The Course

This seminar will introduce you to some of the methods used by social scientist inquiries into the nature of human affairs. We will look at the arguments that political scientists make about media influences and electoral politics using data collected in the Carleton College Media and Elections Study. Our Media and Elections Study has analyzed political communication in every presidential election of the twenty-first century. Your insights, hypotheses, and analysis will enhance the work to which more than 100 Carls have already contributed!

The data with which you will work include: our content analysis of the 2000, 2004, and 2008 election news coverage by the local television affiliates in the Minneapolis Metro Media Market; content analysis of all radio and television ads broadcast in the United States in the 2008 presidential election and all radio and television ads broadcast in Minnesota for the state’s US Senate and House races; and content analysis of the mini-documentaries, web ads, and candidate bio films shown at the RNC and DNC 2008 conventions. We will add to these complete data sets the content analysis of a sample drawn from our recorded film captures of national news coverage of elections 2008 and a sample of network news transcripts from broadcast Election 2012 news stories as well as content analysis of a selection of prominent ads broadcast in the 2012 presidential race. The analysis considers elements of election news stories such as tone, topic, and information framing. Our study of the 2012 campaign ads includes analyzing ad scripts, visual texts and sound, focusing on the accuracy of their claims and messages.

Our emphasis in this year’s part of the study will be on comparative analysis of our fantastic store of a decade of data collection. We have the opportunity to present our research findings in a unique venue: The Weitz White Spaces. We will be working with students in the POSC 204 Media and Electoral Politics and with Professor Greg Marfleet and his students in POSC 230 Political Science Methods.

Political communication takes place in myriad media: billboards, TV and radio advertising, speech and debate, graffiti art, photography, film, museum exhibits, public monuments, interpretive trails and public parks, public art… a long list. In addition to working on skills like writing and oral presentation, you will have a chance to THINK ABOUT such diverse media and their potential for getting political information across to a variety of audiences. Your research projects and findings may be represented in a medium of your choice, including: audio broadcasts (e.g. a scripted radio story); a film; a slide show using movie and/or sound files (e.g. PowerPoint or Keynote); a Prezi; an item/exhibit that you curate from our election news and ads artifacts; an infographic…there are many possibilities. We will build our exhibits over the course of the election, working mainly in the large White Space beginning the week of October 15.

Much of your work will be undertaken in pairs or small groups. In addition to discussing questions raised by our readings in each class session, we will use a portion of these
meetings as a workshop to learn more about how to ask questions that can be addressed by specific kinds of data; how to use methods such as content analysis for studying political communication; and how to exhibit information, including research findings to different audiences. To tell the story of your research and this decade-long research program you will learn a great deal about the research literature and public thinking to which your work contributes.

We will study how media influence campaign spending and organization, consider the methods candidates use to package their messages, and the overall influence of media on electoral politics. We will learn about public opinion analysis and other ideas from the fields of political behavior and political psychology in our study of political communication.

Research in political science, political psychology, and mass communications shows that campaign ad presentations use a number of cinematic and advertising techniques to sell candidates to voters. Depending on the truthfulness and tone of the ad, such mass market effects can be negative or positive from the point of view of democratic theory: How do campaign ads influence political participation? Cynicism? Political Efficacy? Researchers worry about the distortions of factual information occurring when visual images produce a powerful, affective subtext for political communication. We know that political ads increase anxiety and enthusiasm, stimulating several predictable behaviors among voter/viewers. Do the images and sounds of political ads raise anxieties to an excessive extent? Or, increase enthusiasm to a cult-like degree? Do political ads make it less likely that voters will think rationally about the information they receive about a candidate? Furthermore, we have a debate raging on the effects of “negative” ads—do they motivate or dampen participation? What is a negative ad? Add to all of this the news coverage of the campaign and the “ad watches” that go along with it. How do the various news formats convey, limit, or even distort political learning in a democratic electorate?

Course Requirements

Below are the readings and topics for each of our meetings. Readings should be done for the day on which they are assigned unless otherwise noted. In addition to coming to class prepared to discuss the readings, you will take part in workshops to learn our methods of content analysis and a class field trip on election night. On Friday, October 26, we will attend the A&I Seminar Lecture given by Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: "Necessary Conversations: Technology as the Architect of our Intimacies." Attendance at this event is required for all students in A&I seminars.

Your graded work includes:
Content analysis of campaign ads; content analysis of election news coverage; research report of the ad content analysis; research report of the news content analysis; a project creating or collecting one “artifact” for exhibit in “Carleton College Election Study 2000-2012 to be based on our Election Study Resources; oral presentation of your exhibit; the written caption for your exhibit; attendance at the November13 Exhibit Presentation. Activities involving working in pairs or in groups will include peer evaluations of your participation, which will affect your score.

Grades will be computed as follows:
Content Analysis: Campaign Ad and
Topics for Discussion and Reading Assignments:

Part 1: Democratic Theory and the Power of Media

Tues Sept 11  Introduction to the course
Who is the audience for campaign communication?
Our case study on the Jefferson Jackson Dinner, Des Moines Iowa 2007
Resources at:
Entire Iowa Jefferson Jackson Dinner, Democratic Fundraising Dinner
CSPAN November 10, 2007

http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/IowaJef

Hillary Clinton (3:00:19 to 3:24:43)
See Clip of Speech
http://www.c-spanvideo.org/clip/3884056

Barack Obama (3:25:38 to 3:49:53)
See Clip of Speech
http://www.c-spanvideo.org/clip/3884051


Thurs Sept 13  Media as an Institution and Campaign Advertising—Overview


Tues Sept 18  Content Analysis of News and Ads—Our Project

Read:


Part 2: Media and Politics: Public Opinion, Socialization, and Participation

Thurs Sept 20 Candidate Communication and Campaign Strategy 1: Advertising Strategy and Effects—Journalists’ Responses


The Profession of Journalism: Norms, Production Values, and Audience Response

Tues Sept 25 Candidate Communication and Campaign Strategy 2: Speeches and Debates


COMMON TIME **Pizza and Content Analysis Workshop 1**

Thurs Sept 27 Public Opinion 1: Definitions and Measurement


**Tues Oct 2** Public Opinion 2: Agenda Setting—Framing, Priming, and Persuasion


*********First Content Analysis Assignment Due *******

**Wed Oct 3**

**5:30–7:00 Pizza and Content Analysis Workshop 2 **

******First Presidential Debate*****

**Thurs Oct 4**

Public Opinion 3: Narrative and Symbolism in News Reporting

Read: Lauren Cohen Bell, Joan L. Conners, Theodore F. Sheckels, “Chapter 3: A Rhetorical Perspective” and “Chapter 10: Case Six:

Fact Check or Spin?


Rec:


Fact Check.org 08/31/2012, “Romney’s Big Night” [http://factcheck.org/2012/08/romneys-big-night/](http://factcheck.org/2012/08/romneys-big-night/)


Tues Oct 9  Public Opinion 4: News Content and Priming Effects


******Vice Presidential Debate******

Part 3: Campaign Communication and Information Processing

Mon Oct 15  MIDTERM BREAK


**********Second Content Analysis Assignment Due **********

****** Second Presidential Debate******

Tues Oct 18  Information Processing and Citizens’ Understanding of Politics 1: Political Knowledge
I. Discuss Our Brand Is Crisis and the debates
II. Political Knowledge


Tues Oct 23  Information Processing and Citizens’ Understanding of Politics 2: Assessing Issues and Candidates


Thurs Oct 25  The Profession of Journalism: Norms, Production Values, and Audience Response


Friday Oct 26  A & I Convocation 10:50 AM in Skinner Memorial Chapel

Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Professor Turkle is an expert on the subjective side of human relationships with technology; the title of her address will be "Necessary Conversations: Technology as the Architect of our Intimacies."
Tues Oct 30
I. Discuss Convocation
II. Workshop on Projects

**********Project Contents Assembled**********

Thurs Nov 1
I. Candidate Communication and Campaign Strategy 3: Tailoring the Message, Creating the Persona


Monday Nov 5  **********Project Captions Due **********
II. Workshop on Projects

Tues Nov 6
I. Debrief the Campaign — Discuss Race, Gender and Class in Candidate Construction and Electorate Responses


Recommended: Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, “(Ch 7) Affirming Discord” and “(Ch 8 Black Power,” The Black Image in

II. Workshop on Projects

***********VOTE*****Leave Campus 5:00 for Election Night Party************

Thurs Nov 8  Interpreting Messages and Voting — Assessing the Election — Prospects for Change
Working session on Presentation of Results
No additional reading

Tues Nov 13  Regular Class Time Set Up and Class Presentation
**********Common Time Public Presentation of your work in our exhibit**********
The Carleton College Election Study 2000–2012