The Course

This course is an introductory research course in which we study media and electoral politics using data collected in the Carleton College Media and Elections Study through the first decade of the twenty-first century. These data 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 analyses of a sample drawn from our recorded film captures of national news coverage of elections 2008 and network news transcripts Election 2012 news stories and a selection of prominent ads in the 2012 presidential race.

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 100 A&I Seminar and with Professor Greg Marfleet and his students in POSC 230 Political Science Methods. Our research findings can be represented in a number of media, 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.

To tell the story of your research and this decade-long project to which more than 100 Carls have contributed you will learn a great deal about the research literature and public thinking to which our work has contributed.

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 position from the point of view of democratic theory. But 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?

Our readings cover such topics as public opinion analysis, political behavior, and political psychology. This literature suggests hypotheses suitable for our inquiries and
offers insights into a variety of research methods for us to compare and contrast. In addition to the readings on e-reserve listed below, students are required to read the on-line *New York Times* daily.

**Readings can be found on e-reserve.**

**Course Requirements**

Below are the readings and general topics for each of our meetings. In addition to coming to class prepared to discuss the readings, you will take part in two meetings with POSC 230 students to learn about the various research methods that we will be using. Your research activities will include: analyzing the content of campaign ads and election news stories, designing research drawing on our resources from the Carleton Election Study, presenting your results in a medium of your choice in our exhibit, “The Carleton College Election Project 2000–2012,” and taking part in our Exhibit Presentations November 13 Common Time and Class Time. Grades will be based on these assignments, which include writing exhibit captions, creating the exhibit piece conveying the results of your research project, explaining your work cogently in an exhibit caption, and explaining your exhibit work orally in our November 13 Exhibit Presentation and class meeting.

To summarize 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. 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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Analysis: Campaign Ad and Report on Campaign Ad</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Analysis: News and Report on Campaign Ad</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Project Design</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit Caption</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit Creation/Collection</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Presentation of Exhibit Artifact</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class &amp; Project Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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**Topics for Discussion and Reading Assignments:**

**Part 1: Democratic Theory and the Power of Media**

**Tues Sept 11**
Introduction to the course
Communication and Self-Government


**Thurs Sept 13**
Media as an Institution and Campaign Advertising


Tues Sept 18

Content Analysis of News and Ads—Our Project


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

Thurs Sept 27 Public Opinion 1: Definitions and Measurement


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

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


Fact Check or Spin?


Rec:


Fact Check.org 08/31/2012, “Romney’s 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*****

Thurs Oct 18  Information Processing and Citizens’ Understanding of Politics 1: Political Knowledge

I. Discuss *Our Brand Is Crisis* and the debates
II. Political Knowledge

Read: Nicholas Valentino, Vincent Hutchings, Antoine Banks, and Anne Davis. 2008. “Is a Worried Citizen a Good Citizen? Emotions,


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


Walter Cronkite, “Reporting Presidential Campaigns: A Journalist’s View,” Doris Graber, Denis McQuail, and Pippa

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."

**********10:50 AM Skinner Memorial Chapel**********

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  


II. Workshop on Projects

**Monday Nov 5  Project Captions Due **

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


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 Class Time Presentation of Your Work
*******Common Time Public Presentation of your work in our exhibit**********

The Carleton College Election Study 2000–2012