Course Description and Goals:

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the study of voting behavior, campaigns, and elections in the United States. The course is divided into two interrelated sections. In the first section, we will focus on voting behavior. Here we will look at survey research, political culture, public opinion, political socialization, suffrage and turnout, partisanship, political sophistication and ideology, and issue voting. Building on our knowledge of the American voter from the first section, in the second half of the course we will examine elections from the perspective of candidates and campaign strategists. The topics we will focus on include money and elections, campaign strategy, voter mobilization, media, parties and interest groups, and negative advertising. In examining these topics, we will cover a variety of elections with an emphasis on congressional and presidential contests and ballot propositions. Of course, we will draw heavily on recent elections in learning about the electoral process.

Course Readings:


Course Learning Outcomes (CLO):

By the end of this course, students will:
1. Explain and analyze the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of electoral behavior (corresponds to PLO 1 listed above).
2. Apply abstract theory and research methods to understanding electoral behavior in assignments and course discussions (corresponds to PLO 5, listed above).
3. Use contemporary social science research methods to analyze electoral behavior (corresponds to PLO 3, listed above).

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Political Science:

The CLOs above support students in engaging in coursework coherently across Political Science courses, and meeting the Political Science Program Learning Outcomes.
1. An understanding of the processes, theories, and empirical regularities of political institutions and political behavior in the student’s chosen emphasis area: American politics, comparative politics, or international relations.
2. An ability to employ critical thinking and demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy.
3. A capacity to utilize contemporary social science research methods to conduct rigorous research on political phenomena.
4. Effective written communication skills, especially the ability to convey complex concepts and information in a clear and concise manner.
5. An ability to apply abstract theory and research methods to understand contemporary political events and public policies.

This course contributes to the following three General Education Principles:

Scientific Literacy: This course will contribute to a student’s ability to understand and employ social scientific approaches to the study of political phenomena.
Decision Making: This course will contribute to a student’s understanding of the determinants of elite and mass decision making in the realm of politics.
Self and Society: This course will help students understand the spectrum of political beliefs, institutions, and practices and situate their own beliefs and experiences accordingly.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to attend class regularly and have read the material before coming to class. Please note: Students are required to adhere to the standards of academic honesty as detailed in the College Handbook. In particular, please familiarize yourself with rules about plagiarism! If you have any questions about what is or is not plagiarism, please see me.

Policies:

Students are also expected to be courteous. Please do not talk, eat, sleep, arrive late to, or leave during, class (if you must leave early, please notify me before class begins and exit discreetly). Turn off cell phones! Courtesy must also be extended to your classmates. If you do not behave courteously, I reserve the right to drop you from the course.

I am increasingly convinced that the use of laptops in the classroom is detrimental to student learning since many students use them for purposes other than note taking. I reserve the right to prohibit the use of laptops during lecture at any point during the semester, except for students who need laptops due to a documented disability.

Grades:

Your grade for the class will be allocated based on the following assignments:

2 Exams 60% (30% each) Paper 35%
Participation 5%

The final grade is composed of two exams, a paper, a brief paper presentation, and class participation and attendance. Since the exams are equally weighted, there will be no final exam held during finals week. Unless contacted in advance regarding a critical
problem, make-ups will not be granted. The purpose of the exams is to assess your attainment of SLO 1. The paper and paper presentation will assess SLOs 1, 2 and 3. Late papers will be marked down one letter grade per day unless prior arrangements are made. There is no extra credit assignments for this course so please do not ask—put extra time and energy into course work.

Unit One: Voting Behavior

8/24 Introduction to the class

8/26 Polling & Survey Methods
• Flanigan, pp. 241-252

8/31 & 9/2 Suffrage & Turnout
• Flanigan, chap. 2
• Wattenberg, chps. 4-7

9/7 & 9/9 Party Identification & Partisan Realignment
• Flanigan, chps. 3-5

9/14 & 9/16 Public Opinion & Ideology
• Flanigan, chps. 1 & 6

9/21 & 9/23 Vote Choice I: Cue-Taking and Voting Correctly
• Wattenberg, chps. 1-3

9/28 & 9/30 Vote Choice II
• Flanigan, chap. 8

10/5 Exam #1 on Oct. 5

Unit Two: Campaigns and Elections

10/7 Intro to Campaigns
• Herrnson, chap. 1-3
10/12 & 10/14 Parties, Interest Groups & Money in Elections
• Herrnson, chps. 4-6, 11
• Wayne, chp. 2

10/19 & 10/21 Campaign Ads & Media in Elections
• Flanigan, chp. 8
• Green and Gerber, chp. 9
• Herrnson, chps. 7 & 8
• Wayne, chp. 8

10/26 & 10/28 Congressional Elections
• Herrnson, chp. 9

11/2 & 11/4 The Presidential Nomination Process
• Wayne, chps. 1, 4 & 5

11/9 Presidential Campaigns
• Green and Gerber, chp. 2-8, 10
• Wayne, chps. 6-8

11/11 Veteran’s Day Holiday—No class

11/16 & 11/18 Presidential Elections & Reform
• Wayne, chp. 9 & 10

11/23 Catch up Day

11/25 Thanksgiving

11/30 & 12/2 Paper presentations

Paper due Nov. 30

12/7 Second Exam

This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.