This course examines the electoral process in contemporary American politics. This process is how we carry out arguably the most fundamental aspect of our democracy: allowing citizens to choose their representatives. This course will focus on what political science can tell us about electoral politics.

This course is also a writing-in-the-discipline seminar. It aims to help you write more effectively in the fields of American electoral politics and political science more generally. You will work toward this goal by doing a variety of writing assignments. Some will be “low-stakes” assignments that will not be graded but will facilitate your comprehension of course readings or elicit your thoughts and reactions to these readings. Other assignments, which will be graded, will require you to: (1) write a review essay that evaluates a scholar’s argument; (2) compose and present a policy memo that addresses a problem you perceive in the American electoral system; and (3) formulate and execute a substantial research paper. In consultation with me, you will choose your research topic early in the semester. The research paper will then be composed in stages, including a proposal and annotated bibliography, a rough draft and presentation, and a final draft. These assignments will also involve peer evaluations and other kinds of group activities.

The course has four learning objectives:

- You will improving your skills in selecting a topic, refining a research question, designing a research project, conceptualizing variables, gathering and evaluating evidence, constructing a persuasive argument, responding to potential counterarguments, outlining, developing writing strategies, writing, and revising.
- You will be able to understand and evaluate the basic rules and structure of the American electoral system.
- You will be able to analyze the strategic decisions of campaign actors, such as candidates and the media.
- You will be able to understand the decisions of voters, and how much those decisions are affected by campaigns.

**Blackboard.** The syllabus, assignments, readings, slides, and any other course documents will be posted on the Blackboard page for this course at [http://blackboard.gwu.edu](http://blackboard.gwu.edu).

**Required reading.** There are three books assigned for this course. They should be available at the GW Bookstore or via Amazon, Powells, or another on-line bookstore.

Other readings are available on Blackboard. You may also want to read my own blog, *The Monkey Cage*, which often deals with topics related to campaigns and elections.

**Class meetings.** Our time in class is short. I will always start on time. Please arrive on time. I will ascertain who is present at every class session. If you cannot consistently attend this class—because of a recurring conflict, because you are simply prone to missing classes, or whatever—you should not take this class.

Laptops, smart phones, and other electronic devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. You may not use them in class. If you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please see me.

Because this is a seminar, our class meetings will always revolve around contributions. You must be prepared by doing the reading, preparing material for class discussion, and anything else that is necessary.

For each class meeting, please bring the relevant readings with you so that we can refer to them.

**Course requirements.** Your grade will reflect your attendance and participation in class, as well as your performance on these assignments.

1. **Participation and attendance (15%).** You should do all the readings and be prepared to discuss them each week. You may be asked to submit discussion questions or other reactions to the readings before our class meetings. Absences, tardiness, and failure to complete these assignments will affect your grade.

2. **Review Essay (20%).** In 1,500 words (about five pages) you will provide a review of the article “Why Is There So Little Money in American Politics?” that is assigned for September 10. A completed rough draft of your review is due to me via email by **Saturday, September 14, at 5 pm.** I will then email you two of your classmates’ papers. You must bring written feedback on those papers to class on Sept. 17. The final draft is due via email on **Tuesday, September 24, at 5 pm.**

3. **Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (15%).** This 5-page proposal will outline your research question, research design, significance, and expected findings. It must include an annotated bibliography with one or two sentences explaining the argument and utility of at least 15 sources. It is due via email on **Saturday, October 19, at 5 pm.** I will send each person two of their classmates’ proposals to review. We will discuss these proposals in class on October 22. You must also with me to discuss your topic by **Oct. 11.**

4. **Policy memo and presentation (20%).** For each of the 4 class sessions from October 29 through November 19, three of you will write a policy memo outlining a proposed reform to some aspect of that week’s topic: presidential elections, congressional elections, voter turnout, and voter choice. Your memo will describe a problem having to do with that topic—for presidential elections, one possibility is the Electoral College—and make a policy recommendation to address that problem. Then, in class, the three of you will coordinate a presentation of your recommendations. Your grade on this assignment is split evenly between the memo (10%) and the presentation (10%).

5. **Research paper (30%).** This 25-page paper will be the culmination of the proposal you developed earlier. It will describe your question and its importance, offer explanations or hypotheses, present and evaluate evidence, and then draw out conclusions and implications. A rough draft will be due either November 19 or November 26. The week after it is due, a classmate will discuss your paper and then we will all weigh in. I will provide written comments on the draft separately. Your grade is a combination of the feedback you give as a discussant (5%) and your own final draft (25%). The final draft is due in my office on **Tuesday, December 10, by 4 pm.**
Course grades. Your grade in the course will be a weighted average of the requirements. I grade on the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range. Here are several important details of my policy on course grades:

- If you have questions about the grade you received on an assignment, I am happy to answer those questions and to suggest ways that you can do better.
- If you do not think that the grade you received reflects the quality of your work, you may ask for the assignment to be graded again. To do so, submit a formal appeal in writing, explaining why you think the grade you received is not a fair reflection of the quality of your work. The new grade, whether higher or lower, will then become your final grade on this assignment.
- If you do not complete an assignment, you will receive a 0 for the assignment.
- I will penalize late assignments one-half of a letter grade for each day the assignment is late. That is, if the assignment is due on Tuesday and you complete it on Wednesday, the highest grade you can make is a B+. If you complete it on Thursday, the highest grade you can make is a B-. And so forth.
- The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are (again) illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but only if you (1) communicate with me before the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. You must do both of these things in order to avoid penalties for a late assignment.
- There are no opportunities to re-do assignments or to do extra-credit work in this course.
- I do not “curve” grades. At the end of the semester, I will calculate your grade as described above and then round to the nearest whole number (e.g., an 86.5 becomes an 87). That grade becomes your final grade. I will not increase any person’s grade solely to change their letter grade. So if you make an 89.4, you will make a B+, not an A-.

Academic dishonesty. In the Code of Academic Integrity, the University defines academic dishonesty as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or extension on a test, quiz, or assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two different courses without the prior permission of faculty members. By accepting this syllabus and participating in the course, you have agreed to abide by this Code. Students who violate the Code are subject to disciplinary penalties, including failure on the assignment in question, failure in the course, and other penalties imposed by the University. For more information, see this from the Office of Academic Integrity. For guidance on citing sources, see this from the GW Library.

Medical needs, illnesses, and other emergencies. As noted above, if a medical need will result in your missing or completing assignments, please communicate with me. I am willing to be accommodating but communication and documentation is necessary.

Special needs. George Washington University provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. To determine if you qualify, contact the Disability Support Services at (202) 994-8250 (V/TDD). If they certify your needs, I will work with you to make arrangements.

Religious holy day observance. If an assignment or exam is due on a day when you are observing a religious holy day, I will work with you to find an acceptable alternative time to complete the assignment.
Course Topics

Aug. 27  Introduction

- Issenberg, Prologue and Chapter 1.

Sept. 3  The Rules of the American Electoral System

- **ASSIGNMENT**: Complete a “FIT Sheet” based on this week’s readings. You will find a FIT sheet template on Blackboard.
- *Campaigns and Elections*, chapter 2.
- Note that the *Campaigns and Elections* text was already being printed when the Supreme Court issued its ruling in Shelby County v. Holder. For more on that ruling, see [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/26/us/supreme-court-ruling.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/26/us/supreme-court-ruling.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

The following readings focus on redistricting in congressional elections.

- The conventional wisdom on redistricting:

- A scholarly view on whether redistricting makes House elections less competitive:

- A scholarly view of whether redistricting increases polarization (skim the linked paper):

- Did redistricting prevent the Democrats from taking back the House in 2012? There was a series of posts on this at my blog. Here is my best attempt to summarize them and state the relevant issues: [http://themonkeycage.org/blog/2012/12/12/navigating-debates-about-redistricting/](http://themonkeycage.org/blog/2012/12/12/navigating-debates-about-redistricting/). Click through the links if you are deeply interested in this and you will get a sense of the debate.

- A provocative argument:

Sept. 10  Campaign Finance

- **ASSIGNMENT**: Complete a “FIT Sheet” based on this week’s readings.
- *Campaigns and Elections*, Chapter 4.

Sept. 14  REVIEW ESSAY DRAFT DUE BY 5 PM VIA EMAIL. Late essays will not be accepted. I will email you two of your classmates’ essays to review by our class meeting on Sept. 17.
Sept. 17 The History of American Campaigns

- ASSIGNMENT. Bring written feedback (1-2 paragraphs) on each of the 2 classmates’ papers.
- *Campaigns and Elections*, Chapter 3.

Sept. 24 NO CLASS

- REVIEW ESSAY FINAL DRAFT DUE BY 5 PM VIA EMAIL.
- If you have not started, please begin formulating a research question for research paper and building your annotated bibliography.

Oct. 1 The Gender Gap in Political Ambition

- NOTE: I have been summoned to jury duty this day. This class will be led by Danny Hayes, a political science professor here at GW, and Jennifer Lawless, a political science professor at American.

- ASSIGNMENT: Complete a FIT sheet based on this week’s readings.

Oct. 8 Choosing a Message

- ASSIGNMENT: In *The Message Matters*, Vavreck distinguishes between the “clarifying” and “insurgent” candidates. In the 2012 presidential election, which one was Romney and which one was Obama? Write out a one-paragraph answer and defend it with economic statistics or polling data. What does Chapter 2 of *The Gamble* suggest?
- *Campaigns and Elections*, p.133-137.

Oct. 11 Deadline for discussing your research proposal with me. Do not wait until today!
Oct. 15   Targeting
- Issenberg. Chapters 2, 5, 6, 9.
- Eitan Hersh. 2013. Hacking the Electorate, Chapter 5.

Oct. 19   RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE BY 5 PM VIA EMAIL. Late proposals will not be accepted. I will email each of you two of your classmates’ essays to review by our class meeting on October 22.

Oct. 22   Research Proposals Workshop
- No readings assigned. We will discuss your research proposals in class.

Oct. 29   Presidential Elections
- Campaigns and Elections, Chapter 8.
- The Gamble, Chapters 3-6.

Nov. 5    Congressional Elections
- Campaigns and Elections, Chapter 9.

Nov. 12   Voter Turnout
- For background on the factors motivating turnout: Campaigns and Elections, Chapter 11.
- Issenberg. Chapters 3, 4, 7, 10, Epilogue.

Nov. 19   Voter Choice
- FULL DRAFTS OF PAPERS PRESENTED ON NOV. 26 DUE AT 5 PM VIA EMAIL.
- For background on the factors motivating voter choice: Campaigns and Elections, Chapter 12.
- The Gamble, Chapters 7-8.
- Issenberg. Chapter 8 (on the Rick Perry experiments).
Nov. 26  Presentation of research papers

- FULL DRAFTS OF PAPERS PRESENTED ON DEC. 3 DUE AT 5 PM VIA EMAIL.
- Introduction of each paper by discussant, response from author, and open discussion.

Dec. 3  Presentation of research papers

- Introduction of each paper by discussant, response from author, and open discussion.

Dec. 10  FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 4 PM. Please bring to my office (Monroe 469) or my mailbox (Monroe 440).