POS 4931   Spring 2024   Tues 8:30-10:25am   Anderson 19
                                              Thurs 9:35-10:25am

The Road to the White House

Prof. Michael McDonald

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Introduction

It is 2024 and a presidential election year is upon us. This class provides a basis of understanding presidential elections, from the parties' nomination of their candidates through the general election. We will study presidential elections in real-time as the two political parties select their general election nominees. While it is almost certain Joe Biden and Donald Trump will represent their parties in the general election, there is still much to learn and understand about the party nominations processes that arrive at these outcomes. We will then turn our attention to the general election, and what past elections may inform us about how general election campaigns work and how voters make their choices.

To further understand the inner workings of campaigns, there are four homework assignments that mimic, to a degree, major components of a campaign plan: (1) the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate, (2) which voters they will target, geographically, (3) the campaign's resources, and (4) which voters will constitute their coalition. There is also a final paper that will provide an opportunity to reflect upon what you have leaned in the class.

Readings

- John Sides, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossmann, Keena Lipsitz. 2023. *Campaigns and Elections, 4th Edition* (referred to as SSGL in the syllabus reading assignments)
- Michael Nelson, ed. 2022. The Elections of 2020. (referred to as MN in the syllabus reading assignments)

The readings that will be discussed each class are listed below as a Reading Assignment for that day of class. Readings denoted "(Canvas)" have electronic versions available in the "Files" tab on Canvas.

Attendance Policy

If you do not participate in at least one of the first two class meetings of a course or laboratory in which you are registered, and you have not contacted the department to indicate your intent, you can be dropped from the course. You must not assume that you will be dropped, however. The department will not notify you if you have been

dropped from a course or laboratory. You can request reinstatement on a space-available basis if you present documented evidence.

The university recognizes the right of the individual professor to make attendance mandatory. After due warning, professors can prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a failing grade for excessive absences.

The policy for this class is that every student should make the best attempt to attend all classes. A student that misses four or more classes without a university-approved excuse (e.g., from the Dean's office, sports department or other university official) will have their overall grade reduced a letter step. Students do not need, and should not approach the professor, to provide non-university-approved excuses for missing three or fewer classes. A student with ten or more unexcused class absences will receive a failing grade for the entire course and will be barred from attending further classes.

If there is an issue that affects your ability to attend class, please let the professor know as soon as possible. Accommodations can be made if we devise a plan together as soon as a problem occurs.

Grades

Assignment	Due	% of Overall Grade
Candidate Profile	Feb 8	15%
Campaign Targeting Project	Feb 22	15%
Campaign Finance Analysis	March 19	15%
Polling Analysis	April 18	15%
Final Paper	May 1	35%
Class Participation		5%

Class Assignments

The primary assessments of this class will be to assemble a campaign plan for a presidential candidate and a final paper reflecting upon what you learned in the class.

Campaign Plan

Part 1. Candidate Profile (Due Feb. 8). Reflecting upon the reading by Michael Nelson, "The Setting: Who Can Be President?" research the background of a current presidential candidate, selected with approval from the instructor. What are the candidate's strengths and weaknesses? Does the candidate fit the profile of a successful presidential candidate?

Your paper should be 7-8 pages, double-spaced. 12 point Times New Roman font. All references should be provided as endnotes, and do not count towards the page length. Students may choose their citation style, as long as it fully identifies the work.

Part 2. Campaign Targeting Plan (Due Feb. 19). You will develop a general election campaign targeting plan for the political party a presidential candidate for an assigned battleground state. The specifics of the targeting plan will be described in class.

Part 3. Campaign Finance Analysis (March 19). An analysis of campaign finance reports by your candidate's campaign. How much money has been raised? What sources? How much spent? On what? What notable outside groups are supporting the candidate? How much have they raised and spent?

Part 4. Polling Analysis. (Due April 18). You will be assigned a 2020 general election exit poll from the same state as your campaign targeting plan and conduct an analysis of the data, with respect to the Biden and Trump electoral coalitions.

Final Paper (Due May 1). Topic and length TBD.

Technology Use Policy

Studies find that students who use laptops or cell phones in class tend to receive lower grades that their peers.

Laptops, cell phones, tablets, and other electronic devices are banned from the classroom, unless the professor explicitly states otherwise as some class assignments will use technology.

A first offense earns a warning. A second offense results in letter grade reduction of the overall class grade, and a third offense results in an automatic failing grade for the course.

Students with disabilities who present documentation to the professor are permitted to use laptops for note taking. Other students who wish to use laptops for notetaking must receive permission from the professor. An approval effectively serves as a warning. Any student with an approved laptop will receive a letter grade reduction for the first offense of doing anything non-class related on their laptop in class, and a failing grade for the second offense.

Honor Code

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic

misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Basically, don't cheat. You cheat yourself of your education and more severe punishment may follow. Helping someone else is cheating, too. If you have any questions if your approach to completing an assignment may violate the honor code, please contact the instructor for guidance.

Disability Statement

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

My exams tend to have an essay component. If you are eligible for disability services and your disability leads you to need more time taking an exam, please take advantage of disability services. We cannot undo poor performance on an exam if you did not make disability arrangements in advance.

Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/.

Week 1 Jan 9 & 11	**Tues: Welcome!** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 1 **Thurs:** Historical Presidential Elections Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 2
Week 2 Jan 16 & 18	**Tues: First Era of Presidential Campaigns** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 3 • William Mayer. "The System Evolves: Changes in the Presidential Selection Process, 1792-1824." (Canvas) **Thurs: The Next Four Eras** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 3, continued
Week 3 Jan 23 & 25	**Tues: What Makes a Presidential Candidate?** Reading Assignment • MN. Michael Nelson. "The Setting: Who Can Be President?" • MN. William Mayer. "The Presidential Nominations." Homework Assignment • Candidate Profile (Due Feb. 8) **Thurs: Voter Choice in Presidential Primaries** Reading Assignment • Sides, Tesler, and Vavrek "Voter Choice in Presidential Primaries" (Canvas)
Week 4 Jan 30 & Feb 1	**Tues: Presidential Nomination Rules** Reading Assignment • Josh Putnam. 2019. "Backward Looking Future Rule-Making." (Canvas) **Thurs: Guest Speaker Josh Putnam – Update for 2024 Nominations**
Week 5 Feb 6 & 8	**Tues and Thurs: Modern Campaign Strategies** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 5 Homework Assignment (Due Feb. 22) • Campaign Targeting Plan
Week 6 Feb 13 & 15	**Tues: Presidential Campaigns** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 9 **Thurs: Forecasting Presidential Elections** Reading Assignment • Ruth Dassonneville and Charles Tien. "Forecasting the 2020 Election" (Canvas)

	- Jennifer Nicoll Victor. "Let's Be Honest about Election Forecasting." (Canvas) - These first two articles are part of a 2020 symposium on election forecasting. You can find more articles on individual 2020 forecast models [here](#). - Aldrich, Carson, Gomez, and Merolla. "Presidential Performance and the Vote" in *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Elections*. (Canvas)
Week 7 **Feb 20 & 22**	**Tues: Campaign Finance** <u>Reading Assignment</u> - Casey Dominguez. "Money: The Resource Race." (Canvas) - MN. Charles Hunt. "Campaign Finance: Trends and Developments." **Thurs: More Campaign Finance** <u>Reading Assignment</u> - SSGL Chapter 4
Week 8 **Feb 27 & 29**	**Tues: Campaign Finance** <u>Reading Assignment</u> - SSGL Chapter 4, Con't **Thurs: Current Campaigns: Open Secrets** [Open Secrets](#) "Ron DeSantis wanted to change the way campaigns were funded. Then the fights started." (On Canvas) <u>Homework Assignment (Due Mar 19)</u> - Campaign Finance Analysis
Week 9 **Mar 5 & 7**	**Tues: Political Parties** <u>Reading Assignment</u> - SSGL Chapter 6 - Key, V. O. Jr. 1955. "A Theory of Critical Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 17(1): 3-18. (Canvas) **Thurs: Realigning Elections** <u>Reading Assignment</u> - MN. Nicole Mellow and Candis Watts Smith. "Voting: Stabilizing Democracy – and Rehearsing a Realignment?"
Week 10 **Mar 12 & 14**	**Spring Break**
Week 11 **Mar 19 & 21**	**Tues: Media** <u>Reading Assignment</u> SSGL Chapter 8

	• MN. Hershey. "Media and the 2020 Presidential Campaign" **Thurs: Interest Groups** • SSGL Chapter 7
Week 12 **Mar 26 & 28**	**Tues: Voting** • SSGL Chapter 12 • Aldrich, Carson, Gomez, and Merolla. "Who Voted?" in *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Elections*. (Canvas) **Thurs: Voting. Con't**
Week 13 **Apr 2 & 4**	**Tues: Election Polling** Reading Assignment • Zukin. "Polling Primer." (Canvas) • Morris. *Strength in Numbers: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them*, Chapter 5 (Canvas). Homework Assignment (Due Apr 18) • Polling Analysis **Thurs: Guest Lecturer: Joe Lenski, Edison Media Research**
Week 14 **Apr 9 & 11**	**Tues: Vote Choice** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 13 **Thurs: Vote Choice** Reading Assignment • Aldrich, Carson, Gomez, and Merolla. "Candidates, Issues, and the Vote" in *Change and Continuity in the 2020 Elections*. (Canvas)
Week 15 **Apr 16 & 18**	**Tues: Congressional Elections** Reading Assignment • SSGL Chapter 10 • MN. Jacobson "Ever More Partisan, Polarized, and National" **Thurs: Congressional Elections, Con't** Homework Assignment (Due May 1) • Final Paper
Week 16 **Apr 23**	**Tues: Prospects for 2024**
Week 17	**Finals Week (No Final Exam Planned for this Class)**