A and I Seminar: The American Elections of 2014
POSC 100 Fall 2014 (Prof. Steven Schier)

The goals of this class are three: (1) an understanding of the operations of America’s electoral system, (2) an exploration of the history and results of America’s midterm elections and (3) class analysis of the results of the 2014 American elections.

READING LOAD: This class has a significant reading load and I expect you to have the assigned reading completed by the time you come to class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/GRADING:

1) Two four-page essays. (40%; 120 points -- 60 points each)

2) One three-page report on 2014 election results. (10%; 30 points)

3) Active seminar participation and participation in class, both as an individual member of class and as part of a small group reporting on election results. This will also entail occasionally writing questions for class discussion and bringing media articles on the 2014 elections to class. (20%; 60 points)

4) One six-page final essay, due at the end of the finals period. (30%; 90 points)

5) 300 total points are awarded for work in this class. 270 points (90%) earns an “A,” 240 points (80%) a “B,” 210 points (70%) a “C,” and 180 points (60%) a “D.”

WRITING ASSISTANT REQUIREMENT: Our writing assistant for this course is J.M. Hanley, a junior political science major who has previously worked as a writing assistant. He is a valuable resource that you should employ. Each of you is required to meet with J.M at least once to consult with him about your writing for this course. You can contact J.M at hanleyj@carleton.edu to arrange a meeting with him.

HARD COPIES OF PAPERS: You should turn in all writing for the course in hard copy (printed), not as an emailed attachment.

LATE PAPERS: Your grade will be dropped a third of a grade (e.g., from a B to a B-) for each 24-hour period after a deadline. If you anticipate a significant conflict with a deadline, please speak to me at least a week ahead of time.

NOTE ON CLASS ATTENDANCE: Three absences (including absences because of athletic events) during the term are "excusable." Any absences beyond that will have to be made up with extra work or your final grade will be affected.
NOTE: Students who have any disability which might affect their performance in class should consult with me as soon as possible.

CELLPHONES: Cellphones should be turned off during class.

OFFICE HOURS (414 Willis): Tuesday & Thursday 3 – 4:30 pm

EMAIL/PHONE: sschier@carleton.edu (x4118)

The following books are required and available in the bookstore:

Matthew J. Burbank, Ronald J. Hrebenar and Robert C. Benedict, Parties, Interest Groups and Political Campaigns, second edition (henceforth BHB)
Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, Brad T. Gomez and David W. Rohde, Change and Continuity in the 2012 Elections (henceforth AAGR)
Janet Box-Steppensmeier and Steven E. Schier, The American Elections of 2012 (henceforth B-SS)

In addition, some readings will be placed on e-reserve and can be read there or produced as hard copies for your use.

My grading standards are as follows. An “A” paper features clear, thorough and, above all, original analysis of the topic. Relatively few essays achieve this standard. A “B” paper includes reasonably sound consideration of the topic, but an analysis that is less than fully clear, thorough and original. “C” graded papers contain serious thematic vagueness and/or factual inaccuracies. I am likely to award “A”s, “B”s and “C”s as final grades in this class, with the modal category probably a “B.”

Plagiarism: There is zero tolerance for plagiarism. A summary of the College’s policy on plagiarism states: “At Carleton College, an act of academic dishonesty is therefore regarded as conflicting with the work and purpose of the entire College and not merely as a private matter between the student and an instructor; all cases involving such dishonesty are referred for appropriate action to the Academic Standing Committee (ASC) via the Associate Dean of Students or the Associate Dean of the College.” For more information on Carleton’s policy on academic honesty, please consult http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/dos/handbook/academic_regs/?policy_id=21359

Because the course is writing intensive, we will devote two class sessions to in-class revision sessions. During these sessions, class members will divide into groups of three to read and critique each other’s papers.

Beginning on September 25, one third of the class each day will each write three discussion questions or critical observations on the day’s readings. Each one of these must be longer than a sentence but no longer than a paragraph in length. Write questions or observations that
encourage wide-ranging discussion of the topic you raise. Narrowly factual or opinionated questions or observations do not accomplish this. **These questions must be submitted to me (via in-text e-mail – no attachments) by 8:00 AM of the day of the relevant class session.**

We will begin each class session with a media article provided by a member of the class. Each of you will contribute one or more of these over the course of the term. **Please email your article (no attachments) to me by 8:00 AM on class day.** We will have much to discuss during the eventful 2014 election season.

**Our class discussions will proceed as follows.** After the entire class considers the day’s media article, it will divide into three discussion groups to sort through discussion questions selected by me from those submitted that day. One member of the discussion group will serve as reporter and post a short summary of the day’s discussion (no more than one short paragraph per question) at the “Class Discussion Reports” location on our Moodle website. After reading the reports, I will post a short response as well. I will vary the membership of the discussion groups over time to make certain that everyone can discuss class topics with a large number of other class members. **Your media articles, discussion questions and reports will constitute thirty of the sixty points in your class participation grade.**

**During the last weeks of the course,** students will work in analysis teams to create group presentations based on the 2014 election results. One group will analyze the US Senate elections, another the US House elections and a third the gubernatorial and state legislative elections. Each group must prepare class presentations on their assigned days. The presentation must answer three questions: (1) Which election results are most important in 2014? (2) Why are these results the most important for understanding the 2014 elections? (3) In summary, what major implications for American politics arise from these important results? **I recommend that you divide up the elections geographically.** You should then each write a three-page report on your region’s results that addresses the above questions, due on the day of your group presentation.

Your group may use the computer projection facilities in our classroom, preferably with PowerPoint, to present the most important findings. Material from the student reports should be employed in your final essay for the class. **Your group presentation and activities counts for thirty of the sixty points in your class participation grade.**

1. Introduction: syllabus, media articles and videos (9/16)

**PART I: THE ELECTORAL BASICS**

2. Political Parties BHB chs. 1-3 (9/18)

3. Electoral systems and the 2014 elections BHB, chs. 4-5, Chuck McCutcheon, CQ PRESS’S GUIDE TO THE 2014 MIDTERM ELECTIONS (multiple copies on closed reserve) (9/23) **ONE-PAGE 2014 ELECTION EXPECTATIONS PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

4. Campaigns BHB chs. 7-8 (9/25)

5. A and I Convocation, Friday, 9/26, Skinner Chapel at 10:50 AM. Economics Professor Steve Strand will discuss the A and I experience. Attendance at this is MANDATORY.


7. Voting behavior AAGR, chs. 4-6 (10/2)

8. Interest groups BHB, chs. 9,10, conclusion (10/7)

9. Analytical framework paper: in-class revision (10/9) BRING TWO COPIES OF YOUR DRAFT OF THIS PAPER TO CLASS

Paper assignment: In class readings to this point, what organizations, actors and institutions are most important for understanding the outcomes of the 2014 elections? Why are they the most important in explaining the outcome in comparison with other organizations, actors and institutions? (4 PAGES)

10. The polarization debate Fiorina and Abramowitz readings (on e-reserve) (10/14) ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Group analysis assignment: group analysis duties for (1) Senate elections, (2) House elections and (3) gubernatorial and state legislative elections are assigned today. Email me your rank order preferences among these three options by 3 pm on Monday, 10/13.

PART II: EXPLORING MIDTERM ELECTIONS

11. Types of Midterm Elections Andrew Busch, HORSES IN MIDSTREAM, chs. 1, 2 conclusion (on e-reserve) T-M, ch. 1 (10/16)

12. The 2010 Elections: Analysis T-M, chs. 2-4 (10/21)

13. The 2012 Elections: Coalitions and Congressional Elections BS-S, chs, 1,5; AAGR, chs. 9,10 (10/23)


15. The 2012 Elections: Implications B-SS, ch. 10; AAGR, ch. 11 (10/30)
PART III: CLASS ANALYSIS AND REPORTS


Paper Assignment: By examining the history of midterm elections and the 2012 election, identify the events and behaviors most important in affecting the outcomes of the 2014 elections. Also, state your predictions for the important outcomes for the 2014 elections that your analysis group has studied. (4 PAGES)

17. US Senate Elections Reports media articles (11/6)

Paper Assignment: Individual THREE-PAGE REPORTS DUE IN CLASS from Senate election group members addressing (1) Which election results are most important in 2014? (2) Why are these results the most important for understanding the 2014 elections? (3) In summary, what major implications for American politics arise from these important results?

18. US House Elections Reports media articles (11/11)

Paper Assignment: Individual THREE-PAGE REPORTS DUE IN CLASS from Senate election group members addressing (1) Which election results are most important in 2014? (2) Why are these results the most important for understanding the 2014 elections? (3) In summary, what major implications for American politics arise from these important results?

19. State gubernatorial and legislative elections reports media articles (11/13)

Paper Assignment: Individual THREE-PAGE REPORTS DUE IN CLASS from Senate election group members addressing (1) Which election results are most important in 2014? (2) Why are these results the most important for understanding the 2014 elections? (3) In summary, what major implications for American politics arise from these important results?

20. FINAL PAPER in-class revision session BRING TWO COPIES of your OUTLINE or ROUGH DRAFT of your final essay. (11/18)

Final Essay Assignment: Answer the following questions in a six-page final essay: What concepts from the class have proven most useful for you in understanding US midterm elections? Why are they the most important concepts? Upon reviewing your initial expectations and your 2014 election predictions papers, where were your expectations and predictions proven accurate and inaccurate in 2014 and why? How do your favored concepts help to explain the fate of your expectations and predictions?

This essay is due in hard copy at my office no later than at the conclusion of the last final exam period.