Elections are at the center of American politics. For citizens, campaigns are a time of heightened political interest and involvement, and an opportunity to convey their preferences to politicians. For political parties and interest groups, it is a time to gain new political influence (or lose it). Journalists are called upon to translate information about the campaign to the electorate, and politicians must market their policy platforms both to the electorate and other political elites.

In this course, we will explore how campaigns are practiced in the United States. We will consider why people run for office and how political parties, interest groups, and electoral rules influence how campaigns play out. Next, we will explore the content of campaigns – the positions candidates take, the effects of political contexts and campaign events, how campaign messages are conveyed to citizens, and how this all influences election outcomes. Finally, we will consider the effects of campaigns on citizens – what they learn, how they evaluate candidates, what animates their participation, and how they choose which candidates to vote for.

Canvas is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at canvas.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

reading material

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, the readings include a set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be accessed via the course website.

expectations

You are encouraged to be an active participant in class! Please feel free to raise questions at any point during class, including matters of clarification, theoretical points, or topics to address in class discussion. You should also keep in touch by e-mail or by visiting office hours if you have any questions about course expectations or the material covered in class.

You are also expected to maintain proper classroom etiquette. This includes respecting the opinions of others even if you disagree, not talking out of turn, putting away newspapers and crossword puzzles during lecture, turning off the ringer on cell phones before class, and not disrupting the class if arriving late.
requirements

In addition to the readings, you will be responsible for the following:

PARTICIPATION, SHORT ASSIGNMENTS, AND QUIZZES (worth 25% of your final grade)
Because class attendance is an important prerequisite for participating in discussions and in-class activities, attendance will be taken each class session. Absences will lower your participation grade. We will also have several in-class activities that contribute to this portion of your grade, and many weeks we will have short quizzes on the readings. We will have a few short homework assignments as well.

THREE ESSAYS (each worth 10% of your final grade)
Over the course of the semester, several paper topics will be provided. Some of these essay prompts will ask you to engage with debates raised in the readings. Others will ask you to apply class lessons to real-world campaigns. Others will invite you to suggest ways to reform electoral institutions. You will be asked to write essays in response to three of these assignments over the course of the semester. Paper guidelines will be detailed in separate handouts.

THREE EXAMS (each worth 15% of your final grade)
There will be two midterm exams and a final exam.

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at disabilityservices.colorado.edu.

some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at honorcode.colorado.edu. Additional information about avoiding plagiarism, citation style, and writing in political science is also posted on the course website. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Council for additional non-academic sanctions.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).
INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE
Monday, January 14 – Friday, January 18
The landscape of elections in the United States

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES
Wednesday, January 23 – Friday, January 25
U.S. elections in historical perspective, in comparative perspective

CANDIDATE SELECTION
Monday, January 28 – Friday, February 1
Who runs for office? Gender and political ambition. Young people’s interest in entering politics.

ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS
Monday, February 4 – Friday, February 8

ELECTORAL REFORM
Monday, February 11 – Wednesday, February 13
The design of elections. What does it take to reform elections?

Friday, February 15: Exam 1
POLITICAL PARTIES
Monday, February 18 – Friday, February 22
The role of political parties in candidate selection, how political parties influence elections.

THE ROLE OF MONEY AND CAMPAIGN CONTEXTS
Monday, February 25 – Friday, March 1
The role of money in politics. When does campaign spending matter? Incumbency and competition.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND CANDIDATE COMMUNICATION
Monday, March 4 – Friday, March 8
Issue selection, voter targeting, campaign agendas

CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING
Monday, March 11 – Friday, March 15
Candidate advertising strategy, effects of campaign ads

MEDIA COVERAGE OF CAMPAIGNS
Monday, March 18 – Wednesday, March 20
The goals of the press in election coverage, evaluating the quality of media coverage of campaigns

Friday, March 22: Exam 2
Monday, March 25 – Friday, March 29: Spring break – class does not meet.

THE TIMELINE OF CAMPAIGNS
Monday, April 1 – Friday, April 5
Campaign events, debates, conventions, speeches, appearances

CAMPAIGN EFFECTS
Monday, April 8 – Friday, April 12
The effects of campaigns on citizens. Election forecasting.

VOTE CHOICE
Monday, April 15 – Friday, April 19
How do people choose how to vote? Assessing the quality of voters’ choices.

VOTER TURNOUT
Monday, April 22 – Friday, April 26
Why do people turn out to vote? What would increase voter turnout?

CAMPAIGN PROMISES AND POLICY OUTCOMES
Monday, April 29 – Wednesday, May 1
Do elections matter? How elections connect public preferences with policy outcomes.

Sunday, May 5: Final exam (1:30 – 4 p.m.)