Political Science 4034 – Political Participation
Fall Semester/2012; Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:20 in 209 Coates
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Office Hours: 10:30-11:45 T/Th and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to investigate the nature of political participation in America. Because we have a presidential election contest this year, more attention will be paid to electoral participation, that is, elections, campaigns, voting and turnout.

The course is roughly grouped into two main sections. In the first we will examine some general questions of participation: how much is necessary in a democracy, what forms does it take, where does it come from, what factors influence the amount of it we do, why do we vote the way we do. We will also look at political parties and presidential nominations in the first half. The second half of the course covers the presidential general election, congressional elections, political talk, and the media, with a look at campaign advertising and the effects it has on participation. We will also look at the question of how a polarized public affects elections and governance in America.

I would like to follow the format of an extended research seminar. This means that we will meet to discuss the readings, not just to listen to me lecture, although that will be your punishment if you have nothing to say. You need not have more than a basic understanding of American government to do this. You also, of course, need to attend class and be willing to consider questions seriously within the context of the systematic study of political participation. Since this is a class about political participation during an election year, you should also keep informed of what’s going on in the national elections. I will periodically discuss campaign events and issues as they unfold during the course of the semester.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for this course are two examinations, one paper, and class participation. The dates for exams and papers are listed on moodle, in the class schedule and reading assignments section.

Exams: A midterm and a final will be given. The final is not comprehensive. The format of these exams will be discussed early in the semester. Some form of take-home exam is possible, particularly for the final. The midterm and final will each make up 30 percent of your grade.

Paper: The paper requirement will be discussed on the first day of class. A one page typed description of your paper is due on September 27. Failure to turn in this description will be reflected in your final paper grade. Final papers are due on November 15. A 5% per day penalty will be imposed on all late papers. They are to be 6-7 typed, double-spaced pages. The paper will compose 30 percent of your grade.

Participation: Class participation will be composed of your actual participation in class as well as your performance on in-class assignments and one review assignment. These will be discussed on the first day of class. Participation will make up 10 percent of your grade.

TEXTBOOKS

Let’s Vote, by Daniel Shea.
The Polarized Public, by Alan Abramowitz