This POS 399 course on presidential elections will have a dual focus. First, we will engage in a broad, multi-dimensional study of presidential elections, from their history to their contemporary features and dynamics. Second, we will devote equal attention to the presidential election of 2016. The two aspects of the course will be interwoven from the beginning.

The course will involve an essential element of student participation. Each member of the class will belong to a battleground state team, and your team will frequently report to the class on developments in the state you are following. In addition, members of the class are expected to follow the 2016 campaign closely, to come prepared to discuss fresh developments such as the debates, and to ask questions about the significance of events covered by the media.

There are fewer traditional reading assignments in this course than in others that I teach. But there will be more reading assignments posted on Blackboard. Many of these will be short articles online, and because they are produced in real time they should be read right away, before they are superseded by further news.

Most students who have signed up for this course will presumably support a particular candidate. But the course is not an arena for partisanship. I expect each member of the class to avoid the expression of personal biases, to analyze developments from the standpoint of political science, and above all to treat one another with respect.

REQUIRED BOOK AND SUBSCRIPTION


Students should also purchase an online subscription to the Washington Post for the duration of the course.

COURSE OUTLINE

Aug. 30 Introduction to the course
Sept. 1 NO CLASS
Sept. 6  How to follow the 2016 elections
Sept. 8  Reading: Blackboard

Sept. 13  History of presidential elections
Sept. 15  Reading: PWSH, Chapter 4; Blackboard

Sept. 20  Presidential elections today: factors and dynamics
          Reading: PWSH, Chapter 3, pp. 49-50, 79-84; Blackboard

Sept. 22  Presidential debates: history and preview
          Reading: Blackboard

Sept. 27  Political parties and interest groups
Sept. 29  Reading: PWSH, Chapter 2

Oct. 6  Candidates and their campaign styles
Oct. 11  Reading: PWSH, Chapter 5; Blackboard

Oct. 18  Issues 2016
          Reading: Blackboard

Oct. 20  Campaign finance
          Reading: PWSH, Chapter 3, pp. 50-66

Oct. 25  Media
          Reading: PWSH, Chapter 3, pp. 66-79

Oct. 27  Air war and ground game
          Reading: Blackboard
Oct. 27  FIRST PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Nov. 1  Voters
Nov. 3  Reading: PWSH, Chapter 1

Nov. 8  Election Day preview
        Reading: Blackboard

Nov. 10 Analysis of the election results
Nov. 15 Reading: Blackboard

Nov. 17 Battleground team reports to the class

Nov. 22 Implications of the 2016 elections for the next presidency
Nov. 29 Reading: Blackboard

Dec. 1  Strengths and weaknesses in how Americans choose presidents
Dec. 6  Reading: PWSH, Chapters 6 and 7

Dec. 6  SECOND PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Dec. 8  Lessons for the next presidential election?

Dec. 19 TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE

Grades for the course are on an A-E basis, but the course can be taken on an S-U basis. Course grades will be based on two short papers (the first due shortly before Election Day and offering your reasoned prediction and analysis, the second due after the election and examining what you got right and what you got wrong), four quizzes (with your lowest score dropped), a take-home final, and an attendance/participation grade. Your grade will be computed as follows:
Papers – 20% each
Quizzes – 20%
Final – 30%
Attendance and participation – 10%

Please note the following:

1. All assignments must be completed before you can receive a grade for the course
2. Students are reminded that all work handed in must be their own. Cheating on quizzes or plagiarism on papers or the final will be severely punished. If you are unfamiliar with the meaning of plagiarism, please ask me about it.
3. Frequent absences from class without legitimate excuses will hurt your course grade.

My office hours on the main campus are TuTh, 11:45-12:45. They are in the Rockefeller College Contact Office in Humanities 16. I have an office hour on the downtown campus on Wednesdays, 3-3:30, in Milne Hall 216.

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