

Campaign Finance & Fundraising

POS 5935

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Political Science – The University of Florida

Class Meets: MWF, 11:45 am -12:35 pm, Dauer Hall 342; Office Hours: M/F 1-3

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Course Description and Goals

Examines the laws, political dynamics, and fundraising that shape U.S. elections, with emphasis on federal campaign finance with comparisons to select state systems. This is a three (3) credit course.

This graduate-level course examines the legal frameworks, political dynamics, and strategic practices that shape the financing of U.S. elections, with primary emphasis on federal law and fundraising strategy with comparative attention to selected states, especially Florida.

Students will analyze the evolution of campaign finance law, the role of institutions such as the Federal Election Commission, and the interplay between regulation, political strategy, and democratic theory. Topics include independent expenditures and Super PACs, contribution limits, disclosure rules, compliance and enforcement, budgeting, and the political effects of different financing regimes.

Blending academic research with applied skills, the course engages students in analyzing scholarly literature, working with campaign finance data, and assessing empirical research. Students will also examine fundraising strategies and challenges.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *Identify* key theories, concepts, and legal principles related to campaign finance and fundraising in U.S. elections.
- *Evaluate* how academic literature and empirical evidence contribute to our understanding of the role of money in politics, including their limitations and biases.
- *Analyze* the effects of campaign finance laws and fundraising strategies on electoral competition, policy outcomes, and public trust.
- *Apply* legal frameworks and strategic principles to real-world fundraising and compliance scenarios at federal and state levels.
- *Integrate* academic research with applied approaches to develop a comprehensive project, critically evaluating sources to support strategic or theoretical choices.
- *Communicate* findings and recommendations effectively through oral presentations and written work, using clear argumentation, compelling visuals, and persuasive messaging suitable for professional or academic audiences.

Course Requirements

Seminar participants will engage in activities that foster a deeper understanding of campaign finance. All students will be evaluated on the quality of their participation, their ability to synthesize and critically engage with readings, and the quality of their written and oral work..

Required Materials

The course readings are designed to equip you to understand this aspect of campaigning and to provide insight into the strategic, legal, and practical challenges of raising and allocating campaign funds. There is no materials fee associated with this course.

- 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>. Florida sources of news are recommended as well.

Assignments/Graded Work

Participation (10%) Graduate students are expected to contribute at a professional level, demonstrating mastery of readings, integration of current campaign finance developments, and the ability to connect academic theory to practical campaign contexts. In-class exercises may include data analysis, legal case reviews, and strategic scenario evaluation.

Two Short Exams (40%) Exams will combine factual knowledge (laws, institutions, historical developments) with applied analysis of campaign finance data and case materials. Graduate students will also complete a short, written component applying scholarly literature to assess the implications of a specific legal or strategic change.

Long Paper: Comparative Campaign Finance Analysis (50%) Students will conduct a comparative analysis of a *competitive 2024 Florida state legislative race* and a *competitive 2024 U.S. House race*. Graduate-level expectations include:

- Detailed examination of fundraising totals, spending patterns, donor composition, independent expenditures, and compliance challenges using official data sources (e.g., FEC, Florida Division of Elections).
- Analysis of how the *fundraising mix* — small-dollar donations, high-dollar donors, party and PAC contributions, and outside spending — may have influenced electoral outcomes.
- Application of campaign finance theory and empirical research to explain observed patterns and strategic decisions.
- Consideration of the interplay between legal constraints, political strategy, and broader democratic implications.
- An appendix with original data tables, visualizations, or other relevant analyses.

Grade Distribution Summary

Component	MA Students
Participation	10%
Exams (20% each)	40%
Comparative Finance Analysis	70%
Total	100%

Grading Scale

A	94-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D-	60-62
A-	90-93	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	E	below 60
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69		

Critical Due Dates

- September 26: Exam I
- November 7: Exam II
- December 3: Final Paper Due Midnight

The Fine Print (Course, Dept., College, University Policies)

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/>.)

Course Outline

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 3rd 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: Wrap Up (December 1-3)

- Wrap Up

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