

Roger Austin
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Office Hours: Before/after class, TBD, and by appointment

Tuesday 5-6th, 11:45 am – 1:40 pm
Thursday 6th, 12:50-1:40
Mat 16
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Modern Political Campaigns POS 4275; Spring 2026 (Jan 8)

"to make of the columns of The New York Times¹ a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance, and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion." Adolph Ochs, 1896, publisher, NY Times

Goals of the Course

To explore major issues associated with modern political campaigns. Presidential campaigns are a primary, but not exclusive, focus. The emphasis of the course is to investigate why modern campaigns take the forms they do, and to place them in broader American cultural and political contexts. This is NOT a course on how to run campaigns; it is a course on understanding campaign politics.

We take as our starting point that political campaigns mirror American politics generally, warts and all, and are part and parcel of those politics at the time the campaigns take place. The real question is: do our campaigns strengthen our democracy, or not?

Lectures will be presented, but this is primarily a discussion course. As such, coverage of topics will combine much class discussion, some lecture, academic and non-academic readings, guest speakers and other hands-on materials as appropriate to our topics. Students are expected to read the required materials in advance of class, and come prepared to use them as a vehicle for discussion. Attendance will NOT be taken, but students are responsible for everything that happens in class. If a student misses class, it is his/her responsibility to find out what was missed; students are also responsible for all information on the syllabus. Students should take advantage of the instructor's office hours to discuss issues with him. With any luck, you'll be armed and dangerous by the end of the semester.

Reading Materials

Required Books

Political Campaigns in the United States, Richard K. Scher, 2016, Routledge, ISBN 2740355346696
(I encourage you to obtain used or paperback editions)

Students need to read a national newspaper and/or magazine to follow the election. Online versions are fine and probably preferred. It is ESPECIALLY recommended that students examine, on a regular basis, foreign media that have particularly good coverage of American politics and campaigns. As we will be discussing current events every week, several websites and newspapers may come in handy: SayfieReview.com and Sunburn are free and all offer great coverage of all things Florida. There is also fivethirtyeight.com, Politico.com, election.princeton.edu, Politifact.com, Ballotpedia.com, RealClearPolitics.com, NYTimes.com, Pollster.com. There are also free daily emails you can get from NY Times, Washington Post, Wall St. Journal, Palm Beach Post, Tampa Bay Times, Marc Caputo at Politico, Gallup, Pew Surveys and likely many more I am not aware of. **There are also tons of great podcasts and I'm certainly unaware of most of them – so please share your favorites with me and I will share some of these with the class.** Absorb as much information as you can...or all you can stand.

Required Articles:

There will be other articles as we go and as listed in the Syllabus. I will either provide these or provide a link.

¹ And by definition, The University of Florida in the 21st century

Topics Covered in This Class:

- Why do we have political campaigns?
- The rampant negativity of our campaigns
 - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/18/us-elections-2012-us-politics?CMP=email>
 - Scher
- Campaigns in historical context – was it always this bad?
- Who are the candidates/issues? Where do they come from? Is this the best we can do?
- What are the politics of the modern campaign?
 - Money – the Great Satan?
 - Scher
 - *Citizens United v FEC*, 558 US 50 (2010)
 - Materials distributed via class list serve
 - Media – Lucifer's handmaiden, fellow traveler, and pimp? Mainstream and non-mainstream media – are any of these trustworthy?
 - Scher
 - Materials to be distributed via class list serve
 - Political Parties – vacuum cleaners of money, hucksters of agendas, purveyors of garbage
 - Materials to be distributed via class list serve
 - Consultants and pollsters – creating an illusion, constructing the truth, or mirroring reality?
 - The technology of modern campaigns – faster than the truth can travel, so just make it up.
 - Materials to be distributed via class list serve
 - Control the electorate – disenfranchise as needed!
 - Materials to be distributed via class list serve
- Modern Political Campaigns and the corruption of our politics
 - Scher

Course Schedule

Note, this course schedule is a guideline. I reserve the right to amend it as the semester progresses. In particular, I expect to add several more article and podcasts as appropriate. I will get these to you in class, on Canvas and via email.

Week	Dates	Readings/Topics
1	1/13 & 15	Introduction
2	1/20 & 22	Scher Ch 1, Campaigns in the US
3	1/27 & 29	Scher Ch 2, Historical Perspective
4	2/3 & 5	Scher Ch 3, Candidates
5	2/10 & 12	Strategy, Tactics and Votes – readings will be provided
6	2/17 & 19	Polling – readings will be provided
7	2/24 & 26	Scher Ch 4, The campaign industry
8	3/3 & 10	Scher Ch 5, Media
9	3/10 & 12	Midterm on Tuesday 3/12 in class; Scher Ch 5, Media
10	3/17 & 19	Spring Break
11	3/24 & 26	More on the campaign industry
12	3/31 & 4/2	More on the media
13	4/7 & 9	Scher Ch 6, Money
14	4/14 & 16	Scher Ch 6, Money
15	4/21	Scher Ch 7, The future of democracy
16	4/27	Final Exam – 10-Noon

Policies and Grading

CRITERIA FOR GRADE:

- Book Review - 20%
- Midterm – 20%
- Polling Memo – 20%
- Campaign Finance Memo – 20%
- Class Participation – 10%

GRADING SCALE:

- 90-100: A; 90-92 – A-
- 80-89: B; 80-82 – B-; 88-89 – B+
- 70-79: C
- 60-69: D
- <60: E
- +/- grades will be awarded at the margins (for example, 78/79 is a C+; 77 is a C; 90-92 is an A-, etc).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

I take academic dishonesty very, very, very, very seriously. If I find evidence of cheating or plagiarism or other academic dishonesty, I will personally initiate disciplinary action.

Students with Special Needs

It is the responsibility of students needing special accommodation for this course to make an appointment to see me at the beginning of the semester. I will make every effort to meet your needs in accordance with UF Guidelines.

Office Hours

Feel free to come to my office hours for any reason, academic or otherwise. If my office hours are not convenient for you, we'll find a time that is. I am also easy to reach by email or text and typically respond quite quickly; this is the best way to reach me. I also sometimes answer the cell phone and always return voice mails, especially if you let me know a convenient time. I personally keep very late hours.