

**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN IN DC**  
**THE SCIENCE OF POLITICS: CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS**  
**FALL 2012**

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Campaign professionals mostly acquire their skills through on-the job training. For example, David Plouffe, President Obama's campaign manager in 2008, began working in campaigns at age 21 with little academic training. By 40, he had worked in hundreds of campaigns and had a wide-ranging skill set that allowed him to run the most unlikely presidential campaign in history. A similar story describes Karl Rove, the architect of George W. Bush's election in 2000 and re-election in 2004.

Although energy, creativity, and political instinct cannot be taught, there are specific technical skills and lessons about the electorate that anyone who hopes to pursue a career in politics – or just understand our electoral system -- must be familiar with. These include knowledge of the fundamental factors that drive elections and public opinion as well familiarity with the basics of survey research, statistical analysis, media relations, video production techniques, new media, media buying, speechwriting, fundraising, accounting, and political law.

This class will teach you how to better understand the fundamental factors that drive elections in America and to learn some of the skills employed by political professionals. Many of your assignments will require you to apply the lessons of this class to real time events.

Pundits and other observers have already generated a phenomenal amount of analysis, commentary, and predictions – and occasionally they have even been right. Our goal in this class is to go beyond the spin and hyperbole of many election commentators and understand how voters decide and how strategists persuade.

It is not a "how to" class, but instead will combine the insights of campaign professionals with insight from the study of previous campaigns and core academic knowledge. In short, this class will combine theory, practice, and exploration, taking the insights of political scientists and political practitioners and rolling them into one. We will take advantage of our unique access to political professionals in DC. These political professionals will join us during normal class time, but I will also arrange other times for us to meet. For example, two consultants with extensive experience negotiating debate rules and preparing candidates for presidential debates will join us to watch one of the presidential debates.

## **READINGS**

The readings in this class will come from refereed academic journals as well as media and non-scholarly accounts of campaigns and elections.

Most of the journal readings are available on JSTOR ([jstor.org](http://jstor.org)) and the other readings are widely available on the web. I will send along copies of additional readings by e-mail.

Also, you should not take this class unless you are deeply interested in electoral politics and keep up with it on a daily basis. There are obviously a slew of sites available to follow politics and political news. I typically read *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* as well as [www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com) every morning. I also check in with Pollster.com to keep up to date on current polling information. "The Note" from ABC News, "First Read" from NBC News and Politico's "Playbook."

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

There will be a series of three short assignments and final case study project. They are described below and represent the sort of work product that journalists and campaign operatives must do. I will outline expectations in more detail in class. Some have set due dates and others have flexible times. There will also be an in-class participation requirement

### **Poll Briefing [10 Points]**

For this assignment, you will write a memo to a potential candidate for political office on how to be a savvy consumer of public opinion polling. Using information from this class, you will lay out the factors that should be considered when looking at public opinion. You should discuss the implications of sampling, question wording, and the mode of delivery (e.g., IVR, RDD, Internet). You should also give a non-technical summary of some of the statistical concepts presented in the class. You are encouraged to use examples of current public opinion polls and information found on Pollster.com. This paper should be no longer than two pages, single-spaced, with 12 point font and a one inch margin. It will be due on xxxx.

### **Journalist Briefing Memo [20 Points]**

For this assignment, you will write two memos, similar to the ones produced by ABC News for "The Note" or NBC's "First Read." (See links for examples). This memo should be written from a journalist's perspective (rather than a partisan one). The goal of these memos is to outline the important news stories for a single day and **provide analysis**. Depending on the day, there might be one central story or several smaller stories, but it is up to you to determine what is important and why. Timing is critical for this assignment, because nobody wants yesterday's news. The memos are due by 10 pm on the days you have chosen to write your real time memo. This memo should be no longer than two pages single-spaced.

**Political Strategy Briefing Memo [10 Points]**

For this assignment, you will write a memo similar to the one provided to candidates every day by their political advisers. This memo should be written from a political operative's perspective (not a journalistic one) and should be a broad overview of the current political landscape. It should include both analysis of the political situation as well as recommendations for action and reaction. The memo can consider electoral and/or legislative strategy. This memo should be no less than one page, single spaced, with 12 point font and a one inch margin, and no longer than two pages single spaced. I will provide memos from actual campaigns for you to examine before you do the assignment.

**Class Participation [20 Points]**

The website Politico.com posts daily questions in "The Arena" (<http://www.politico.com/arena/>) and pundits post responses to those questions. Before each class, I will send around an Arena-style question or two. We will take a few minutes during each class to discuss these questions – or more accurately for you to provide answers. You can comment on the main question or respond to assertions made by your fellow students. You can and should certainly have a point of view, but evidence is crucial. Don't just be a pundit. Be a smart analyst of real time events. You will be evaluated for both the frequency and quality of your participation.

**Final (40 points)** The final project will be a case in which you will have to come up with a campaign plan for a hypothetical election. The case will demand that you synthesize information from class, readings, and guest presenters on survey research, the fundamental factors that drive elections, targeting, media buying, etc... In short, your task will be to apply the lessons of class to a real political task. I will provide you with the case and give you precise instructions on what you need to do. You will present your project not only to me, but to a "jury" of high profile DC based political consultants. You will also be responsible for a written summary of your plan not to exceed 15 pages. Do well and you may not only earn a good grade in this class, but a job offer in politics.

**TOPICS AND READINGS****MEETING 1**

Introduction to Class and Briefing on 2012 Campaign

**MEETING 2**

Survey Research 101

- Literary Digest Article from 1936 - <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5168/>
- Trochim, William M. "Probability Sampling" *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*, 2nd Edition. <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/sampprob.php>
- Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science*, 36: 579-616.

### MEETING 3

#### Election Rules, Election Laws, and Campaign Finance

- Burden, Barry C., David T. Canon, Kenneth R. Mayer, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2010. "The Turnout Effects of Early Voting, Election Day Registration, and Same Day Registration in the 2008 Presidential Election." <https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/bcburden/web/OSU.pdf>
- Jost, Kenneth. 2010. "Campaign Finance Debates." *CQ Researcher* 20(20): 457-480.
- Garrett, Sam R. 2010. *The State of Campaign Finance Policy: Recent Developments and Issues for Congress*. CRS Report for Congress.
- Zengerle, Jason. 2011. "The Idealist." *The New Republic*.
- Franz, Michael 2008. *Choices and Changes: Interest Groups and the Electoral Process*. Temple University Press. Select Chapters

### MEETING FOUR

#### Party Identification and The Nature of the Times

- Bartels, Larry "The Study of Electoral Behavior" in *Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior*.
- Bartels, Larry M., and John Zaller. 2001. "Presidential Vote Models: A Recount." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 34: 8-20.
- Gelman, Andrew, and Gary King. 1993. "Why are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes Are so Predictable?" *British Journal of Political Science*, 23: 409-451.

### MEETING FIVE

#### Political Participation and Political Mobilization

- McDonald, Michael P., and Samuel L. Popkin. 2001. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter." *American Political Science Review*, 95: 963-974.
- Citrin, Jack, Eric Schickler and John Sides 2003. "What if Everyone Voted? Simulating the Impact of Increased in Senate Elections." *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Gerber, Alan and Donald Green 2000. "The Effects of Personal Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review*, 94: 653-663.

### MEETING SIX

#### Campaign Strategy Overview

- David Plouffe, *The Audacity to Win*. Selections.
- Rove, Karl Selections. *Courage and Consequences*. Selections.

### MEETING SEVEN

#### The Ground War

- TBA

#### **MEETING EIGHT**

##### The Air War

- Seeyle, Katherine Q. 2004. "How to Sell a Candidate to a Porsche-Driving, Leno-Loving, Nascar Fan." *The New York Times* December 6.
- Peters, Jeremy, "For GOP Ads, CSI but Not Letterman." January 29, 2012.
- Feltus, William readings ("The Politics of Sports Fans," "Primetime 2010 Elections," "Cable News Ratings Trends," and "Cable News Bias")

#### **MEETING NINE**

##### Earned Media

- TBA

#### **MEETING TEN**

##### The Campaign on the Internet

- David Plouffe, *The Audacity to Win*. Selections.
- TBA

#### **MEETING ELEVEN**

##### Debates

- TBA

#### **MEETING TWELVE**

##### Primaries

- John Heilemann and Mark Halperin. 2010. *Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime*. Selections.
- Ridout, Travis N. and Jenny L. Holland. "Candidate Strategies in the Presidential Nomination Campaign." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.
- Bartels. 1988. *Presidential Primaries and the Dynamics of Public Choice*. Princeton University Press. Select Chapters
- Norrander, Barbara. 2009. "The Polls: Public Support for Presidential Nomination Reform." *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

#### **MEETING THIRTEEN**

##### Normative and Persuasive Effects of Campaigns

- Hillygus, Sunshine "Campaign Effects on Vote Choice." in Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior.
- Franz, Michael M., Paul B. Freedman, Kenneth M. Goldstein, and Travis N. Ridout. 2007. *Campaign Advertising and American Democracy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Selections.

#### **MEETING FOURTEEN**

##### Final Presentations