

POLS 417: Voting and Elections

**Washington State University, Fall 2014
MWF, 10:10-11 a.m., Todd 413**

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Introduction

In a democracy, elections serve as the vital link between the people and those who govern them. During a campaign, candidates are forced to defend their performance in office and proposals for the future. And voters pass judgment on the performance of office-holders—and on how much they like their ideas for the future.

In this course, we will study voters and candidates and the two processes that link them: campaigns and elections. This is a course in which we will examine a variety of scholarly research about the behavior of voters and candidates. It is not a course in political management (i.e., how to run a campaign). That said, I will bring many examples of contemporary electoral politics into the classroom—enough to satisfy most political junkies. This course will focus on elections in the United States, though I will provide examples from other countries. Moreover, we will spend some time learning about electoral systems used around the world.

Readings

There are three books available for purchase or rent:

Sides, John, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossman and Keena Lipsitz. 2013. *Campaigns & Elections: Rules, Reality, Strategy, Choice: 2012 Election Update Edition*. W.W. Norton.

Asher, Herbert. 2010. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. 8th edition. CQ Press.

Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*. Crown.

Grading

There are 1000 points available for this course. Your final grade in this course will depend on your success in four areas:

Midterm Examination (300 points): This in-class exam will consist of three sections: the definition of key terms, short answers and short essays. You will take it over two days.

Final Examination (300 points): This exam will be similar in format to the midterm.

Short Assignments (150 points—50 points each). You will complete 3 of the following 4 assignments. Each should be about 3 pages long (double spaced).

1. Visit the website opensecrets.org. Look up the political donors from your hometown's zip code (or Pullman, if you prefer) for the 2012 and 2014 election cycles. Which types of recipients (i.e., candidates, parties, outside groups) and which specific recipients received the most money? Which received the least? Were Democrats or Republicans the primary beneficiaries of money from your hometown? Were any of the recipients from out of state? Why do you think the donor gave to an out-of-state candidate? Did any other donations strike you as unusual? Why? What's your best explanation for why the persons made the particular donations? Can you draw any conclusions about the political leanings of your hometown on the basis of examining such information? DUE SEPTEMBER 22.

2. Find a recent newspaper article that describes the result of an election poll. Describe the poll's findings. What information does the article provide about the procedures used to administer the poll? What interpretation of the results did the article provide? Do you agree with the interpretation? Why or why not? Discuss at least five potential threats to the validity or accuracy of poll. What else would you like to know about the poll or its procedures in order to be able to better evaluate it? (Please attach a copy of the article to your assignment.) DUE OCTOBER 27.

3. Investigate a current initiative or referendum campaign in Washington or another state. Whose idea was the particular initiative you're investigating? What is the sponsor's stated rationale for the ballot proposition? Do you believe this rationale, or is there more to the story? Which groups, if any, are supporting the proposition? Which groups, if any, are opposing the proposition? What do you know about these groups? Has any polling been taken on the proposition? What were the findings? Given what you have learned about this initiative campaign, would you vote yes or no? Why? More broadly, what is your position on the initiative as a form of democracy? Why? DUE NOVEMBER 14.

4. Talk a walk around your neighborhood or around campus, taking special note of yard signs and bumper stickers on parked vehicles. Copy down what at least 10 of them say. Are you able to find a political meaning in each message, or are some completely non-political? (Think hard about how a bumper sticker saying, for instance, "Visit Glacier National Park" might be political.) Why do you think people displayed the particular bumper stickers or signs? Do you believe they work? Why? What broader conclusions, if any, can you draw about the political thinking of people living in your neighborhood? DUE NOVEMBER 21

Reading Response Papers (100 points—50 points each). You will submit two response papers, one for the book *The Victory Lab* and one for the book *Polling and the Public*. Each reading response should be 2-3 pages double spaced. A good reading response will provide only

a small amount of summary. Instead, you might raise questions provoked by the reading, critique the author's methods or link the reading with other readings we have done this semester. Each response will be due before we discuss the relevant portion of the book. DUE September 24, 10:10 a.m. and DUE October 17, 10:10 a.m.

Group Presentation (150 points): You and three or four classmates will work as a group to study the electoral system of a country other than the United States. You will present what you learned in the form of a 10-minute-long presentation during the last week of class. Your group may choose to use presentation software, such as PowerPoint. Your presentation should discuss:

- When the country adopted its current electoral system and why it was chosen
- The workings of the electoral system (e.g., is it first-past-the-post single-member district? How does that system translate votes into seats?)
- The pros and cons of the electoral system as used in the country
- Your overall evaluation of the country's electoral system
- Any advice you have for reforming the electoral system in the country

During your presentation, be sure to make reference to and summarize at least three books or scholarly articles that discuss your country's electoral system.

Some other "rules" of this assignment:

- You will sign up during class on September 22 for the country that you would like to study. I will provide you with about 10 different options. Once all of the slots for a particular country are taken, you must choose a different country.
- Each member of the team must speak during the presentation.
- You must provide me with a hard copy of your presentation.
- I will be asking you to evaluate the performance of the other groups.

I will grade your assignment using several criteria, including the extent to which your presentation:

1. Identifies, summarizes, and defines the issue or problem at hand
2. Clearly states purposes, objectives, or hypotheses.
3. Presents observations and results in a complete, logical and clear fashion.
4. Assesses, discusses, and reconciles the supporting data/evidence acquired from the exercise in relation to the existing literature.
5. Identifies conclusions, implications and consequences.
6. Effectively organizes and articulates information to promote understanding and communicate significance of the issue or problem.

GRADING SCALE:

930-1000	A
900-929	A-
870-899	B+
830-869	B

800-829	B-
770-799	C+
730-769	C
700-729	C-
670-699	D+
600-669	D
0-599	F

EXTRA CREDIT—I generally do not provide opportunities for extra credit, but if a special event arises (e.g., a professor needs participants for an experiment or a political strategist comes to give a talk on campus), I may offer an extra credit opportunity.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Student Learning Outcomes At the end of this course, students should be able to:	Course Topics/Dates The following topic(s)/date(s) will address this outcome:	Evaluation of Outcome: This outcome will be evaluated primarily by:
Explain and evaluate the electoral system and process in the United States	The electoral system and process	Midterm examination
Develop oral presentation skills	Throughout course	Group presentation
Evaluate and critique various electoral practices and systems	Elections in Comparative Perspective, Assessing Campaigns and Reforms	Group presentation, Final examination
Analyze strategic choices made by political campaigns	Campaign Strategy	Short assignments, Midterm examination
Analyze and critique polling results	Polling	Short assignment, Final examination
Evaluate research using scientific methods	Campaign Strategy, The Victory Lab and throughout course	Midterm examination, Short assignment, Reading response

Other information

ATTENDANCE. Your attendance in class does not factor directly into your grade. That said, students who attend class regularly typically do much better on exams and assignments than students who do not.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES. The use of cell phones, smart phones, or other mobile communication devices is disruptive, and is therefore **prohibited** during class. All such devices must be turned off. Those using such devices must leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.

USE OF LAPTOPS/TABLETS. Students are permitted to use laptops/tablets during class for note-taking only. Those using such devices during class for other purposes must leave the

classroom for the remainder of the class period. I reserve the right to ban the use of laptops/tablets entirely if the use of such devices interferes with the learning environment.

MAKE-UP EXAMS. I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. Students who will miss an exam due to membership in an official university group must notify me at least FIVE days in advance, and I will have you take the exam before you leave town.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Assignments must be at my office by 5 p.m. on the due date or they will be considered late. In the case of the reading responses, I must receive them by 10:10 a.m. at the start of class. For each day an assignment is late, including weekends, I will subtract 10 percent of the assignment's total point value from your score. I prefer to receive hard copies of assignments in my office, but if you are turning in a late assignment, please also email me an electronic copy so I know exactly when it was submitted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. Academic integrity will be strongly enforced in this course. Any student caught cheating on any assignment will **FAIL THE COURSE** and will be reported to the Office Student Standards and Accountability. Cheating is defined in the Standards for Student Conduct WAC 504-26-010 (3). It is strongly suggested that you read and understand these definitions.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION. Students with Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center. For more information contact a Disability Specialist: 509-335-3417, <http://accesscenter.wsu.edu>, Access.Center@wsu.edu.

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PLAN. Washington State University is committed to enhancing the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and visitors. It is highly recommended that you review the Campus Safety Plan (<http://safetyplan.wsu.edu/>) and visit the Office of Emergency Management web site (<http://oem.wsu.edu/>) for a comprehensive listing of university policies, procedures, statistics, and information related to campus safety, emergency management, and the health and welfare of the campus community.

Course Outline

Introduction (Aug 25)

Sides 1

NO CLASS AUGUST 29 OR SEPTEMBER 1

The Electoral Process and Context (Aug 27, Sept 3, 5)

Sides 2

History of Campaigns (Sept 8, 10)
Sides 3

Campaign Finance (Sept 12, 15, 17)
Sides 4

Campaign Strategy (Sept 19, 22)
Sides 5

IN-CLASS SIGN-UP FOR GROUP PRESENTATION (Sept 22)

Campaign Strategy: The Victory Lab (Sept 24, 26, 29)
Issenberg (all)

RESPONSE PAPER DUE SEPTEMBER 24, 10:10 a.m.

Parties and Interest Groups (Oct 1, 3)
Sides 6

MIDTERM REVIEW (Oct 6)

MIDTERM EXAM (Oct 8, 10)

Media and Elections (Oct 13, 15)
Sides 7

Polling (Oct 17, 20, 22)
Asher (all)

RESPONSE PAPER DUE OCTOBER 17, 10:10 a.m.

Presidential Campaigns (Oct 24, 27)
Sides 8

Congressional Campaigns (Oct 29, 31)
Sides 9

State and Local Elections (Nov 3, 5)
Sides 10

Initiatives and Referenda (Nov 7, 10)

Voter Participation (Nov 12, 14)
Sides 11

Voter Choice (Nov 17, 19)
Sides 12

Elections in Comparative Perspective (Nov 21, Dec 1)

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 24, 26, 28

IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS (Dec 3, 5, 8)

Assessing Campaigns (Dec 10)
Sides 13

FINAL EXAMINATION REVIEW (Dec 12)

FINAL EXAM (Wednesday, December 17, 8-10 a.m.)