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POSC 149
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
Fall 2012

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Course Description
This course is an examination of presidential elections. We will discuss candidate strategy, with special attention to victory in the U.S. Electoral College, politics of candidate selection (i.e., the nomination process), campaigning, media coverage, voter decision-making, candidate rhetoric, and the question of whether the presidential campaign matters much at all.

Required Books


These books represent only a portion of the course readings. For most of the topics we will cover, I have selected additional readings identified below. You should read these articles prior to the class periods where they will be discussed. These additional readings are available through the course site on http://ilearn.ucr.edu.

Course Requirements
Debate analysis paper 25 percent
The War Room analysis 25 percent
Forecasting model paper 25 percent
Final exam 25 percent

A Note on Expectations. This class features a substantial reading load and a commitment to developing your skills crafting arguments and analyzing political messages. We will certainly attend to the presidential campaign. According to campus academic policies, “courses are assigned a unit value determined by the number of hours of work per week required of the student. Specifically, Academic Senate regulations require three hours of work per week for each unit of credit.”¹ This is a four-unit class. Plan to commit 12 hours per week to it.

Debate analysis. One of your writing assignments will revolve around identifying arguments the candidates make: What is the thesis? What are the supporting points? I will ask you to write a paper identifying and evaluating the quality of an argument either major party presidential candidate, President Barack Obama (D) or former Gov. Mitt Romney (R-MA), advances during their debates. This paper is due October 25, after the third presidential debate. However you will draw on arguments made in the first or second debates. You may also look for an argument made by one of the Vice Presidential candidates, Vice President Joe Biden (D) or U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), in their debate.

The War Room analysis
We will screen the documentary The War Room together as a class. There will be a paper. Specifically, I will ask you to compare and contrast insights about campaign management that you get from The War Room versus the book you will read, The Race to 270. This is due November 20.

¹ p. 40, University of California General Catalog 2012-2013.
Forecasting model paper. The third paper for the class is an analysis of forecasting models. Political scientist and economists, in particular, have developed statistical models trying to forecast the results of presidential elections before they happen. This paper will call upon you to “look under the hood” of forecasting models to explain how they work and try to come to grips with the questions of whether and how social scientists can accurately predict the results of an election several months before any one votes. This is due December 7, by 5 p.m. Turn it in to my office, 2222 Watkins Hall.

Late papers will be graded, but with a 1/3rd letter-grade penalty for each day—or partial day—each is late. Any passing paper that is turned in will receive passing partial credit.

Plagiarism and cheating will result in a loss of credit on the spoiled assignment and all cases will be referred to the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Program Office.

Final Examination
If you are unable to take the final exam at the scheduled time, you may schedule an alternate time by contacting me prior to the scheduled exam time and providing appropriate original-copies documentation (medical, military, etc.) for your inability to take the exam at the scheduled time. Scheduling a makeup exam is your responsibility. I will consider extreme medical emergencies, again with complete original documentation. The final exam is scheduled for December 14, 2012, 3-6 p.m.

Course Schedule
1. September 27 Introduction

2. October 2
   Who runs for president?

October 3 First Presidential Debate

Presidential primaries/Nomination process
3. October 4
   History
   Norrander, Barbara. 2010. The Imperfect Primary, chapter 1. pp. 1-24 (24)

4. October 9
   Current Process
   Norrander, Barbara. 2010. The Imperfect Primary, chapter 2. pp. 25-58 (34)

5. October 11
   Fairness
   Norrander, Barbara. 2010. The Imperfect Primary, chapter 3. pp. 59-93 (34)

October 11 Vice Presidential Debate

6. October 16
   Alternatives and Frontloading
   Norrander, Barbara. 2010. The Imperfect Primary, chapter 4. pp. 94-118 (25)

October 16 Second Presidential Debate

7. October 18
   Assessments/Implications for the General Election
   Norrander, Barbara. 2010. The Imperfect Primary, chapter 5. pp. 119-128 (10)

October 22  Third Presidential Debate

8. October 23  Debates

9. October 25  Vice Presidential Candidates

DUE TODAY: DEBATE ANALYSIS PAPER

10. October 30  Electoral College
Shaw, Daron. 2006. The Race to 270, chapter 1. pp. 1-16 (16)

11. November 1

12. November 6
Shaw, Daron. 2006. The Race to 270, chapter 3. pp. 41-70 (30)

November 6  Election Day

13. November 8  The War Room documentary
Shaw, Daron. 2006. The Race to 270, chapter 4. pp. 71-110 (40)

13. November 13
Shaw, Daron. 2006. The Race to 270, chapter 5. pp. 111-142 (31)

14. November 15

15. November 20  Assessing the Electoral College

DUE TODAY: THE WAR ROOM VS. RACE FOR 270
16. November 27  Forecasting
Note: http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/id/196443

17. November 29  Campaign Events and Effects

18. December 4  Reconciling Campaign Effects and Forecasting

19. December 6  Presidential Elections and the Politics of Race

_DUE December 7, 5 p.m.: FORECASTING MODEL COMPARISON AND ASSESSMENT_

December 14  Final Exam  3–6 p.m.