The 2012 Presidential Election
Prof. David Greenberg
SAS Honors Seminar

Class Time: Wednesday 1.10-4.10
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Office Hours: Wed. 10.30-12.30
Course No.: 01:090:269:01

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Index No.: 16190

Syllabus

Description. The course examines the 2012 election in its historical context. Studying the history of the campaign and its practices and institutions should encourage students to think in a more rigorous, scholarly way about a topic that many of us will be talking about anyway this fall. As a class, we’ll follow the ups and downs and twists and turns of the election season. But we’ll also try to understand how campaigns have come to take the form that they do. We’ll use the insights of political scientists to challenge conventional wisdom and journalistic clichés, and we’ll study media and communications research to understand how the election is portrayed to voters.

Course Requirements.

1. Weekly readings. Each week there will be assigned readings on the given topic. Usually the assignment will consist of a single book, but some weeks it will be a collection of articles.

2. Following the campaign in the news. Students are required to follow the daily political coverage through the kinds of sources below. There will be occasional quizzes to make sure you’re reading the newspapers and doing the class reading.

   a) The New York Times or The Washington Post or The Wall Street Journal; and
   b) one analytically serious political magazine (print or online) such as Slate, The New Republic, The Daily Beast, POLITICO; and
   c) one political-science website such as Monkey Cage; 538; Brendan-Nyhan.com; or A Plain Blog About Politics. These are serious, analytical blogs done by statisticians or political scientists and tend to avoid general punditry.

   Not allowed: mass-content, low-level websites such as Yahoo News, Huffington Post, etc.

   If you are unsure about whether a site is legitimate to follow, please ask me.

   And of course, you may read more than this!

3. Collecting relevant articles and submitting portfolios. From these sources, students are expected to save at least 10 articles throughout the semester on one of the following topics. Write a paragraph commenting on each one.

   These articles will be drawn upon in the final weeks of class as well as for the second paper.

   a) the role of race and gender in the campaign;
   b) the role of political consultants;
   c) the role of the news media;
   d) the role of political advertising;
   e) the role of the individual candidates (biography, personal style, etc.);
   f) the debates.

   On the week that we discuss your topic, you will submit a first portfolio of the articles you have collected along with a paper about your topic based on those articles. (See Second Short Paper.) On the final week of term, you will submit a second portfolio of several additional articles collected since you submitted the first set of articles. This is required in order to make sure you continue the exercise even after you submit the paper and the first set.
4. **First Short Paper. Due October 3.** There will be an initial five-page essay, designed to evaluate facility with the readings, ability to frame an argument, and writing skill.

5. **Second Short Paper. Individual due dates.** A second ten-page paper will be based on the articles you collect on a campaign-related topic (see below). **It will be due the week that topic is discussed in class.**

6. **Term Paper. Due December 12.** The final piece of writing for the course is a ten- to fifteen-page paper that explores some aspect of presidential elections in depth.

7. **Watching campaign events.** Students are expected to watch the conventions, debates and other major political events of the campaign season.

**Reading List.**

   ***Please buy online ASAP.****

**Weekly Assignments.**

File Book available at Rutgers University Bookstore, New Jersey Books, or in Alexander library reserves.

Article available on the class website at the Sakai site.

**Wed., Sep. 5**

**The Pageant**

*This week will be an introduction to the class. Please come to class having read excerpts from two classic works of American political sociology, Tocqueville’s Democracy in America and Bryce’s American Commonwealth.*

- Alexis de Tocqueville, “Election of the President,” “Mode of Election,” “Crises of Election,” and “Re-Election of the President,” in *Democracy in America*.
  [http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-01](http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-01)
  [http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-02](http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-02)
  [http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-03](http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-03)
  [http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-04](http://tinyurl.com/alexis-president-04)

  [http://tinyurl.com/bryce-chapter05](http://tinyurl.com/bryce-chapter05)
  [http://tinyurl.com/bryce-chapter07](http://tinyurl.com/bryce-chapter07)
  [http://tinyurl.com/bryce-chapter08](http://tinyurl.com/bryce-chapter08)

**Sep. 4-6**

**WATCH: DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION**

**Wed., Sep. 12**

**The Nominating Conventions**
This week, having just watched the Democratic Convention, we will discuss the conventions—their historic role, the media coverage of them, and the way they have framed the fall campaign.


**Wed., Sep. 19**

**The Candidates**

This week we get to know the candidates. Half the class will read a biography of Obama. The other half will read a biography of Romney. We will spend one half the class on Obama and the other on Romney.

If possible, read the whole thing. The minimally required reading is pp. 3-98, and pp. 259-466.

- Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, *The Real Romney*

**Wed., Sep. 26**

**No Class: Yom Kippur**

**Wed., Oct. 3**

**Case Study #1: 1800**

The first half of class this week will be devoted to a discussion of one of three case studies of historic campaigns: the 1800 election. The second half of class will be devoted to developments in the current campaign.


**Wed., Oct. 10**

**The Debates**

This session falls in the midst of the debates, which we will discuss this week.

- Alan Schroeder, *The Presidential Debates*.


**Thurs., Oct. 11**

**WATCH: VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE**

**Tues., Oct. 16**

**WATCH: 2ND PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE**

**Wed., Oct. 17**

**The Early Years**

This week we continue our historical study of campaigns.


**Mon., Oct. 22**

**WATCH: 3RD PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE**

**Wed., Oct. 24**

**The 20th Century**

We continue our historical study of campaigns.


**Wed., Oct. 31**

**Case Study #2: 1960**

Our historical survey continues with another classic work.

Tues., Nov. 6  WATCH: ELECTION DAY RETURNS

Wed., Nov. 7  Election Day Post-Mortem
*The day after Election Day we can collectively analyze results.*


Wed., Nov. 14  Case Study #3: 2008
*We conclude the historical portion with a look at the 2008 race. We also use Rebecca Traister’s discussion of gender as a takeoff point to look at race and gender in the 2012 race.*


Wed., Nov. 21  Advertising
*The history of campaign ads. The first half of class will be devoted to Jamieson’s work. The second half we will discuss the clips you have saved.*

Introduction, Chs. 1, 2, 5, 7, 9-11, conclusion.
http://nymag.com/print/?/news/frank-rich/negative-campaigning-2012-6/

Wed., Nov. 28  The Handlers
*Another topical week: examining the consultants who have taken on an increasingly important role in political campaigns. These readings will also be supplemented by your clips.*


**Also:** begin Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus*, pp. 1-137. It is a long book, and you may not be able to read it all in one week.

Wed., Dec. 5  Research Session.
Meet with research librarians in Alexander Library as we work on papers.


Wed., Dec. 12  The News Media
*The role of the media. The first half of class will be devoted to Crouse’s book. The second half we will discuss the clips you have saved and circulated.*


[4] Final Paper Due