

POLS 3150-01  
American Presidential Elections  
Fall, 2016

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McGannon Hall, Room 135  
977-3036 (O); 963-0451 (H)

**STATEMENT ABOUT THE COURSE:** The subject of presidential elections is inherently exciting to any person interested in politics. I want to make this course as informative, interesting, and exciting as possible. You have the special advantage of taking this course during the height of the 2016 presidential campaign. How could the timing of this course be better? Consequently, we are going to follow and discuss the day to day progress of this campaign as it progresses.

You will be responsible for reading half of the chapters for the mid-term and the other half of the chapters for the final. I will cover much of the material in these chapters, but I am not going to bore you with tedious lectures, covering systematically practically all of the materials covered in these chapters by our authors, Nelson Polsby, Aaron Wildavsky, Steven Schier, and David Hopkins. I will definitely cover the highlights in these chapters and make certain what I expect from you for the mid-term and final, but I want to spend much of our time presenting and critiquing developments (breaking news) in the 2016 presidential election and placing them into historical perspective.

To do this, I will be emailing to you the most current articles, editorials, columns, blogs, polls, etc. that will provide insights into what is happening in this presidential campaign. Many times the articles will be only hours old. I will comment on most of these materials and we will discuss their significance in class. Obviously, some of the articles may offend your partisan beliefs since some will slam Republicans, while others will slam Democrats. Please understand that, although most of us are partisans, we should act as political science scholars in our search for understanding presidential campaign politics, not as sensitive, not-so-open-minded partisans. Frankly, this may not be so easy for many of you not very comfortable with having your partisan beliefs challenged and even shaken by, yes, I am going to say it, facts. What we will learn is that both Republicans and Democrats lie and distort in their campaign speeches, debates, and political ads, saying about anything to get elected. In fact, we will consult fact checkers from time to time to check the truthfulness of what Trump and Clinton will say during the course of their campaign. Presidential campaigns have been rather dirty since active campaigning for the presidency first began. The U.S. presidential election constitutes the most important electoral contest in the world because the President of the United States is the most powerful office holder in the world. Consequently, since the stakes are high, it is understandable that the presidential candidates play hardball to win.

## COURSE OUTLINE

- I. Introductory Comments: Understanding Presidential Elections**
  - A. American Presidential Elections Are Like No Other!
  - B. Clinton v Trump: A very unique presidential election indeed!
  - C. What Internet sites are the best for insights into presidential elections?
  - D. Why poll data are so important to understand through careful scrutiny

- E. We are a product of “the funnel of causality” (chill out and abandon your partisan blinders and think like a political scientist while still retaining your partisanship – it can be done)
- F. Let’s look at the early odds: Nate Silver’s 538 --  
<http://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-election-forecast/>
- G. Spending serious time trying to figure out the Trump candidacy because his candidacy is really like no candidacy in the past, leaving journalists, political analysts, and political scientists baffled
- H. What does the rather strong Trump support say about the American electorate?

## **II. Presidential Elections: An Historical Overview**

- A. Introduction: the situation today in historical perspective
- B. Creation of the Electoral College
- C. Why third party candidates cannot win (e.g., Gary Johnson (L) and Jill Stein (G))
- D. A look back to all presidential elections
- E. Early presidential elections to 1824
- F. Presidential elections from 1828
- G. Electoral College Politics and the Vote
- H. Presidential election types: classic descriptions of types of presidential elections allowing us to better understand presidential election cycles
- I. Summary

## **III. The American Electorate: An Analysis of Voters and Non-Voters**

- A. Typical turnout rates
- B. Why people vote or do not vote
- C. Partisanship: how it affects party loyalty, political attitudes, and voting behavior
- D. Are voters stupid or ignorant about politics and American democracy?
- E. Is ignorance about politics dangerous? Some electoral behavior scholars think so.
- F. Summary

## **IV. Presidential Elections and Interest Group Politics**

- A. Interest groups and their support for our political parties and presidential candidates
- B. What are special interests and are they a threat to our democratic processes (e.g., presidential elections)
- C. How do they affect campaign spending and election outcomes?
- D. Are third party candidates excluded in part by special interests/interest group politics?
- E. Third party politics and the politics of futility
- F. Summary

## **V. Presidential Campaigns, Rules, and Resources**

- A. Playing the Electoral College game: trying to win 270 electoral votes
- B. The role of money in presidential campaigns: can presidential candidates with more money simply “buy” the election victory?
- C. What is *Citizens United* and why all the fuss?

- D. Information as a resource: controlling the information
- E. Incumbency as an advantage and disadvantage
- F. Summary

## **VI. Presidential Campaigns: From the Early Stages to Capturing the Nomination**

- A. Deciding whether or not to run for president: why do people decide to run and what factors do they consider before tossing their hat into the ring?
- B. What are primaries? What strategies are employed to win a primary?
- C. Why is the New Hampshire primary considered so important to win?
- D. What are caucuses? What strategies are employed to win a caucus?
- E. Why is the Iowa Caucus considered so important to win?
- F. Looking back on the role primaries and caucuses have played in the presidential nomination process
- G. Bernie Sanders complained this year that Hillary Clinton unfairly had rigged the nomination process because she had secured so many superdelegates. What are superdelegates and their significance in winning the nomination?
- H. Summary

## **VII. National Nomination Conventions**

- A. What role have they played historically in nominating their party's presidential nominee?
- B. What role do national nominating conventions play today?
- C. National Nominations as "non-newsworthy," sheer propaganda
- D. The meaning of party platforms and planks: ideally and realistically
- E. The declining role of the status of nominating conventions and their likely future as important presidential elections events
- F. Summary

## **VIII. The General Campaign**

- A. Developing a campaign plan and sticking to it
- B. Building your organization
- C. Who are your key players in a presidential campaign organization?
- D. Building a campaign war chest: having a lot of money is key to winning, but money is more important in winning the nomination than general election only in the sense that both party nominees normally have enough money to compete
- E. Appealing to voters on the basis of issues, but how much to issue stands really matter? What are the true determinants of vote choice?
- F. Trying to control the media to get good press and a lot of press coverage
- G. The importance of polling, focus groups, advertising, the Internet, and social media play in modern presidential campaigns
- H. How affective are political ads in changing a voter's mind on who to vote for?
- I. GOTV drives: their importance and effectiveness
- J. Campaign blunders and their impact; Trump has caused political scientists to reassess what is means to "blunder"
- K. Summary

**IX. Explaining Various Presidential Election Forecasting Models**

- A. Introducing various forecasting models
- B. Looking at their success
- C. Explaining and critiquing forecasting models, especially stressing the assumptions of each
- D. Why I think that Nate Silver's poll-based forecasting model is probably the best kind of model to use to predict presidential election results
- E. What we can learn from studying forecasting models
- F. Following forecasting models during this presidential election
- G. Summary

**X. The Impact Presidential Elections Have On American Democracy, Public Policies, the American People, and the Future Well Being of America**

- A. Election outcomes do make a difference, but how much of a difference given our checks and balances system, especially in an era of polarized, party politics?
- B. Don't forget the purpose of a presidential election/. It is to choose a leader who will lead America for at least the next four years on the domestic and foreign fronts. What sort of public policy differences would you expect to see from electing a Democrat (Clinton) or a Republican (Trump) to the presidency? How much would it matter to the immediate and long range future of America?
- C. Summary

**XI. Assessing American Presidential Elections and Suggestions for Reform**

- A. Open discussion: what is wrong with the present presidential election process?
- B. What reforms would correct these shortcomings in the presidential election process?
- C. Specifically, would you recommend reforms for the nomination process, the national party nominating conventions, the Electoral College, the way presidential candidates are financed, media coverage, political advertising, voter targeting strategies, the role interest groups play in the campaigns, registration and voting practices by election boards from state to state, and the like
- D. All things considered, how democratic and fair are American presidential elections today?
- E. Summary

**Required Readings**

Nelson Polsby, Aron Wildavsky, Steven Schier, and David Hopkins, *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2015). ISBN -13: 978-1442253674

Handouts and online articles "hot off the press"

**Attendance Policy:** Students are expected to attend class regularly since lectures are an important source of information, especially since topics discussed in lectures are frequently not

covered in the book or in the hand-outs. This is because I will be lecturing on breaking news regarding the 2012 presidential campaign and political news in general that cannot be covered in previously published materials. I want to frequently comment on what is happening in the presidential campaign as it develops, putting the breaking events into an historical perspective.

**Students cannot miss more than six classes during the course of the semester and get credit for this course.** Understand that we are meeting only two times each week, so missing six classes constitutes missing a total of three weeks of classes or about 20% of the course. Excused absences (e.g., illness, death in the family) are exempt.

### **Grading Policy**

Mid-Term	180 points
Final	180 points
Editorial	<u>40 points</u>
Total	400 points

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The numerical equivalents of letter grades are:

94-100 = A	91-93 = A-	88-90 = B+	82-87 = B	80-81 = B-
77-79 = C+	73-76 = C	70-72 = C-	65-69 = D	Below 65 = F

### **Course Learning Objectives and Assessment of Student Learning**

The purpose of this course is twofold: (1) to teach students comprehensively about the presidential election process from an historical and modern perspective; and (2) to make students think critically about American presidential elections in the context of political science research on the subject. Students will be assessed on their general knowledge about various aspects of presidential elections as taught in this class through a midterm and final exam and in-class discussions, as well as in their ability to apply what they have learned in this class about presidential elections to critique the strengths and weaknesses of the presidential election process.

### **COURSE EVALUATION**

**During the last day of the semester, students will complete a confidential course evaluation in class rather than an on-line evaluation. This is because too many students fail to complete online course evaluations, reducing the value of the course evaluation.**

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**Student Success Center Syllabus Statement:**

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center assists students with academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students can visit [www.slu.edu/success](http://www.slu.edu/success) to learn more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning).

**Disability Services Academic Accommodations Syllabus Statement**

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations **must** contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Once successfully registered, the student also **must** notify the course instructor that they wish to access accommodations in the course.

Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at [Disability\\_services@slu.edu](mailto:Disability_services@slu.edu) or [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484) to schedule an appointment.

Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about the student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

Note: Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one are encouraged to contact to Disability Services.

**Title IX Syllabus Statement**

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty

member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; [akratky@slu.edu](mailto:akratky@slu.edu); [314-977-3886](tel:314-977-3886)) and share the basic facts of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web addresses:

<http://www.slu.edu/general-counsel-home/office-of-institutional-equity-and-diversity/sexual-misconduct-policy>

[www.slu.edu/here4you](http://www.slu.edu/here4you) .

### **Academic Integrity Syllabus Statement**

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors.* The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at: [http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic\\_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf](http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf).

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.



## **Students with Special Needs - Disability Services**

*Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course - as outlined in the syllabus - due to presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action. Please telephone the office at 314-977-8885, or visit DuBourg Hall Room 36. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.*

## **Americans With Disabilities Act**

All provisions are honored by this instructor.

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## **COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY**

### **Academic Integrity and Honesty**

*The University is a community of learning, whose effectiveness requires an environment of mutual trust and integrity. Academic integrity is violated by any dishonesty such as soliciting, receiving, or providing any unauthorized assistance in the completion of work submitted toward academic credit. While not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, examples include copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed book exam, submitting materials authored by or revised by another person as the student's own work, copying a passage or text directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, and colluding with another student or students to engage in academic dishonesty.*

*Any clear violation of academic integrity will be met with appropriate sanctions. Possible sanctions for violation of academic integrity may include, but are not limited to, assignment of a failing grade in a course, disciplinary probation, suspension, and dismissal from the University. Students should review the College of Arts and Sciences policy on Academic Honesty, which can be accessed on-line at <http://www.slu.edu/colleges/AS/> under "Quicklinks for Students" or in hard copy form in the Arts and Sciences Policy Binder in each departmental or College office.*