

# Campaign Finance & Fundraising

POS 4931/Fall 2025

Office hours:  
M/F 1-3 pm, 205 Anderson  
Suzanne.Robbins@ufl.edu

Suzanne M. Robbins Ph.D., @ the University of Florida

## Course Description & Overview

*Examines the laws, political dynamics, and fundraising that shape U.S. elections, with emphasis on federal campaign finance with comparisons to select state systems.*

Class meets:  
MWF 11:45-12:35  
Dauer Hall Room 342  
In-person only

Course meets:  
Section/#: 4935/25509  
3 credits (non Gen-Ed)  
pre-req: none

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Campaign Finance & Fundraising examines the legal frameworks, political dynamics, and practical realities of raising and spending money in American elections. While the course focuses primarily on U.S. federal campaign finance law and practice, it also compares state-level approaches, with special attention to Florida and Colorado. Students will explore the intersection of legal rules, political strategy, and democratic theory, considering both normative questions (how campaign finance should work) and empirical evidence (how it actually does).

Through a mix of legal analysis, political science research, and real-world case studies, the course addresses key topics including the evolution of campaign finance law, the role of the Federal Election Commission, independent expenditures and Super PACs, contribution limits, disclosure rules, and enforcement challenges. We will also examine the mechanics and strategy of political fundraising, from small-dollar online campaigns to high-dollar events.

By the end of the course, students will be able to evaluate whether — and how — campaign finance rules shape electoral competition, policy outcomes, and public trust in government.

## Student Learning Objectives

*By the end of the semester, students will be able to:*

- Identify and compare key concepts, actors, and institutions in U.S. federal and selected state (Florida, Colorado) campaign finance systems.
- Analyze and assess the effects of campaign finance laws and fundraising practices on elections, policy, and democratic governance.
- Apply legal frameworks and political science research to evaluate contemporary campaign finance controversies.
- Analyze empirical data on campaign contributions, expenditures, and fundraising patterns.
- Synthesize legal, empirical, and strategic perspectives to develop evidence-based arguments.
- Collaborate effectively in research and presentation teams to address complex campaign finance issues.

*We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both. -Justice Louis Brandeis, 1941*

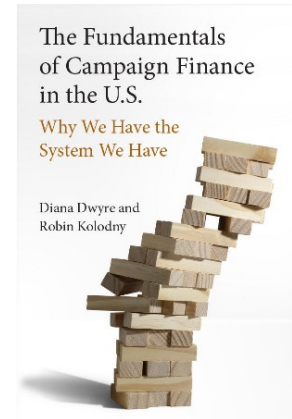
*There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money and I can't remember what the second one is. — Mark Hanna, ~1896*

*Money is the mother's milk of politics. — Jesse Unruh, 1966*

## Required Materials

### Required Materials

- Dwyre, Diana, and Robin Kolodny. 2024. *The Fundamentals of Campaign Finance in the U.S.: Why We Have the System We Have*. University of Michigan Press.
- Mutch, Robert E. 2016. *Campaign Finance: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press. (PDF on Canvas)
- Additional readings posted or linked on Canvas, including scholarly works, government websites, news articles, and think tank analyses.
- News consumption: Students should regularly read *The New York Times* and/or *The Wall Street Journal*. Free digital access is available through the UF Business Library: <https://businesslibrary.uflib.ufl.edu/wsj-nyt-economist>.
- A laptop with presentation software, spreadsheet capability, and internet access for in-class lab work.



## Expectations: Tips for Success

- *Attend and prepare.* This is an advanced seminar that blends lecture, discussion, and hands-on workshops. Complete readings before class, listen actively, take notes, and contribute to discussions and activities. You can't do well if you skip class.
- *Engage critically.* Move beyond repeating talking points. Ask yourself: *Why? If this is true, what else must be true? What is this an example of?* Think about implications, evaluate evidence, and connect ideas across readings and topics.
- *Apply and synthesize.* Use what you learn from laws, research, and case studies to interpret real-world events and craft your own analyses and strategies.
- *Meet deadlines.* Complete all assignments on time so you can get feedback and stay on track.
- *Respect diverse perspectives.* Politics is inherently conflictual. You are not expected to agree with me, the authors, or your classmates — but you are expected to read carefully, understand arguments, and engage in evidence-based, civil discussion.
- *Collaborate effectively.* Take an active role in group work, share responsibilities, and contribute to a final product that reflects the strengths of the whole team.

## The Fine Print

**Attendance is required.** Students failing to attend class during the first week may be dropped from the course. Please contact Dr. Robbins if you miss class for documented absences (e.g., religious observances, illness, academic, or athletic competitions). **Late Work:** Canvas will assess a 5% per day penalty automatically to late work. You may make up a missed exam within seven calendar days with acceptable documentation (no early exams). **AI** (i.e., ChatGPT, GoogleLM, etc) are ubiquitous but unreliable, please see the use of AI policy on Canvas. **This course complies with all UF academic policies.** For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/)." (The direct link is <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.)

## Assignments and Grading

### Participation (5%)

Attend regularly, contribute thoughtfully, and engage actively in workshops, labs, group activities, and discussions. Participation includes structured peer critique via Padlet, designed to strengthen your critical thinking and feedback skills.

### Mini Labs / Exit Tickets (up to 6) – 15%

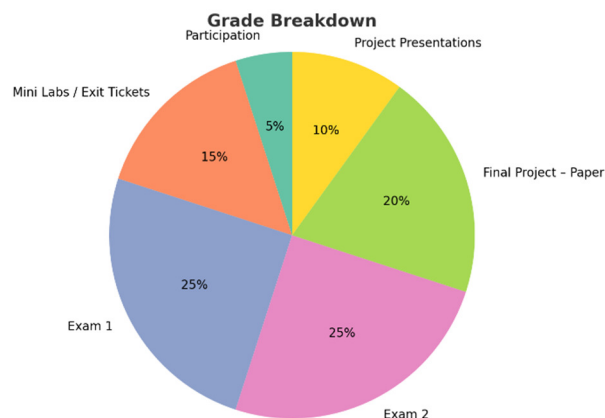
Mini-labs will be held regularly to prepare you for exams and, more importantly, for your final paper. Each lab includes a short reflection or “exit ticket” to help build your analytical skills and content knowledge.

### Exams (50% – 25% each)

Two in-class exams with short-answer questions will assess your understanding of core concepts, theories, and debates in campaign finance. Students should be able to interpret key statutes, court cases, and their consequences, and compare across systems. Exam 1 covers Modules 1 & 2; Exam 2 covers Module 3.

### Final Project – Paper (20%); Presentations: Padlet & Elevator Pitch (10%)

The final project is a comparative analysis of a 2024 competitive race at the state level (Florida) and one at the federal level (any state, U.S. House or Senate). The paper must include data analysis, visuals, and comparative critical analysis informed by course readings, with attention to legal and policy implications. The Padlet presentation is a visual summary of key findings; all students will participate in a Gallery Walk to provide peer feedback. The elevator pitch is a concise, in-class presentation of your major findings.



Details/Rubrics for assignments are on Canvas.

A	94.0%	C	73.0%
A-	90.0%	C	70.0%
B+	87.0%	D+	67.0%
B	83.0%	D	63.0%
B-	80.0%	D-	60%
C+	77.0%		

## Critical Due Dates

- Labs:
  - August 29
  - September 5, 12, & 19
  - October 10 & 24
- Exams:
  - September 26 (Modules 1 & 2)
  - November 7 (Module 3)
- Project:
  - November 21, project posted to Padlet before class, Gallery Walk during class
  - December 1 & 3: Elevator Pitch
  - December 9 (noon): Final Papers Due



Figure 1: (Image credit: ADAM ZYGLIS / © 2014 Cagle Cartoons)

## Module 1: Introduction & Foundations (August 22-29)

22 & 25 Aug

- Syllabus
- Greenwood, "New FEC Chair"\*
- Epstein, "The D.N.C.'s New Leader"
- Levinthal, "Federal Judge Blocks"
- Vogel, Yaffe-Bellany, "Donor List Suggests"
- Matthews, "The Great Money in Politics Debate"

27 & 29 Aug

- Chapter 1, *The Fundamentals of Campaign Finance* (Dwyre/Kolodny)
- Chapter 1, *Campaign Finance: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Mutch, skim intensively)
- La Raja/Schaffner, "Campaign Finance Laws, Purists & Pragmatists", 2015
- *Lab: Florida Division of Elections campaign finance overview page*

## Module 2: State & Local Campaign Finance Systems (September 3-26)

3 & 5 Sep: State and Local Overview

- Chapter 8, *Fundamentals of Campaign Finance*
- NCSL: Campaign Finance Regulation: State Comparisons
- NCSL contribution limits & disclosure tables (browse NCSL site)
- *Lab: NCSL Campaign Finance Legislation Database & mini-report*

8-12 Sep: Florida Case Study

- Sarkissian, "Newly Released Records", 2025
- Moynahan, "Florida's Campaign Finance Law," 1976
- Florida Secretary of State Web Page: Campaign Finance, including Candidate and Political Committee handbooks
- Florida Statue 106
- *Lab: Florida DOS data lab; choose a competitive House or Senate Race; download data and clean*

15-19 Sep: Colorado & Seattle Case Analysis

- Colorado Campaign & Political Finance Manual and overview page
- Heerwig et al "Participation & Representation," 2023
- Griffith, "Evidence from Seattle's Democracy Voucher Program", 2022
- Seattle Ethics & Elections Commission 2023 Democracy Voucher report (program data)
- *Lab: project proposal and data workshop, including 3<sup>rd</sup> party spending*

22-24 Sep: Law & Policy Outcomes

- Determan & Oxley, "Campaign Contributions and Electoral Competitiveness in Florida State Elections", 2025
- Albert et al, "Election Reform & Campaign Finance," 2024
- Rogers & Middleton, "Ballot Initiatives," 2015
- Kulesza et al, "State Responses to U.S. Supreme Court Decisions," 2017
- Kang & Shepherd, "Partisanship in State Supreme Courts," 2015
- Flavin, "Campaign Finance Laws, Policy Outcomes, and Political Equality in the American States," 2015

26 Sep: In-class Exam I

## Module 3: Federal Campaign Finance (September 29-November 7)

29 Sep: Federal Overview

- Chapter 2, Corruption and Campaign Finance in the U.S. (Dwyre/Kolodny)
- Chapter 1, Campaign Finance: What Everyone Needs to Know (Mutch, re-skim intensively)
- How to Read a Legal Opinion (Kerr)

1 – 10 October: Legal & Statutory History: Spending & Contributions

- Chapter 3, From Buckley to BCRA
- Chapter 2, Watergate & Buckley v. Valeo (Mutch)
- Buckley v. Valeo, 1976
- *Lab: U.S. House Race & FEC data, Contributions*

13-15 October: Citizen's United

- Chapter 4: Triumph of Free Speech (Dwyre/Kolodny)
- Chapter 9: Corporations, Unions and Citizen's United (Mutch)
- *Citizens United, 2010*
- Smith, "The Myth of Campaign Finance Reform," 2009

20-24 October: Disclosure & Players

- Chapters 5-7, Dwyre & Kolodny
- *Lab: U.S. House Race & FEC data, Spending, Outside Actors*

27 October- November 5: Empirical Evidence and Political Consequences

- Chapter 10: Conclusion (Mutch)
- La Raja/Schaffner "Ideological Wellsprings," 2015
- Brod, "Outside Money, Inside Influence," 2025
- Norton/Pildes "How Outside Money makes Governing More Difficult, 2020"
- Le et al, "Money in Politics," 2024
- Kang, Party Campaign Finance 2025
- McKay, "Fundraising for Favors," 2015

7 November: In Class Exam II

## Module 4: Fundraising (November 10-21)

- Cohen, Chapter 3: Fundraising, 2025
- Lestingi, "Putting it All Together"
- Gregory, "Campaign Budgeting"
- Hahn, "Random tips"
- Hahn, "Major Donor Fundraising"
- Greenwood, "Can AI Help Fundraisers"
- Bonica, "Campaign Finance and Gerontocracy," 2025
- Malbin & Parrot, "Small Donor Empowerment Depends on the Details"
- *Gallery Walk on Padlet For Projects*

## Module 5: Presentations (December 1-3)

- Project Presentations
- Wrap Up

*Final project papers due on 9 December at noon.*

*\*Readings other than the Dwyre & Kolodny text are linked on Canvas*