CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS
Syllabus

Professor Michael Signer, Esq., Ph.D.

This course will focus on the theory, science, and practice of modern presidential campaigns. Campaigns provide the connective tissue between those who are interested in serving in government, and the governance that actually happens. Through the course of a presidential campaign, voters, donors, parties, the media, and other candidates create a highly dynamic process where even the most keenly-constructive campaign plan is often thrown off course. The end result is the election of arguably the most powerful single person in the world—by a democratic (or mostly democratic) process. This course will teach students about the variables driving outcomes in modern presidential campaigns, while also giving them greater insight into the actual decision-making process that helps govern a campaign.

Over the course of eight weeks, students will read how political scientists have analyze the factors driving outcomes in modern American politics, from campaign finance to negative politics, public opinion to candidates’ behavior. These materials will be supplemented by several classic journalistic studies of campaigns, including books and documentary films.

Students will also be required to apply their insights to practice through assignments that walk through the strategic and tactical decisions of a modern presidential campaign, from message, fundraising, and media strategy, to primary and caucus states, to the general election.

Assignments will include a short paper evaluating one of the political science texts, a speech or op-ed about a candidate’s strategy, and a longer paper in the form of a strategy memorandum to a candidate. Class participation will also factor into the grade.

Students are expected to read the materials closely and to complete the assignments on time.

Course Requirements

This course has four requirements:

- Attend and participate in all seminars, and lead one discussion: 30% percent of grade.
- Op-ed or speech: 10% of grade
- Short paper (5-7 pp): 20% of grade.
- Final paper/memorandum (12-15 pp): 40% of grade.
Reading Assignments

Students will need to purchase the following books:

- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the ’72 Campaign Trail*.

All other materials will be available in a course reader.

Week 1: Introduction

*Tuesday, June 26th, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:


Week 2: The Nature of Modern Campaigns

*Tuesday, July 3rd, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:

** **ASSIGNMENT: 800 word op-ed for your hometown paper on public policy issue. ** **

  - Preface, Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3: pp. ix - 81

Week 3: Polling and Public Opinion

*Tuesday, July 10th, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:

- Chapter 5, “Modern Campaign Strategies,” in *Campaigns & Elections*, pp. 120-149.
Week 4: Message

Tuesday, July 17th, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:

- “Later in March,” in Hunter Thompson, Fear and Loathing on the ’72 Campaign Trail, pp. 103-118.

**ASSIGNMENT: 5-7 pp. SHORT PAPER DUE AT 5:00 PM ON FRIDAY, JULY 20th**

Week 5: Message (continued) and Campaign Finance

Tuesday, July 24th, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:


**EXTRA SATURDAY CLASS**: Saturday, July 28th, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.:

- Chapter 4 in Campaigns & Elections, pp. 82-119.

Week 6: The Role of the Economy in Campaigns

Tuesday, July 31st, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:


**EXTRA SATURDAY CLASS**: Saturday, August 4th, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.:

- In-Class Debate on the Economy: students will divide into teams with four members: Candidate, Campaign Manager, Debate Prep, and Issues. On Saturday, debates will occur on economic proposals between each team.
Week 7: Staying on the Offense

Tuesday, August 7th, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:

- Richard Ben Cramer, *What It Takes*, Chapters 61, (pp. 626-630), 71 (pp. 682-686), 72 (pp. 687-696), 73 (pp. 697-700).
- Chapter 13, “Positively Negative,” in *The Political Brain*, pp. 317-347.

Week 8: The Early States

Tuesday, August 14th, 6:30 – 9:30 p.m.:


**FINAL 12-15 PP PAPER DUE ON DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED**