

Elections and Voting Behavior

POL 162 - Fall 2013
MW 2:10-3:30PM in Wellman 119

Instructor

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M 4-5PM & W 10-11AM
and by appointment

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1 Course Information

Course Description

The focus of this course will be on presidential and congressional elections in U.S. politics. The course is designed to promote understanding and assessment of the electoral process, with an emphasis on the extent to which citizen participation facilitates democratic control over the actions of politicians and government. To address this broad question, the course is organized around three themes: (1) the individual sources of political behavior, including participation, voting choice, and political attitudes; (2) the institutional and contextual factors that shape citizens and politicians actions in campaigns and elections; and (3) the methods that political scientists use to understand these phenomena. The readings and lectures in the course consider these three themes sometimes simultaneously to promote an understanding of how elections work in U.S. politics.

Prerequisites

This course contains a data analysis component. Thus students should take POL 51 or an equivalent data analysis course before enrolling. The instructor will discuss relevant data analysis topics in lecture, but students without previous experience on the topic may have difficulty with this material.

Required Texts

In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns, by John G. Geer, University of Chicago Press (ISBN 9780226284996).

Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do, by Andrew Gelman, Princeton University Press (ISBN 9780226284996).

Controversies in Voting Behavior, 5th Edition, edited by Richard G. Niemi, Herbert F. Weisberg, and David Kimball, CQ Press (ISBN 9780872894679).

Politics of Congressional Elections, eight edition, by Gary C. Jacobson, Pearson (ISBN 9780205251766).

In addition to the assigned readings, students should read all elections-related posts from the Monkey Cage (<http://themonkeycage.org/>), a blog that addresses current events from a political science perspective.

2 Course Grades

Students' grades for the course are comprised of the following components:

- ✓ **Exam 1 - midterm (Wednesday, November 6): 30%**
- ✓ **Exam 2 - final (Tuesday, December 10, 10:30am): 30%**
- ✓ **Research Paper (Monday, December 2): 30%**
- ✓ **Negative Ads Project (Monday, Nov. 25): 10%**

The final letter grade will be assigned according to the standard table:

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 93-100: A | 87-89 : B+ | 80-82 : B- | 73-76 : C | 67-69 : D+ | 60-62 : D- |
| 90-92 : A- | 83-86 : B | 77-79 : C+ | 70-72 : C- | 63-66 : D | 00-59 : F |

Exams

The exams will feature multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Therefore, **students must bring a scantron sheet (UCD 2000) and a blue book to each exam.** Exams will cover lecture material as well as material from the readings. There will be no make-up exams. Students with documented emergencies on the day of an exam will not take a makeup exam; Instead, their grade will be allocated proportionally between the remaining two exams. The final is *not* cumulative.

- ✓ **The midterm** is on Wednesday, November 6.
- ✓ **The final exam** is on Tuesday, December 10, 10:30am.

Research Paper

The purpose of the paper assignment is to give students an opportunity to use the data analysis skills they develop in this course to study a topic of their choice. Students' grades will be based on the clarity of the argument and writing, the originality of the research question, and the technical proficiency of the analysis and interpretation of the results. There will be one homework assignment, **due Monday, October 28**, that will help students prepare their research and will be incorporated into the paper grade. More details will be given as the quarter progresses. **A hard copy of the paper is due at the beginning of class on Monday, December 2.** Electronic copies will not be accepted. Late papers immediately lose a full-letter grade (i.e., 10 percentage points) and lose an additional full-letter grade for each additional 24-hour period they are late.

Negative Ads Project

This project asks students to watch a series of presidential ads and evaluate these adds on a number of dimensions using an excel spreadsheet. There is no written component of this project. More details will be given as the quarter progresses. **The data is due via email on Monday, Nov. 25.** Late projects will not be accepted and will receive a score of zero.

3 Expectations

Participation & Attendance

To succeed in the class, students should show up to class having done the assigned readings for the day. Students do not need to have mastered the material, but rather they must have begun to think about the concepts in order to keep up with lecture. Aside from discussion section activities, there is no formal grade for participation or attendance.

Email Policy

The instructor encourages email questions and comments. The instructor and TA(s) will respond to emails within 24 hours, excepting weekends and holidays. To receive a response, the subject line of all emails must include the course number (POL 162), followed by a descriptive subject title (e.g., “POL 162: Question about [topic]”). **The instructor and TA(s) *will not* respond via email to the following:**

1. Emails that fail to include the course number and a descriptive title in the subject line.
2. Questions that students can answer themselves by reading the syllabus.
3. Questions that require more than a short paragraph to address fully. For more detailed responses, students are encouraged to see the instructor and TA(s) during office hours.

Late Work Policy

Technology failure (e.g., hard drive crash) is not an acceptable excuse for late work—students must back up their data. Likewise, except in rare, prolonged cases, illnesses and family emergencies are not acceptable excuses for late work; students should get their work done early in case unforeseen problems arise.

Classroom Etiquette

Students must be courteous to the instructor, TAs, and fellow students. Students should arrive to class on time. Those who must leave early should sit near the exit to avoid distracting others, but do not need to inform the instructor in advance. Students who miss class should talk to other students to find out what material they missed. Cell phones must be silent and *out of sight*. Laptops are allowed in class if they are used solely for note taking and other course-relevant purposes. Students must ensure that they are not distracting others with the content of their screen.

Regrade Policy

After receiving any grade, students must wait 24 hours before contacting the instructor or the TA regarding the grade. Students who feel their grade is incorrect must then follow these steps, *within one week of the day the grade is made available*: 1) Discuss your grade with your TA in office hours. TAs are not allowed to change grades at this time. 2) Students who still feel that their grade is incorrect may give the instructor the graded copy of the assignment along with a one-page document explaining why the grade is incorrect. 3) The instructor will regrade the entire response, which means the grade may go up or down.

Universal Learning

Students should inform the instructor of any special accommodations that may promote their ability to learn. Students who need an alternative location for exams must contact the instructor *in the first week of class* to schedule times for each exam. Such students are required to provide documentation of this need.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please see the university’s policies regarding plagiarism and cheating online at <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/cac.html>.

4 Frequently Asked Questions

1. **(Q) I am [insert number] on the waiting list. How likely is it that I will get into the course?**
(A) Most quarters, a few students get in off of the wait list, but other students do not. That is all the info I have; Use your best judgment. I will not issue PAT numbers.
2. **(Q) Is the final exam comprehensive?**
(A) No, it will focus on the material since the last midterm.
3. **(Q) I need to miss an exam because [insert reason]. Can I take it at a different time?**
(A) No, there will be no makeups; drop the class if you cannot attend one of the exams. Documented emergencies are the *only* acceptable reason to miss an exam, in which case the other exams will be weighted heavier to compensate.
4. **(Q) You assigned [insert reading] on the syllabus, but didn't talk about it in class. Will it be on the exam?**
(A) Yes, it might be. The readings and lecture are both essential for your understanding of the material
5. **(Q) When should I do the readings?**
(A) Once before lecture, then again (and again) as necessary until you understand the material.
6. **(Q) I need a [insert specific letter grade] in this class. [Blank stare].**
(A) Well, that's not really a question. I assume everyone wants the best grade possible. If you need a good grade, put in the work. I'm always happy to clarify difficult material in lecture and office hours, but I will not change grading policies for individual students—no matter how badly they want a [insert specific letter grade].
7. **(Q) Will there be study guides for the exams?**
(A) Yes.
8. **(Q) When will the study guide be ready?**
(A) Usually 5-7 days before the exam.

5 Schedule

| Date | Topic | Reading | What's Due? |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Week 1 | The Context of U.S. Elections | | |
| Mon., Sept. 30: | | | |
| Wed., Oct. 2: | | Niemi: 1,2,4 | |
| Week 2 | Citizen Capacity | | |
| Mon., Oct. 7: | | Niemi: 5,7 | |
| Wed., Oct. 9: | | Niemi: 8 | |
| Week 3 | Party & Polarization | | |
| Mon., Oct. 14: | | Niemi: 12,13,14 | |
| Wed., Oct. 16: | | Niemi: 15,16,17 | |
| Week 4 | Forecasting Elections | | |
| Mon., Oct. 21: | | Gelman: 1,2,3 | |
| Wed., Oct. 23: | | S: Abramowitz | |
| Week 5 | Red State, Blue State | | |
| Mon., Oct. 28: | | Gelman: 4,5,6 | Homework Exercise |
| Wed., Oct. 30: | | Gelman: 8,10 | |
| Week 6 | Midterm | | |
| Mon., Nov. 4: | | Niemi: 11 | |
| Wed., Nov. 6: | Midterm | | |
| Week 7 | Electing Presidents | | |
| Mon., Nov. 11: | NO CLASS | | |
| Wed., Nov. 13: | | Geer: 1,2,3 Niemi: 9 | |
| Week 8 | Congressional Elections I | | |
| Mon., Nov. 18: | | Jacobson: 1,2 | |
| Wed., Nov. 20: | | Jacobson: 3,4,5 | |
| Week 9 | Congressional Elections II | | |
| Mon., Nov. 25: | | Jacobson: 6 | Negative Ads Project |
| Wed., Nov. 27: | | Geer: 7 | |
| Week 10 | Representation and Implications | | |
| Mon., Dec. 2: | | Jacobson: 7 | Research Paper |
| Wed., Dec. 4: | | | |
| Week 11 | | | |
| Final Exam: | Tuesday, December 10, 10:30am | | |

Key

Niemi = *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, by Niemi et. al.

Jacobson = *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, by Jacobson

Geer = *In Defense of Negativity*, by Geer

Gelman = *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State*, by Gelman

S = Reading available on SmartSite.

Schedule is tentative and may change as quarter progresses.