

# Course Syllabus

## PSCI 3021: U.S. Campaigns and Elections

### Instructor

**Professor Kenneth Bickers**

**Office:** Ketchum 222

**Telephone:** (303) 492-2363

**Office Hours:** Telephone or in person most weekdays by advance appointment

**Email:** [bickers@colorado.edu](mailto:bickers@colorado.edu) (<mailto:bickers@colorado.edu>)

### Course Description

Regularly scheduled competitive elections are at the heart of all democratic societies. Indeed, one consequence of the rise of democracy around the world is that for many people, government actions, even when those actions are found to be disagreeable or contrary to our personal preferences, are typically viewed as legitimate, if the leaders taking those actions have been duly elected in an electoral system that is broadly viewed as fair. Yet the practice of democracy is often messy and imperfect.

Criticisms are often leveled at American democracy because of its persistently low turnout rates, the frequent lack of serious challengers to incumbents running for reelection, the gerrymandering of electoral maps to protect incumbents, the impact of money on campaigns, the manipulation of voters through media advertisements, the distortion of popular will due to the institution of the electoral college, and more.

In this class, we will exam electoral systems, patterns of voting, and election campaigns to better understand democratic practice in the United States. We will examine the factors that lead to voting and nonvoting, as well as preferences for candidates running for partisan offices. We will examine presidential and congressional elections. We will also focus on local elections and institutions of direct democracy. Our goal will be to understand how campaigns and elections operate in America and to explore the various arguments about why election processes work as they do. More fundamentally, the goal is for each student to be self-reflective about the strengths and weaknesses of democracy as it is practiced in this country.

### Course Requirements

This is an online course. At the same time, it is designed to replicate many of the features of a regular term-based face-to-face class experience. There are lectures. There are lots of readings.

There are guided discussions via threaded online discussions. There will be two papers. There are four exams. There are several opportunities for extra credit.

Each of the exams entails a combination of multiple choice questions and essay questions. Exams will be non-cumulative. As with any upper-level course, it is imperative that each student be prepared in advance by doing the assigned readings. To provide an incentive to do the readings carefully and thoroughly, there are a number of opportunities for extra credit by successfully completing self-assessments that pertain to the readings.

The biggest difference between this course and a regular class is that we will not be meeting together as a whole. This means class room conversations take the form of threaded discussions. It means that you bear greater than normal responsibility to know about and meet due dates for activities and assignments. At the same time, it also means that you can go back and review lectures. You can even go back to early portions of the class to see how ideas or concepts connect across topics. In short, it means you have more control over the pacing and depth of your own learning process.

In addition to me, Josalyn Williams [email: [Josalyn.Williams@Colorado.edu](mailto:Josalyn.Williams@Colorado.edu)] will be helping with the course and grading some of your assignments. Josalyn is a PhD student in Political Science at CU and specializes in American politics. Feel free to contact either of us should you need assistance or have questions.

## Course Materials

This course involves a substantial amount of reading. For most class sessions, students will be expected to read chapters from books that have been assigned for the course and/or articles in political science journals. Most of the articles can be found as PDF files on the course Desire 2 Learn website. Some readings are so widely available (e.g., sections of the US Constitution) that you will be able easily to find them on the web. Two books have been ordered for use in this course:

Stephen C. Craig and David B. Hill. 2010. *The Electoral Challenge: Theory Meets Practice, 2d ed.* Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Available as a traditional paperback text or in Kindle e-reader form from Amazon.com).

Gary C. Jacobson. 2015. *The Politics of Congressional Elections.* Any edition past the 8th ed. Longman.

## Course Outline

See the [Course Outline \(https://canvas.colorado.edu/courses/62069/pages/course-outline\)](https://canvas.colorado.edu/courses/62069/pages/course-outline) page for a complete list of readings, lectures and assignments.

## Course Activities

The five weeks of this class are punctuated by several different types of graded activities.

## **Discussions**

Five graded discussions are planned for the course. Instructions for the specific content of these discussions will be given at the point that we reach each one. In some cases, you will be assigned to a particular group for a given discussion. Assignment to a group is based on whether your student id number ends in an even or odd number. In all cases, you will be asked to post an initial set of comments, followed by at least two additional comments. Guidance will be given at the time as to what these postings should include. Participation in each threaded discussion is worth four percentage points toward your final grade (20 percentage points total). You will receive one-third credit for meeting the requirements of the first posting; one-third credit for meeting the requirements of your first follow-up posting; and one-third credit for the second follow-up posting in the thread. Each discussion takes place over a period, generally, of three days. All initial and follow-up postings should take place within the assigned window for the discussion. Any postings that occur after 10 pm (Mountain Daylight Time) on the day that the window closes will not be counted toward your discussion grade.

In addition to the graded discussions, we will probably have one ongoing discussion that will permit us to talk about current campaign and election news as it unfolds during the course. Please read the paragraph in the policies section of the syllabus regarding course etiquette. Disagreement is to be expected. Disagreement, however, should not come at the expense of civility.

## **Exams**

There are four exams in this course. Each exam is worth 15 percentage points toward the final grade (up to 60 percentage points total). These exams will incorporate a mix of multiple choice items and short essays. You are responsible for all assigned readings and lectures for the exams. The exams will be non-cumulative. That is, they will cover material introduced since the prior exam (or, in the case of the first exam, the first class session). They are open book, open note.

Please note: Once you begin an exam, you will have exactly one hour and fifteen minutes to complete the exam or to the published ending time for that exam (i.e., 10 pm MDT). After that amount of time, the computer will automatically close you out of the exam and provide us with the answers to the questions that were completed during that time frame. Once you have begun the exam, you will not be able to reopen the exam. The exams must be completed by 10 pm (MDT) of the day on which they are to be taken. To repeat, Canvas will close you out of an exam at 10 pm (MDT) on the day that the exam period closes.

My advice is to study for the exam just as if it were closed book, closed note. This will minimize your reliance on readings and notes. In sum, be ready when you start an exam, as you will have a single one hour and fifteen minute opportunity to complete it.

## **Short Essays**



A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
97+	93- 97	90- 92	87- 89	83- 86	80- 82	77- 79	73- 76	70- 72	67- 69	63- 66	60- 62	<60

## Technical Requirements & Support

Please see the [Technical Requirements & Support](#)

(<https://canvas.colorado.edu/courses/62069/pages/technical-requirements-and-support>) page for more information.

## Course Policies

### Grading Policy

A word about my grading policy. No matter how careful, instructors sometimes make mistakes in grading. For that reason, I have an automatic regrade policy, subject to a couple of restrictions. I will be happy to regrade any exam or paper. I ask, however, that you hold on to any item for at least 24 hours after it is returned to you before asking for a regrade. Any request for a regrade must be made within one week after the exam is returned to you, after which no regrading will be done. Should you feel that an assignment has been misgraded, I encourage you to take advantage of this policy. Ordinarily, the entire exam or paper will be regraded, which means that the grade may go up, go down, or stay the same.

### Course Etiquette

This course tackles subjects that are sometimes viewed as controversial. It is incumbent on every participant in the class (instructor and students alike) to strive to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning. This is especially important in an online course, as it sometimes is easy to forget that at the other end of a web discussion is a real, living, breathing person. We should always remember that people bring differences with them into the learning environment and that these differences should be respected. It is imperative that each of us maintain civility when asking questions and making comments. Likewise, questions and comments by others should be treated with civility at all times.

## University Policies

See the [University Policies \(https://canvas.colorado.edu/courses/62069/pages/university-policies\)](https://canvas.colorado.edu/courses/62069/pages/university-policies) page for a complete list of policies.

# Course Outline

## Summer 2020

### Unit 1: Course Introduction

**Lecture 1:** Introduction and Course Overview

**Lecture 2:** Tasks, expectations, grading

**Lecture 3:** Thinking scientifically: empirical, not normative

Resource: Bickers Memo on Scientific Method

### Unit 2: Elections within American Style Federalism

**Lecture 4:** What makes the US different (or similar) to other countries?

Resource: Cross-National Election Turnout Rates

**Threaded Discussion:** Consult the supplied table of voter turnout rates across various countries. In a threaded discussion, indicate in a posting what you think is the key factor that explains the variation in turnout, giving reasons for your hypothesis. Respond to the postings of other students by explaining why you think your hypothesis is more likely to be correct than their hypotheses. That is, what is the evidence that your hypothesis is correct?

**Lecture 5:** Election rules as methods for aggregating preferences

Resource: Electoral System Powerpoint

**Lecture 6:** Types of Election Rules Used in the US

**Short Essay:** Write an essay of approximately 300 words, in which you explain how and why a change of election rules from proportional representation to plurality with runoff might plausibly have led to the same or perhaps a different outcome in the 2020 Democratic nomination process in Iowa (if your student ID ends in an odd number) or New Hampshire (if your student ID ends in an even number). A good essay will explain the differences in the two types of election rules and provide a plausible answer by delving into polling data that existed in the days or weeks leading up to that contest. Be sure to fully cite sources that you use in writing this essay.

**Lecture 7:** Special Topic - Election rules and their impact on election of women and minorities

Readings: Trounstein, Jessica, and Melody E. Valdin. "The Context Matters: The Effects of Single-Member versus At-Large Districts on City Council Diversity." American Journal of Political Science

52.3 (2008): 554-569.

Brockington, David, et al. "Minority representation under cumulative and limited voting." *Journal of Politics* 60.04 (1998): 1108-1125.

**Self-assessment:** Types of electoral rules (Extra Credit)

## **Exam 1 – Due by Tuesday, June 9 by 10 pm MDT.**

### **Unit 3: Voting and Nonvoting**

**Lecture 8:** Who Votes in American Elections?

Reading: Almost No One Votes in Mayoral Elections in the U.S. - CityLab

Resource: US Voter Turnout, 1958-2016

**Lecture 9:** Rational actor theory of voting: the "paradox of voting"

Reading: John H. Aldrich. "Rational Choice and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 37, No. 1. (Feb., 1993), pp. 246-278.

Resource: Rational actor model of voter turnout.doc

**Self-assessment:** Rational Actor Model of Voting (Extra Credit)

**Lecture 10:** Election Laws: if voting were made less costly, would voter turnout increase?

Reading: "Greater Convenience but not Greater Turnout" By Mary Fitzgerald. *American Politics Research*, v. 33, n. 6 (November, 2005)

**Lecture 11:** Special Topic: The Impact of Direct Democracy on Turnout

Readings: "Direct Democracy and Candidate Elections" by Daniel Smith, in *Electoral Challenge*, ch. 9.

**Lecture 12:** Special Topic: Does Negative Advertising Suppress Voter Turnout or Enhance it?

Readings: Ansolabehere, Stephen, et al. "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American political science review* 88.04 (1994): 829-838.

Wattenberg, Martin P., and Craig Leonard Brians. "Negative campaign advertising: Demobilizer or mobilizer?" *American political science review* 93.04 (1999): 891-899.

Resource: Negative Advertising Summaries.pdf

**Lecture 13:** Special Topic: Does voter contact induce turnout?

Reading: Green, Donald P., Alan S. Gerber, and David W. Nickerson. "Getting out the vote in local elections: results from six door-to-door canvassing experiments." *Journal of Politics* 65.4 (2003): 1083-1096.

**Threaded Discussion:** In a threaded discussion, post a hypothesis as to what you think might increase voter turnout and is a feasible reform of the American electoral process, providing evidence (including citations) that your proposed reform might work. Select a posting of another student and respond with additional evidence from prior studies that you think either counters that student's hypothesis or adds additional support for their hypothesis. If another student selects your post for rebuttal, provide additional support (with evidence and citations) that you believe corroborates your initial hypotheses.

## Unit 4: How do people decide for whom to vote?

### Lecture 14: Voter Calculations: The Classical Model

Readings: Bafumi, Joseph, and Robert Y. Shapiro. "A new partisan voter." *Journal of Politics* 71.01 (2009): 1-24.

Resource: Lecture Outline -- The Classical Model of Voting

**Self-assessment:** Vote choice (Extra Credit)

### Lecture 15: Retrospective evaluations

Readings: Alvarez, R. Michael, and Jonathan Nagler. "Economics, entitlements, and social issues: Voter choice in the 1996 presidential election." *American Journal of Political Science* 42.4 (1998): 1349-1363.

William Mayer, "Swing Voters", chapter 3 in *The Electoral Challenge*, and response by Lance Tarrance

Resource: Lecture Outline - Retrospective evaluations

### Lecture 16: Prospective evaluations: the civics model

Resource: Lecture Outline - Prospective evaluations

**Threaded Discussion:** Locate a recent televised or web-based campaign ad. In a threaded discussion, post the URL for other students to see and include a short description (no more than 50 words) of the race in which this ad appeared and what type of evaluation is being invoked (i.e., retrospective, prospective, or some other type).

Select someone else's posting of a URL and explain why you think the ad may have been effective or ineffective and for which groups of potential voters. Respond to a posting about your ad or, if no one has posted about yours, follow-up on someone else's ad, describing why you think it might be

effective or ineffective. [www.livingroomcandidate.org](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org) has presidential races. YouTube will have races of all types.

## **Exam 2 – Due by Friday, June 19, at 10 pm MDT.**

### **Unit 5: Presidential Campaigns**

**Lecture 17:** The dynamics of presidential candidate nomination: The Nominating Process

Reading: "The Attrition Game: Initial Resources, Initial Contests and the Exit of Candidates During the US Presidential Primary Season" by Barbara Norrander. *British Journal of Political Science* 36, 487–507.

Resource: Overview of Nomination and General Election Processes

**Lecture 18:** Caucuses and Primaries

Reading: "Measuring the Consequences of Delegate Selection Rules in Presidential Nominations" by Stephen Ansolabehere and Gary King. *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 2. (May, 1990), pp. 609-621.

Resource: Nominating Events 2016

**Short Essay:** In a short essay (300 words) explain what you see as the main things that will change when Colorado in 2020 shifts from the use of a caucus process to primaries for selecting delegates to the respective national party nominating conventions. A good essay will identify at least three major differences. A great essay will provide estimates of the magnitudes of these changes based on what has happened in other states. Be sure to include citations (failure to do so will result in a failing grade on the essay).

**Lecture 19:** Use of polls, media events, paid advertisements

Reading: "Political Advertising" by Michael Franz, *The Electoral Challenge*, ch. 6

**Lecture 20:** Campaign finance in the nomination process

Reading: "Money and Elections" by Marian L. Currinder and John C. Green, with Stuart Rothenberg's "Response," *The Electoral Challenge*, ch. 5

**Lecture 21:** Nominating Conventions: GOP vs. Dem. party rules, delegates/super-delegates

Reading: "A backroom without the smoke? Superdelegates and the 2008 Democratic nomination process" by Priscilla L. Southwell. *Party Politics* 18(2) 267–283.

**Self-assessment:** The nomination process (Extra Credit)

**Lecture 22:** General election process: Inter-party, the electoral college, geographic strategies, the big-bang

Reading: "The Methods behind the Madness: Presidential Electoral College Strategies, 1988-1996," by Daron Shaw. *Journal of Politics*, 61: 4 (Nov., 1999), pp. 893-913

**Threaded Discussion:** Assume for a moment that you are an ambitious politically active young professional, hoping to make a big splash for yourself. You have been offered the opportunity to be the state campaign manager for a general election presidential candidate in 2020 in a state of your choosing (the GOP candidate, if your student ID ends in an odd digit, or the Dem candidate, if your student ID ends in an even numbered digit). In a threaded discussion, post to the class the state to which you would want to be assigned and the reasons why. In at least two follow-up postings, try to talk at least one other student (who has been assigned the same candidate) out of their choice of a state, explaining why that state is a bad place for a person with political ambitions to be focusing.

**Lecture 23:** Campaign finance in the general election process

Reading: Supreme Court's recent decision on campaign finance system

Resource: Overview of Campaign Finance System

## **Exam 3 – Due by Friday, June 26 at 10 pm MDT**

# **Unit 6: Congressional elections**

**Lecture 24:** Incumbency advantage or the decline of marginal seats in congressional elections

Reading: Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, ch. 3 (Sections on Incumbency Factor and Sources of Incumbency Advantage)

**Lecture 25:** Campaign funding

Reading: Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, ch. 3 (Section on Money in Congressional Elections)

**Lecture 26:** Incumbent Campaigns versus Challenger Campaigns

Reading: Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, ch. 4

**Threaded Discussion:** Assume, for the sake of argument, you want to run for Congress in the fall of 2018 (and you are not the incumbent). You have been advised that you need to kick start the campaign by raising at least \$100,000 from major donors in the district at least a year before election day by persuading them to give the maximum amount permitted by Federal Election laws. In a threaded discussion, describe how you might convince potential donors that your campaign is worth them giving you that kind of money. Follow-up at least twice with suggestions about specific

strategies or attributes that someone else should be emphasizing in their efforts to persuade potential donors to support you financially.

**Lecture 27:** National tides in Congressional Elections

Reading: Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, ch. 6.

**Self-assessment:** Congressional Elections (Extra Credit)

**Exam 4 – Due by Friday, July 3, at 10 pm MDT.**