This seminar approaches the study of American politics through the lens of our campaigns and elections. It is designed for graduate students, especially those who plan to take the American politics comprehensive exam, but it should also be useful for students interested in political journalism. Students will be introduced to classics in the field of voting behavior, but will also gain insight into the role that political parties, interest groups, campaign finance, and the news media play in campaigns. We will also explore how political advertising and other forms of campaign appeals work, as well as the burgeoning field on strategies for getting voters to turn out. This is an exciting time to be taking this course, not only because it is a presidential election year, but because the political science department has planned a series of events for the fall about the election. I have tried to time the introduction of topics to prepare students for particular events. As a result, we jump around a bit, but rest assured that there is a method to the madness.

This class has also been designated as a “Writing in Politics course”. As a result, a major focus of this course is how to write about political science research for a broader audience. Students who plan to conduct political science research will learn how to translate their findings into language fit for publication in venues, such as The Washington Post and Vox.com, among others. The purpose of publishing in such venues is to make your work more relevant for current events and policy debates. Students who foresee a future in political journalism will learn how to read academic articles and the statistical analyses they often include.

SEMINAR ORGANIZATION AND REQUIREMENTS

If this is your first year of graduate school, welcome! As you will quickly learn, there is no place to hide in a graduate seminar. You are expected to contribute in each class. This means you need to do all of the required readings for the week and come prepared to discuss them. This will be much easier if you take good notes while you are doing your reading.

On the first day of class, students will sign up to be discussion leaders for 3 classes during the semester. Ideally, there will be two discussion leaders for each class, but this may not always be the case. When it is your turn to be discussion leader, you should be especially well-prepared and come with a list of comments that will further discussion by offering thoughtful comments or questions. Your job is to encourage discussion, NOT to provide a summary of the readings.

Students have a number of options for meeting the written requirements of the course. They can choose to write standard reading responses, a blog post based on the weekly readings, a blog post
Based on a topic of the student’s choice, or a project prospectus. These assignments are each worth a certain percentage of the student’s grade:

Traditional reading response: 5%
Article based on weekly readings: 7.5%
Article based on topic chosen by student: 15%
Project prospectus: 50%
Publication bonus: 10 points

• **Reading response** (5%): Write a 2-page single-spaced response to the readings. Students should spend no more than a page summarizing the readings. The remainder of the essay should be devoted to synthesizing and critically responding to them. They can do this in a number of ways, including comparing and contrasting the arguments/findings of two or more readings from the week, critiquing a study’s methodology or measurements, suggesting alternative explanations for its findings, or elaborating on the implications of its findings, among others. Submit these essays to me by 5 p.m. the night before the seminar (i.e. on Monday). If you are taking the American Politics field exam, I suggest you write traditional reading responses for the weeks on parties and primaries (Sept. 6), the political psychology of persuasion (Sept. 20), campaign mobilization and its effects (Oct. 18), individual-level factors affecting turnout (Oct. 25), vote choice (Nov. 1), and economic voting (Nov. 8). These weeks feature readings that appear on the reading list for the exam. This does not mean that the other topics we cover in this class will not be helpful, but the weeks I have listed here cover material that is central to the field.

• **Article based on weekly readings (7.5%)**: Write a 300 word article that explains how the week’s readings speak to current events in a manner that is appropriate for a broader audience. Model your article on a Monkey Cage post. You must circulate your article to everyone in the class by 5 p.m. the night before our seminar meets (usually a Monday). Your classmates will read the article before class and be ready to offer constructive criticism.

• **Article based on topic chosen by students (15%)**: Students who would like to explore a topic relevant to the study of American campaigns and elections that is not covered in this course should meet with me to develop an appropriate reading list (approx. four articles/book chapters). The requirements for the article are the same as for those on topics we cover in the class.

• **Project prospectus (50%)**: A 20-page prospectus can build on topics covered in the course or others relevant to the study of campaigns and elections in the United States. The prospectus should include a clear statement of the research question, a literature review, hypotheses and a description of the data and methods to be used.

• **Publication Bonus (10 pts.)**: If you submit your work to a major media outlet and get it accepted, I will give you 10 points.

Every student in the course must take the final in-class exam. The exact format of the exam has not been determined, but students will be required to respond to multiple essay questions. They will have some choice in the questions they answer.
Each student’s final grade will be determined in the following manner:

- Participation: 15%
- Written work: 55%
- Exam: 30%

To be clear, students can earn the 55% of their grade based on written work in a number of ways. For instance, they can write 11 traditional reading responses, 6 articles and 2 reading responses, a project prospectus and 1 reading response, etc. It is up to each student to decide what he or she wants to write. I will grade all written work on a letter grade basis.

**READINGS**

All of the articles are available through online databases such as JSTOR and EBSCO. Book chapters will be available on the course’s Blackboard website in PDF format (indicated by [BB]). You are required to buy the following books for the course:


In addition, I strongly suggest that you take a look at the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and order any books that look interesting to you. It is better to take notes in a book that will sit on your bookshelf than to take notes on a print-out that might be misplaced.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**August 30: Introduction**

**September 6: Parties and Primaries (Guest Speaker: Peter Beinart)**


September 13: Predictions and Polls
Departmental Event: Is There a Digital Divide Between the Democrats and the Republicans? (time and location TBD)


September 20: The Political Psychology of Persuasion
Departmental Event: The State of the Presidential Race and Its Meaning @ 4:15pm in the lounge.


September 27: The Effects of Political Advertising (Guest Speaker: Travis Ridout)

• Gerber, Alan S., Gimpel, Jim G., Green, Donald P., & Shaw, Daron R. (2011). How large and long-lasting are the persuasive effects of televised campaign ads? Results from a randomized field experiment. American Political Science Review, 105(01), 135-150.
October 4: No Class (Rosh Hashana)

October 11: No Class (Yom Kippur)

October 14 (A FRIDAY!): Campaign Finance and Interest Groups

October 18: Campaign Mobilization and Its Effects

October 20: Departmental Event-The Coming Crack-Up of American Politics with Stanley Greenberg and Jennifer Hochschild (time and location TBD)

October 25: Individual-Level Factors Affecting Turnout


**November 1: Vote Choice**

• Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Chapters 3 and 7, pp. 36-50 and 96-114. [BB]


**November 8: Economic Voting**

*Departmental Event: Election Watch Party (Lounge)*


**November 10:** Departmental Event-Beyond the Punditry: Fresh Perspectives on the 2016 Presidential Election with Bob Erikson (Columbia), Celeste Katz (Mic.com), Monika McDermott (Fordham), and Sam Wang (Princeton Election Consortium) (time and location TBD)

**November 15: Candidate Emergence**


November 22: Campaign Agendas and Issues


November 29: News Coverage


December 6: Do Campaigns Matter?


Final Exam: TBD