The Course
How does political advertising influence the electorate? Do “negative ads” turn voters off? Can advertising be used strategically to influence turnout, decreasing the participation of one of the major parties, while increasing the likelihood that others will vote? Election ads along with the 6 second “sound bite” are now among the major forms of political communication in modern democracies. We will study how ads are created and “work” from the standpoint of political psychology and film analysis.

The course includes a research component and students enrolled in the 303 version of the class will help design experimental research, recruit research subjects, participate in data collection, and conduct extensive analysis and presentation of our experiment data (and, as appropriate other data) for their seminar papers.

Readings
The readings for the course have been drawn from a number of books and journal articles available on e-reserve at the library. Password is POSC

Assignments
In addition to reading about how advertising may influence voters and change the composition of the electorate, we have an exciting opportunity to study these effects in experiments using self-report and bio-physical measures of our research subjects’ responses. Your work is part of 15 years of data collection on election news and advertising effects. Here are the sorts of data that Carls have already collected:

Content analysis (of election news from the 2000, 2004, and 2008 elections based on recordings of ALL local election news from 2000 and 2004 and ALL local election news plus NBC, CBS, ABC, MSNBC, CNN, FOX, and CNN-Headline News in 2008. We have also content analyzed the national news coverage of the 2004 election using transcripts of the three major terrestrial broadcasters and the MSNBC, CNN, and FOX. Lotsa News.

Content analysis of about 600 TV and radio ads run in Election 2008 including all ads run for Minnesota elections and ads run nationally for the presidential candidates. The content analysis is exceptionally detailed. We also have the spending data for these ads (where and when each ad ran and how much was spent each time the ad ran).

Content analysis of all ads run for candidates in Minnesota elections in 2010, using the same protocols as in 2008. We have video of the ads run by the two major political candidates campaigns in 2012 available for content analysis.
**National surveys** run in 2002, 2006, and 2008 asking a random sample of voters about their perceptions of the fairness of various types of negative advertising statements and claims. The surveys’ definitions of negative ads are based on our focus group studies conducted in 2000 and 2006. Transcripts of these focus groups (designed and run by students in this course) are available. We embedded experiments in our 2006 and 2008 national surveys. There is a panel of around 200 respondents who have taken part in all three surveys.

**Experiment** on information processing run in this course in 2009. We made negative and advocacy ads with Democrats as targets and Republicans as targets and placed these ads within the advertising slot of a news broadcast. We divided our test subjects into four groups: Republicans/Democrats viewing a negative ad and Republicans/Democrats viewing an advocacy ad. We recorded and transcribed interviews and analyzed the transcripts according to a protocol created by colleagues at Arizona State University who study information processing biases using transcribed speeches.

**Experiment** on information processing run in this course in 2013. We studied the physiological effects of ads in studies designed to manipulate: 1) the ways in which an individual’s affective state (i.e. mood—happy, sad, angry, anxious, enthusiastic) influences their perceptions of different kinds of ads or 2) the ways that existential fears (fear of death) influences a person’s perceptions of ads.

You can use any of these data. We also have access to other research collections, including the work done by the University of Wisconsin/Wesleyan University Election Ad Studies. And you will be adding to the available data by conducting experiments that test individual’s responses to various aspects of political advertising.

We are undertaking a new experiment using M-Turk (Mechanical Turk) survey capabilities. Our study will use three survey ways to look at the effects of inaccurate advertising claims on voters’ knowledge of candidate issue positions. We will look at these effects over time (the decay of any effects); whether partisanship, gender of voice over, candidate gender, and participant gender influence effects; and how claim accuracy may influence perceptions of ad fairness and ad negativity. These data will be among the resources you may use in your studies.

Our research involves several steps. We will study gender of voiceover, perceptions of fairness, perception of negativity, and influence of false claims on political knowledge, including candidate issue stand. Our readings will show you why the feelings that people already have when the ad comes on TV (or radio) changes the way they feel about ad claims about issues and candidate traits and why ads may change an affective state to influence attitudes and learning.

POSC 303 is designated as a possible “comps course,” meaning that it may be possible for you to use your seminar paper as the basis for a political science comps project. This research paper will: explain your research design, review relevant literature, explain your methods of analysis,
present data, and your analysis of the findings. You will join your research team in designing an infographic presenting your findings.

Each research team will design and print an infographic that we will display in a public show on the final day of class (March 8, 2016).

Each student writes an individual paper. You must be present for the display of your work. You will present your work to the class and you will present your work in the public show (we will have decent treats for both events).

There are several steps in a research process and it is important to coordinate work within the group and to meet the scheduled times for handing in work for each part of the process. Your individual contributions to team work will be evaluated by your peers.

Grades will be computed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment Project Design/Execution</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal: appropriate lit, subject selection, variables &amp; measures</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execution: preparing and analyzing data</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Presentation of Research</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infographic Design and Presentation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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A Word about experiments and research findings

In a perfect world well-designed experiments turn up interesting patterns in data that tell us something wonderfully enlightening about cause and effect. But science also is a matter of trial and error. In the real world we find that our measures (measurement instruments) may be too blunt to demonstrate the patterns (sometimes we can use sophisticated stats to reveal more—but sometimes our sophisticated thinking makes the pattern disappear). Sometimes we cannot control the experiment in the way that we hope. And often we do everything well, but we simply get a null result (lack of statistical significance) for our trouble. A null result isn’t a mistake. In fact, new social science journals have been starting up to publish well-designed studies that net no statistically significant results. In this class, whatever knowledge we gain—even if it is the knowledge that we should design the study differently—is important. What matters: the thought, care, and effort that goes into the attempt and the accurate portrayal of the results and suggestions for improvement.

A Word about participation and our schedule

This class is designed as a “hands-on” experience in visual analysis and experimental methods in political science research. Research in the social sciences increasingly involves teamwork as well as individual effort. You may have a specific part of a bigger research question that interests you. But having data on which you will write an individual research paper depends on the team. The infographic assignment specifically asks you to integrate your question/work with other members of the team. The 40% of your grade that relies directly on teamwork (the experiment
design and execution and the infographic design and presentation) is the subject peer evaluation as well as my evaluation. Your peers will evaluate your work on the team. If there are difficulties on the team that you cannot resolve, please let me know. Problem-solving, productive contestation, and collaboration are important skills. I won’t know if you need help unless you talk with me.

The following schedule of readings and other activities includes several “Workshop” sessions in which you and your team will learn and do many of the tasks required to produce results. The POSC 303 Seminar version of the course requires participation in the overall coordination of research that will inform a comps-eligible analytical paper. Some of the Workshop and specific assignments require preparation outside class to make class time/Workshop time productive. Preparation and sticking to the schedule is very important. I evaluate your effort in the participation score that is 10% of your grade. “Good,” the absolutely minimal acceptable effort, is generally an 85 or 8.5 percent; you can each do better than “good.” In sum, sticking to the schedule that the class and your team set is important; not only will my evaluation matter—peer grading and self-evaluation will be important factors in determining your scores for group work and your overall grade.

**Part 1: Studying Political Advertising**

**Tues Jan 5**  
An Overview of Ads and Ad Research—Surveys, Experiments, Focus Groups, Content Analysis

**Thurs Jan 7**  
Experimental Designs and Early Findings on Effects of Negative Ads  

**Tues Jan 12**  
Ad Construction, Placement, and Content  

**Thurs Jan 14**  
Defining and Measuring Concepts and Causality: What Are Negative Ads? (What are Attack Ads? What are Issue Ads?)


*************** Select Your Research Team and Topic***************

Tues Jan 19  Workshop: Self-report Measures, Physiological Measures


Self-Assigned Preparation PRIOR TO CLASS MEETING: Each team looks at the initial readings for its experiment topic and assigns additional reading to each team member. Team members come prepared to discuss the reading: research question, theory that motivates the research question, method of study (type of study, definition of variables, measurement of variables). The presentations and discussions among team members will prepare you to design your research project.

Thurs Jan 21  I. Hurray for the Negative Ad?! Not So Fast
[We will divide the readings below among teams]


II. On Writing Lit Reviews, Research Reports, Research Papers


**Due in class:** FROM YOUR TEAM: Research Question (restated as necessary), Experiment Design and “Plan B thoughts,” Operationalization (Definition) of Key Concepts, Measures, and Statement of Next Steps and Team Assignments.
FROM YOU: Statement of your specific area of interest in this project—your research paper topic.

Tues Jan 26 Revisiting Ansolabehere and Iyengar, Are We Asking the Right Questions? Motivated Information Processing I
Read: George Marcus and Michael MacKuen. 1993. “Anxiety, Enthusiasm, and the Vote: The Emotional Underpinnings of Learning and
Involvement During Presidential Campaigns,” *American Political Science Review*, 87, 3 (September) 672–685.


Rec:


Thurs Jan 28  Motivated Information Processing II and Partisan Responses to Negative Ads

Read: Dan Stevens, John Sullivan, Barbara Allen, and Dean Alger.


**Final Experiment Design Due in Class**

**Tues Feb 2**  
Candidate Characteristics and Constructs  


**Part 2: Stepping Back—Ads Viewed within the Campaign Environment**

**Thurs Feb 4**  
The Larger Environment of Campaign Events and News Coverage of Ads  


**II. Present Experiment Research Designs to Class**

**Mon Feb 8**  
**MIDTERM BREAK**

**Tues Feb 9**  
Methods and Question in Cognitive Neuroscience  


***POSC 303 Students: Schedule Appointments with Paula Lackie Re: Our Data Sets***

Thurs Feb 11 Framing, Priming, Narrative and Opinion Formation

Tues Feb 16 Who Frames What? How?

Part 3: Stepping Back—Ads and Voter Cognition

Thurs Feb 18 Can Facts “Overcome” Feelings? Is there a Fact/Feeling Divide?

Tues Feb 23 Visual Representation of Quantitative and Qualitative Information
***** Session on Visual Design Elements *****
****Draft Lit Review and Methods Sections for Research Papers Due in Class*****

Thurs Feb 25  State of the Art and Science of Political Advertising: Your Assessment?

*******  POSC 303 Summary of Findings/Update on Data Analysis Due in Class *******

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon Feb 29</td>
<td>3:30–6:00 Individual Group Discussions of Infographic Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues Mar 1</td>
<td>Infographic Workshop/ Help with Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thurs Mar 3</td>
<td>Infographic Workshop/ Help with Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon Mar 7</td>
<td>2:00-4:00 finish and deliver infographics to printing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues Mar 8</td>
<td>Pick Up Infographics from Printing</td>
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</tbody>
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Class meeting (prior to infographics session) to present infographics to class

**********  Infographics Presentation Common Time ******************

********** Final POSC 303 Research Paper Due in Class **********