Campaigns and Elections
GOVT 232
Fall 2012
Fisk 314
Monday and Wednesday
2:40-4 p.m.

Professor Logan Dancey
Office: PAC 102
Office hours: Tuesday, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and by appointment
Office phone: 860-685-3416
E-mail: ldancey@wesleyan.edu (please include GOVT 232 in the subject line)

Course Overview

With the 2012 elections as our backdrop, this course will examine the style and structure of American campaigns. We will consider longstanding debates and current controversies in the academic study of elections, including if campaigns “matter” and the extent to which voters make informed, “rational” decisions. We will analyze the key players in federal elections—voters, candidates, parties, interest groups, and the press—and the ways these groups interact to influence the outcome and meaning of elections in the United States.

Although the class is first and foremost an introduction to the academic study of elections, we will use the 2012 presidential and congressional races as an opportunity to examine what political science research can tell us about contemporary campaigns. Each student in the class will closely follow one of the most competitive Senate races and analyze the race both from the perspective of a campaign strategist and an academic analyst. The goal is to translate what we learn in the classroom into knowledge that can be used to better understand contemporary political campaigns.

Note: Although we will discuss and analyze the 2012 election, this is not a course on the 2012 election in particular or campaign strategy. Instead, it is an introduction to the academic study of campaigns and elections.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course you will be better able to:

1. Understand the academic approach to studying elections
2. Evaluate the extent to which contemporary elections live up to democratic ideals
3. Assess the ways in which campaigns do (and don’t) affect voter decisionmaking
4. Conduct independent research on congressional elections
Course Structure

This course will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to finish the required readings for each class session and come ready to engage in a critical discussion of the arguments and evidence presented in the readings.

Required Books


Course Website

You can access the course website through moodle.wesleyan.edu. Please check the course website regularly (i.e. at least twice a week).

Assignments

Campaign Strategy Memo (15%): Each member of the class will track a Senate race throughout the semester (with 2 to 3 people per Senate race). On Oct. 3 you will submit a 5-page campaign strategy memo for one of the two candidates in your Senate race. The memo should offer a strategy for the final month of the campaign based on research you have done on the candidates and state as well as information gleaned from class readings. More information will be provided at least two weeks before the assignment is due.

Group Campaign Ad Presentation (10%): Class on Oct. 29 will be dedicated to in-class presentations by groups of roughly four on the content of 2012 presidential ads. Groups will code ads for specific content described in John Geer's *In Defense of Negativity*. We will then compare 2012 ads to the elections Geer chronicles in his book. More information will be provided Oct. 17. Please note that attendance in class on Oct. 29 is mandatory, and failure to attend class that day will result in a failing grade for this assignment.

Exam #1 (20%): The first exam in this course will be Oct. 10, and it will cover the readings through Oct. 3. The exam will be closed-note, closed-book and consist of short identification and essay questions.

Exam #2 (20%): The second exam for this course will be Wednesday, Dec. 5. It will only cover the second half of the course (post-midterm). The exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of short identification and essay questions.
Final paper (25%): Your final paper will be a 12-15 page academic assessment of the Senate election you followed. The paper will focus on both why the election turned out the way it did and the extent to which the results support or refute existing political science research and/or journalistic interpretations of the election outcome. It is due by 2 p.m. on Saturday, December 15. More information will be provided in a separate handout.

Participation (10%): Your participation grade will be based on two factors. The first half of your participation grade (5 points) will be based on attendance and participation in class. I will take attendance beginning Sept. 17. One unexcused absence will not affect your participation grade. A second unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1 out of 5 participation points. You will lose two additional participation points for a third unexcused absence. If you have four or more unexcused absences you will lose all 5 points. You can also lose participation points for disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping or texting) or failing to participate in class. I do not expect every person to have something to say every day, but semi-regular participation that indicates engagement with the course material is expected.

The second half of your participation grade (5 points) will be based on attendance at the Wesleyan Media Project’s post-election conference, which is scheduled to take place Friday, Nov. 30. There will be multiple panels spread out over the course of the day, and you will need to attend at least one. For those who are unable to attend due to their class schedule or another legitimate reason (e.g., athletic competition), I will create a short assignment that can be completed as a replacement for conference attendance.

Key Dates
Oct. 3: Campaign Strategy Memo Due
Oct. 10: First Exam
Oct. 29: Group Campaign Ad Presentation
Nov. 30: Wesleyan election conference
Dec. 5: Second Exam
Dec. 15: Final Paper Due

Late Assignments
Late papers will lose one letter grade for each day that they are late (e.g., a B+ becomes a C+ if it is one day late). An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted after the start of class the day it is due. The assignment becomes two days late the following day. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted. Exams must be taken during the time scheduled. Makeup exams will only be granted in rare cases (e.g., a documented medical emergency).

Contacting the Instructor
I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Dancey in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your papers are best dealt with in office hours where we can have a more productive
conversation than over e-mail. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

**Contested Grades**

If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible [during the 2nd week of the semester], so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/index.html.

**Technology in the Classroom**

You may use laptops or tablets in class for note taking purposes only. Refrain from using these devices for Facebook, instant messenger, e-mail checking, or anything else that may distract you, your fellow students, or me. It is obvious when someone is using his or her laptop for non-class related activities, and I reserve the right to discontinue the use of laptops (unless you contact me about an exception) if they become a distraction. Texting is not permitted during class.

**Academic Integrity**

I take plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct seriously. Please see this helpful website: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html

Suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Board. I expect students to follow the Wesleyan honor code, which can be found here: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/honorboard/honorc
**Course Schedule:**

Readings noted with an asterisk (*) are from assigned books. The rest of the material can be found on Moodle or by going to the url listed next to the reading.

**LOGISTICS**

Sept. 3

- Meet and greet

**PERSPECTIVES ON CAMPAIGNS**

Sept. 5


**CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS**

Sept. 10: Overview


Sept. 12: Challengers and Competition


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1 I reserve the right to make modifications to the course schedule during the semester. If I make changes I will both announce them in class and on the website.
Sept. 17: Funding a Campaign

- *Jacobson, pp. 64-95.


Sept. 19 Voting in Congressional Elections

- *Jacobson, chapter 5.


PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

Primaries

Sept. 24: Primaries and the Parties, I

- *Cohen et al., The Party Decides, pp. 1-36 and chapter 6 (no need to read the appendix to chapter 6).


Sept. 26: Primaries and the Parties, II

- *The Party Decides, chapters 7 & 9

General Election Strategy

Oct. 1: Electoral College Strategies, I

- *Shaw, Daron. Race to 270, chapters 1 & 2.

Oct. 3: Electoral College Strategies, II (Campaign Strategy Memo Due)

- *Shaw, Daron. Race to 270, chapters 3 & 5 (also take a look at Tables 4.1-4.3 and Figures 4.2a-4.2d in chapter 4).

Oct. 8: Financing the 2012 Race/Exam review


Oct. 10: midterm exam

Oct. 15: No Class—Fall Break

**CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING**

Oct. 17: Negative Ads, I


Oct. 22: Negative Ads, II


Oct. 24: The Press as a Filter


Oct. 29: In-class Group Presentations

- Campaign ad presentations

Oct. 31: The Press as a Persuader?


THE ELECTORATE

Nov. 5: Voting in Presidential Elections


Nov. 7: Election Recap

• We’ll talk about the election results. Be prepared to talk about the outcome of the Senate race you are following.

Nov. 12: Voter Competence


Nov. 14: Race


WHAT ELECTIONS “MEAN”

Nov. 19: Mandates


Nov. 21 (No class—Thanksgiving Break)
Nov. 26: National Politics and Congressional Elections

- *Jacobson, Chapter 6.
- Reading on 2012 election TBD

Nov. 28: Polarization and Electoral Accountability

- *Jacobson, pp. 257-86.

*Friday, Nov. 30: Wesleyan election conference! More details to come.*

Dec. 3: Post-Conference Discussion/Exam review

- Discussion of papers/presentations at Wesleyan election conference

Dec. 5: Exam #2

Saturday, Dec. 15: Final papers due by 2 p.m.
Here is a list of resources that are particularly useful for tracking developments in contemporary campaigns:

**Center for Responsive Politics** (Great for campaign finance data): [http://www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)

**CQ Weekly** (You will need to access this site on campus or through the library website. It is a potentially valuable source for House and Senate races): [http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/](http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/)

**CQ Press Voting and Elections Collection** (Good for statistics on previous races. You will need to access this site on campus or through the library website): [http://library.cqpress.com/elections/](http://library.cqpress.com/elections/)

**National Journal** (You will need to access this resource on campus or through the library website. Charlie Cook’s columns may be especially useful). [http://www.nationaljournal.com](http://www.nationaljournal.com)

**LexisNexis Academic** (You will need to access this resource on campus or through the library website. It is a good resource to find local news coverage of your races). [http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/inacademic/?](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/inacademic/)

**Electoral College Sites:** See [http://www.270towin.com](http://www.270towin.com) and [http://fivethirtyeight.blog.nytimes.com](http://fivethirtyeight.blog.nytimes.com).

**Real Clear Politics** (A good source for the latest polling information and news stories): [http://www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com)

**Almanac of American Politics** (The 2012 edition should be available in the reference section of the library. It is a good resource for background on the politics of specific states and biographies of incumbents and existing officeholders).

There are also the major national news sources, such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Although these newspapers are likely to have some coverage of your Senate races, the sources with the most consistent news coverage will be local newspapers. You can find those through LexisNexis or another search feature like Google News. It might be worth setting up an RSS feed for news on your race. It is also worth keeping an eye on the candidates' websites for press releases, links to news stories, and the debut of new ads.