This course examines the electoral process in contemporary American politics. This process is how we carry out arguably the most fundamental aspect of our democracy: allowing citizens to choose their representatives. In this course we will focus on what political science can tell us about electoral politics.

The course has four learning objectives:

1. You will be able to understand and evaluate the basic rules and structure of the American electoral system.
2. You will be able to understand and analyze the strategic decisions of candidates, political parties, the media, and interest group, and then apply your understanding to advise a specific candidate.
3. You will be able to understand the decisions of voters, and whether those decisions are affected by campaigns.
4. You will know more about campaigns and elections than the vast majority of pundits who frequently but unfortunately open their mouths on cable news.

Blackboard. The syllabus, PowerPoint presentations, and any other course documents will be posted on the Blackboard page for this course at http://blackboard.gwu.edu.

Required reading. There are three books assigned for this course. They should be available at the GW Bookstore or via Amazon, Powells, or another on-line bookstore.


All other readings are available on Blackboard. Most are .pdf files. Others are accessible on other webpages, links to which are also posted on Blackboard. You may also want to read my own blog, which often deals with topics related to campaigns and elections: http://www.themonkeycage.org/.

Class meetings. Our time in class is short. I will always start on time. Please arrive on time. I will ascertain who is present at every class session. Your presence in class obviously affects the participation portion of your grade. If you cannot consistently attend this class—because of a recurring conflict, because you are simply prone to missing classes, or whatever—you should not take this class.

When we are in class, you may not use a laptop computer, cell phone, or PDA. If you believe you have a valid reason for using a laptop for note-taking purposes, please see me and we can discuss your situation. This will increase your engagement and improve the quality of everyone’s learning experience.
Because this is a seminar, our class meetings will consist much more of your contributions and the entailing
discussion than of my lectures. I will do my best to prepare you to contribute and to facilitate discussion as we go
along. However, it is incumbent on you to be prepared by doing the reading, preparing material for class discussion,
and anything else that is necessary.

For each class meeting, please bring the relevant readings with you so that we can refer to them.

Course assignments. The assignments will consist of 3 five-page papers, a midterm exam, and a final exam. The
paper assignments will be described in more detail, but, briefly, the topics are:

1) Comparing electoral systems. You will choose a foreign country, describe its electoral system, compare it to
the American system, and discuss the merits and demerits of each.

2) Campaign strategy memo. You will write a memo to a potential presidential candidate who could run in
2012. You will provide them with a basic strategy for their campaign, drawing on information about the
country, relevant political issues, public opinion, and candidate's background.

3) Campaign reform. You will propose and defend a reform to the electoral system—e.g., to the Electoral
College, the redistricting process, campaign finance, voter registration, or any other aspect of American
campaigns and elections.

Because this is a writing-intensive course, you will turn in a first draft for each paper, receive feedback, and then turn
in a revised final draft. Each draft will be graded, although the final draft will be weighted more heavily. Your
overall grade on each paper will be comprised of your grades on the first draft (40%) and the final draft (60%).

The midterm exam will be a take-home exam. The exam is due in class on Tuesday, October 19. I will hand it out
in class on the prior Thursday, and you will have the weekend to complete it.

The date of the final exam has not been set by the university. We will either have an in-class on that date or a take-
home exam that is due on that date. I am open to your opinions. Some key dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment/Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Sept. 14</td>
<td>electoral systems first draft due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Sept. 16</td>
<td>electoral systems first draft returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Sept. 21</td>
<td>electoral systems final draft due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Oct. 14</td>
<td>take home midterm exam passed out in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Oct. 19</td>
<td>take-home midterm exam due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Oct. 26</td>
<td>strategy memo first draft due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Oct. 28</td>
<td>strategy memo first draft returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Nov. 2</td>
<td>strategy memo final draft due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, Nov. 18</td>
<td>campaign reform first draft due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Nov. 23</td>
<td>campaign reform first draft returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Nov. 30</td>
<td>campaign reform final draft due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The date of the final exam will be set by the Registrar’s Office. I do not have any control over it. If we have an in-
class final exam, you must take the final exam at this date and time. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Course grades. Your grade in the course will be a weighted average:

- 10% class participation
- 45% papers (15% per paper)
- 20% midterm
- 25% final
I grade on the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range.

Here are several important details of my policy on course grades:

• If you have questions about the grade you received on an assignment, both Morgan and I are happy to answer those questions and to suggest ways that you can do better.

• If you do not think that the grade you received reflects the quality of your work, you may ask for the assignment to be graded again. To do so, submit a formal appeal in writing, explaining why you think the grade you received is not a fair reflection of the quality of your work. The new grade, whether higher or lower, will then become your final grade on this assignment.

• If you do not complete an assignment, you will receive a 0 for the assignment.

• I do not tolerate late assignments. I will lower your grade one-half of a letter grade for each day it is late. That is, if the assignment is due on Tuesday and you complete it on Wednesday, the highest grade you can make is a B+. If you complete it on Thursday, the highest grade you can make is a B-. And so forth.

• The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are (again) illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but only if you (1) communicate with me before the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. You must do both of these things in order to avoid penalties for a late assignment.

• There are no opportunities to re-do assignments or to do extra-credit work in this course.

• I do not “curve” grades. At the end of the semester, I will calculate your grade as described above and then round to the nearest whole number (e.g., an 86.5 becomes an 87). That grade becomes your final grade. I will not increase any person’s grade solely to change their letter grade. So if you make an 89.4, you will make a B+, not an A-. No amount of pleading will change this outcome. Particularly common and ineffective are pleas claiming that your grade in this class will cause you to lose a scholarship, prevent you from attending the graduate or professional school of your choice, or lead to some other unfortunate, but unlikely, consequence. Even more ineffective are pleas that contain false statements that I can easily debunk with a glance at your transcript, such as “This is the only B that I received this semester.”

Academic dishonesty. In the Code of Academic Integrity, the University defines academic dishonesty as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or extension on a test, quiz, or assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two different courses without the prior permission of faculty members. By accepting this syllabus and participating in the course, you have agreed to abide by this Code. Students who violate the Code are subject to disciplinary penalties, including failure on the assignment in question, failure in the course, and other penalties imposed by the University. See: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/index.html

Medical needs, illnesses, and other emergencies. As noted above, if a medical need will result in your missing or completing assignments, please communicate with me. I am willing to be accommodating but communication and documentation is necessary.

Special needs. George Washington University provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. To determine if you qualify, contact the Disability Support Services at (202) 994-8250 (V/TDD). If they certify your needs, I will work with you to make arrangements.

Religious holy day observance. If an assignment or exam is due on a day when you are observing a religious holy day, I will work with you to find an acceptable alternative time to complete the assignment.
Course Topics

Aug. 31  Introduction


Sept. 2, 7  The American Electoral System

- The U.S. Constitution (http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html):
  - Article I, Sections 1-3
  - Article II, Section 1
  - amendments: 1st, 12th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th


Sept. 7, 9  Financing Campaigns

- For a sense of how much money is raised and spent, explore these data from the 2008 presidential campaign: http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/index.php


- The updated limits on contributions are at the Federal Elections Commission’s website: http://www.fec.gov/ans/answers_general.shtml#How_much_can_I_contribute.

- You should understand the basic facts of the case and the Court’s decision in Citizens United v. FEC.

Sept. 14-28  Modern Campaign Strategy

Here is an organizing framework as you think about the components of campaign strategy: whether to run in the first place; what to say, which gets at the choice of message (which issues, what positions on those issues, whether to promote or attack, etc.); and whom to target (which voters).

The Decision to Run (Sept. 14)


**Message Development: Agendas (Sept. 16)**


**Message Development: Positions (Sept. 21)**


**Message Development: Positive vs. Negative (Sept. 23)**


**Choosing & Mobilizing Voters (Sept. 28)**


**Sept. 30, Oct. 5 Political Parties**

- Cohen et al., chapters 1-5.

**Oct. 7 Interest Groups**

Oct. 12  Consultants


Oct. 14, 19  The Media


Oct. 21, 26, 28  Presidential Campaigns

**Nominations**

- Cohen et al., chapters 6-10.

**General Election**

- Vavreck, prologue and chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5

Nov. 2, 4  Congressional Campaigns

- General discussion of the midterm election.

Nov. 9  Why Do People Vote?

Nov. 11, 13  How Do People Vote?

Race and Gender (Nov. 11)

• Kaufmann, Petrocik, and Shaw, chapter 5.


• A few other studies are briefly summarized here: http://www.themonkeycage.org/2008/06/does_racial_prejudice_hurt_bla.html.

Party Identification (Nov. 11)

• Kaufmann, Petrocik, and Shaw, chapters 2, 4, and 6.

The Economy (Nov. 13)


Issues (Nov. 13)


Candidate Traits (Nov. 13)


Nov. 16-23  Do Campaigns Matter?

Overview (Nov. 16)

• Kaufmann, Petrocik, and Shaw, chapter 8.

Educating Voters (Nov. 16)

• Franz, Michael M., Paul B. Freedman, Kenneth M. Goldstein, and Travis Ridout. 2008. Campaign Advertising and American Democracy. Chapters 2 and 6 (“Campaign Ads as Information Supplements” and “What Did They Know and When Did They Know It?”)

“ Priming” the Fundamentals (Nov. 18)


Persuading Voters (Nov. 18)


**Mobilizing Voters (Nov. 23)**


• If you are interested, more is here: [http://research.yale.edu/GOTV/](http://research.yale.edu/GOTV/).

**Putting It Together (Nov. 23)**


**Nov. 30, Dec. 2 ** **Campaign reform**