

# PLSC 382A - U.S. Campaigns & Activism

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Instructor: Tyler W. Clarke

Class Meeting: Online Asynchronous

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:00-2:00pm, and [by appt.](#)

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## Seminar Description

A unique perspective on campaigns centered on the decision-making of paid political operatives who are the bridge between American voters/volunteers and candidates/politicians. Students will assume the role of a senior campaign operative and make decisions and react to events in this “choose-your-adventure” style course. The decisions and scenarios will be rooted in the real experiences and decisions campaign operatives face including: What candidates/organizations to work for? How to deal with unexpected events or candidate gaffes? How to manage a campaign’s resources? And more!

## Learning Objectives

Students who pass this course will fulfill the requirement for a Social Science General Education course (N Gen Ed). Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to describe major concepts in the study of elections and campaigns and theories of mobilization and political participation in the discipline of Political Science. The primary learning objectives of the course are; first, to provide a clear understanding of the processes and structures of the American political system; second, to improve analytic and argumentative skills that may be used to understand and explain political and social phenomena like elections and campaigns; and third, explore scholarly work in political science and other disciplines that seeks to understand electoral and campaign processes and the outcomes they produce.

## Statement on the use of AI

I encourage the use of technology, including generative AI tools, to contribute to your understanding of course materials. However, this is a writing intensive class and it is important for assessing student learning that students' written work be their own. Ultimately students will be accountable for the work that they submit. While I do not recommend use of generative AI (or such tools) for work in this class I do request that if students use AI for **any** portion of **any** submitted assignment they adhere to the following procedure:

- Students will disclose uses of AI clearly in the text of assignments.
- Disclosures will also include a link to the prompt(s) used to generate AI responses. Be sure you know how to document your use of a tool before using it.

## Additional Course Policies:

- **Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD):** At Binghamton University, all faculty and instructors have the legal and ethical responsibility to ensure the provision of accommodations that afford enrolled students with disabilities equal access to, and participation in, all institutional programs and activities. Students requesting disability-related accommodation should register with the Services for Students with Disabilities office (SSD). These accommodations can be submitted through Services for Students with Disabilities office (SSD) at any point throughout the semester. Their office is in the University Union, room 119, and can be reached via their office phone number, (607) - 777-2686, or through their email [ssd@binghamton.edu](mailto:ssd@binghamton.edu). Students are responsible for contacting their instructors to discuss the implementation of their accommodation. As accommodations can be sensitive, students are encouraged to schedule a meeting with the instructor outside of office hours. If students do not contact the instructor about accommodations, it is assumed that they have chosen not to use them now.
- **Grade Appeals:** All grade appeals must be submitted in writing during class or office hours. All appeals must include an explanation

for the grade appeal, including your concerns and the original graded assignment.

## Required Texts

- Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber. Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout. Brookings Institution Press, 2019. [Available Online Through University Library Here](#)
- Additional Handouts/Readings on Brightspace

I also reserve the right to assign additional readings from new sources should the need arise.

## On reading, or How to Read

Reading academic stuff is a bit different from most other reading. It's important to think about what you're trying to accomplish. With journal articles, the goal has to be to understand the novel claim the paper makes, to understand why that novel claim is interesting or novel (at least according to the author), to understand how the author assesses the evidence, and to understand what that evidence tells us. Most importantly, you should have two answers to each of these - what the author says, and what you think. The author may tell you the argument is important for some reason, and you might disagree - you might think it's unimportant, or important for a different reason, or wrong, or whatever.

## On Writing

It would be dishonest to say there is not a good deal of variation in what one instructor or another defines as "good" writing; to that end I will do my best to spell out my expectations explicitly. First and foremost, I cannot emphasize enough how much I prize clarity and conciseness in writing submissions. An audience's attention is hard to obtain and easy to lose and I am no exception. Often I suggest to students when writing or presenting they ask "What is the minimum number of words I need to communicate my message?" And

this class will follow suit. Obviously I recognize that at times an author must sacrifice some degree of brevity in exchange for an appropriately thorough treatment of the subject but students should not treat this admission as a license to expound needlessly.

Moving toward more specific details I expect all assignments typed, in 12pt Times New Roman or Arial font, and double spaced with numbered pages. All submissions should have the students' name clearly indicated on the first page as well as any relevant assignment information and a date. Beyond these I request students omit unnecessary stylistic elements such as cover pages and the like, although whimsical titles are within bounds if you are so inclined. This is not a class in English spelling or grammar but proper execution of these elements serves to bolster the persuasiveness of your writing as well as its clarity therefore do your best to avoid such mistakes. As far as citation styles go I am agnostic, Political Science tends to employ Chicago style or APSA (a variant of Chicago) but as long as the student is consistent and clear I will be satisfied. On the topic of citation, it is absolutely fundamental that students cite those authors who served as direct or indirect inspiration for their ideas both in the text of their assignments as well as at the end in a bibliography or works cited list. Finally, when writing for this class it should be ever present in the student's mind that the goal of our class is analysis, not summary. In almost all cases I am well aware of what was said in such and such book/text/article and the space you are devoting to telling me what I already know could be devoted instead to telling me what I don't know i.e. your take on the content. While I do believe the guidelines offered in this section are quite expansive I do not consider them exhaustive and so any omissions need not be interpreted as especially meaningful.

## Course Requirements

Each week in the course will correspond to a month in the students' chosen campaign. Students will have a scenario or task to complete that mirrors the real decisions political operatives make in real campaigns around the country. Along with each week's task/decision there will be assigned readings that the student will use to inform their decision making as "campaign operatives". Each week's task will constitute an equal portion of students' final grade i.e. 20%.

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

94 – 100 = A

90 – 93 = A–

87 – 89 = B+

83 – 86 = B

80 – 82 = B–

77 – 79 = C+

73 – 76 = C

70 – 72 = C–

60 – 69 = D

< 60 = F

## Course Schedule

### **Week 1, July 8th-12th - Introduction to the World of Political Organizations**

Summary: Students will be introduced to the basic types of campaign organizations: Candidate, Issue, and Party and the various forms they take legally: 527, Super PAC, 501c4; then they will choose one to "work for" for the remainder of the semester.

Read: Meyer, Alix. "Privatizing or Renewing Politics? Para-Partisan Groups in the United States." In HAL, 123–135. 1st ed. Routledge, 2020.

Read: Excerpt from Campaigns And Elections, 4th Edition, John Sides ISBN: 9780393441680

### **Week 2, July 15th-19th - Developing a Campaign Plan**

Summary: Students will be introduced to the various tactics and strategies campaigns may employ within the set of available tactics dependent on the

type of organization they chose the week prior, then they will develop a comprehensive field plan for their organization.

Read: Green & Gerber Chapters 3-8 (Read at least **TWO** Chapters)

### **Week 3, July 22nd-26th - Getting the Message Out**

Summary: Building off last week's submissions students will build an ad script, canvass script, phone script, or other set of materials based on their campaign plan; e.g. if a student said they will run a series of ads then they should design an example advertisement, this is a chance to get creative and have some fun.

Read: Review the relevant chapter in Green & Gerber that discusses the campaign strategy you are using.

Read: Green & Gerber Chapter 11

### **Week 4, July 29th-August 2nd - October Surprise!**

Summary: Students will receive a randomly generated (positive/negative) October surprise that they will have to respond to e.g. issue a statement, run a new ad, change tactics, message etc. The content for this week will be a set of videos about historical October surprises.

Watch: [This short video on October surprises](#)

Watch: [Short Clip on Various October Surprises](#)

Watch: [1964 October Surprise](#)  
(Be advised this clip contains original audio from 1964 and as such may contain offensive material)

Watch: [Alternative to the above, 2016 October Surprise Hilary Clinton](#)

## **Week 5, August 5th-9th - Outcomes and What Comes Next**

Summary: Students will receive a randomly generated outcome for their campaign and need to come up with a plan for what comes next e.g. follow your candidate to DC, encourage them to run for a new office, run for office yourself, retire, etc.

Depending on what you decide read one of the following:

### **Run for Office**

Read: Petersen, R. Eric. Roles and Duties of a Member of Congress. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010.

### **Follow to DC**

Read: Petersen, R. Eric. "Congressional staff: Duties and functions of selected positions." Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008.

### **Retire From Campaigns**

Find: A job posting/description for a job outside of the world of campaigns that you think would be a good fit for your skillset as a "former campaign operative".