

Western College Program
Miami University

WCP 333S.A **The Internet and the Election:** Fall, 2008
An Interdisciplinary Exploration

Time and Location

Tuesday & Thursday 2:00 – 3:15 Room 24 Peabody Hall

Professor

Christopher Wolfe

Office: 127 Peabody

Office Hours: Wed. 11:00-12:00 (& T/TH 11:00 – 12:30 room 112 Psychology Building)

Phone: 529-5670 or 529-3679

e-mail: WolfeCR@muohio.edu

Homepage: <http://tappan.wcp.muohio.edu/home/index.html>

Course Hot Links Page: <http://tappan.wcp.muohio.edu/home/politics.html>

Overview

By almost any measure the Presidential election of 2008 is one for the history books. We have already passed new milestones on gender, race, age, and religion, and both the Republican and Democratic primaries upset the early conventional wisdom. We are also in uncharted waters when it comes to the role of the Internet. The net is being used in unprecedented ways – by the campaigns, political interests, and ordinary individuals – that are changing the nature of our political discourse. Political organizing, fundraising, voter registration, and political journalism are all being changed in new and unpredictable ways. Of course, not all is sweetness and light: the Internet is also being used to spread misinformation and stir up negative emotions.

This election season has also seen scholars and scientists in fields as diverse as linguistics, psychology, neuroscience, and, of course, political science addressing electoral politics. They bring new theories and research findings to political phenomena. We will consider issues that received relatively little attention in previous years such as the role of metaphor, cognitive framing, and even the amygdala brain structure in Presidential politics. Whether you are a Democrat, Republican, Independent, Libertarian, Socialist, etc., I encourage you to understand and critique these concepts within your own political framework and apply them to the causes that you cherish.

Armed with ideas and research from many quarters, we will study the Internet and the election "in real time" as the election unfolds, returning to the presidential primaries after the votes have been cast. We will explore phenomena, such as the political use of YouTube, social networking sites, and blogs and analyze quantitative data from the Web such as surveys, polls, and campaign financing. We will disseminate our work to scholars by writing for a peer-reviewed journal and to the public by posting brief, thoughtful essays to on-line blogs. In these ways you will contribute to the academic understanding of the Internet and the election and, (who knows!) maybe even influence the outcome.

Course Goals

By the end of this course you should:

- have a good understanding of Presidential politics and the emerging role of the Internet;
- be able to apply theory and research from several fields to new political phenomena;
- develop more sophisticated ways of evaluating political information on the Internet;
- be better at writing about politics on the Internet and for the Internet as a medium;
- be better able to use the net to advance your own political causes whatever they may be.

Grading

Grading for the course will be based on a 1,000 point scale, with letter grades assigned in the following fashion: 800 to 829 = B -, 830 to 869 = B, 870 to 899 = B+ etc. The number of points for each assignment is outlined below.

Assignments

Assignment	Points
Political Blog Analysis Articles (5 x 100)	500
Peer Review of Peer Blog Analysis Articles (5 x 20)	100
Blackboard Recommended Web Sites (10 x 10)	100
Class Participation	100
Final: Article for the International Journal of Internet Science	200
Predictions: States, Electoral College Vote, and Percent of Popular Vote (3 x 10 bonus points)	10 bonus points for the person who comes closest each of three times.
Total	1000

Political Blog Analysis Articles

Every other week, from week 3 through week 12, each student will post a thoughtful political analysis article on a Blog. These analytic essays of about 700 up to 1400 words (2-4 pages) will draw on course readings and address course topics in a scholarly and interesting way. Your posts will make use of the Graff, Lakoff, Westen, and Raymond books. Topics may include this week on the Web, fundraising on-line, candidate blogs and Web sites, digital activism, other blogs, using the Internet to influence the mainstream media, what the data mean, YouTube, and low blows and dirty tricks. Although blogging is an act of public writing, you will be permitted to work under a pseudonym provided that your classmates and I know your *nom de plum*.

Peer Review of Peer Blogs

Every other week from week 3 through week 12 – when you are not posting a blog entry yourself – your task is to post a thoughtful commentary of 200-400 words on a fellow student's analytic blog entry.

Blackboard Recommended Web Sites. Each week you will study web sites representing a wide political spectrum, including ideologies you favor and those you oppose. Ten (10) times throughout the semester your job will be to find Web sites on particular topics and recommend them to the class. We will use the Blackboard discussion board for your active links with brief annotations. The catch is that only one person can recommend each site – *if someone else gets there first you have to find another one*. Your Blackboard posts will be evaluated the following basis. Annotated links that do a reasonably good job addressing the issue will receive full credit (10/10). Those that fall short will receive only half credit (5/10). If you do not post to Blackboard on time, or if your annotation or link is inadequate, it will receive no credit (0/10).

Class Participation. Thoughtful discussion on your part is essential to the success of this course. My assessment of your participation will be systematic, though ultimately somewhat subjective. Each student will start with a "C" in class participation. Every other week, I will make adjustments in the class participation grades, generally of 1/2 letter grade, but occasionally of 1 letter grade. Grades may increase every second week through thoughtful discussion and active listening informed by your reading of books and Web sites. Grades may decrease due to unexcused absences, excessiveness lateness, or behaviors that undermine good discussions. Of course, your grade may also stay the same. I will let the class know every time I make adjustments.

Article for the International Journal of Internet Science (Take Home Final). The International Journal of Internet Science (IJIS) is a European-based "peer reviewed open access journal for empirical findings, methodology, and theory of social and behavioral science concerning the Internet and its implications for individuals, social groups, organizations, and society" (<http://ijis.net/>). Your task is to write an article in APA style drawing on theory, specific examples, and data about some particular aspect of the U.S. Presidential Election in 2008. Because we are writing for an international audience, you may assume readers have a general knowledge of democracy and the Internet, but know little about specific candidates and the peculiarities of the American electoral system.

Bonus Points. Use <http://www.270towin.com/> to predicted which states each candidate will win, the total number of Electoral College votes for each, and the percentage of the popular vote won by each candidate.

Academic Misconduct

Please consult the on-line Student Handbook at http://www.units.muohio.edu/secretary/policies_guidelines/student_handbook/ University policies on academic conduct apply to all aspects of this course.

Required Readings

Web Sites

Selected Internet sites reflecting a wide ideological spectrum will be recommended by you and your classmates and selected by me on a weekly basis. Please regularly consult the course hot links page: <http://tappan.wcp.muohio.edu/home/politics.html>

Books

The First Campaign: Globalization, the Web, and the Race for the White House
by Garrett M. Graff. Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (November 27, 2007)

The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation
by Drew Westen. Publisher: PublicAffairs; Reprint edition (May 5, 2008)

Don't Think Of An Elephant!/ How Democrats And Progressives Can Win: Know Your
Values And Frame The Debate by George Lakoff.
Publisher: Chelsea Green (January 30, 2005)

How to Rig an Election: Confessions of a Republican Operative
by Allen Raymond. Publisher: Simon & Schuster; 1 edition (January 8, 2008)

"Inside Baseball"

From time to time we will use the net to check in with "friends of the course" who have special knowledge of and perspectives on the election. These friends include National Public Radio Whitehouse Correspondent and political reporter David Greene; editor of the libertarian Reason.com, and Reason.tv Nick Gillespie; Presidential historian, Utah resident, and retired Western Dean Burt Kaufman; Christopher Berg, Western graduate and former staffer on the Hillary Clinton campaign; Ryan Donymoyer, Western graduate and Washington D.C.-based reporter for Bloomberg; and Jeff Segall, California-based scientist and environmental activist.

Course Schedule

(Note: All readings and assignments should be completed before class. Please bring your books to class to facilitate course discussion. Additional readings on the Web will be regularly assigned.)

Part I: New Ideas from Other Quarters

What's Changed: The Web and the Presidential Race

Week 1

Bonus Points Prediction I: Predict the Outcome of the Presidential Election on the Blackboard Web site.

Tuesday August 26: Introductions, syllabus review

Thursday August 28: Graff, The First Campaign, Introduction pp. 3-16 (16 pages)

Week 2

Blackboard Annotated Links I: The Youth Vote

Tuesday September 2: Graff, The First Campaign, Rise of the Anxious Class pp. 21-49 (29 pages)

Thursday September 4: Graff, The First Campaign, Google and People-Powered Politics & The Democrats Reboot pp. 50-89 (40 pages)

Week 3

Tuesday September 9: Graff, The First Campaign, 2008: The Lay of the Land pp. 90-121 (32 pages)

Framing the Debate

Thursday September 11: Lakoff, Don't Think of an Elephant, Forward, Introduction, Preface & Chapter 1 Framing 101 pp. ix-34 (40 pages)

Week 4

Blackboard Annotated Links II: YouTube

Tuesday September 16: Lakoff, Don't Think of an Elephant, Chapters 2-5 Enter the Terminator, What's in a Word? Plenty if It's Marriage, Metaphors of Terror, & Metaphors that Kill pp. 35-74 (40 pages)

Thursday September 18: Lakoff, Don't Think of an Elephant, Chapters 6-10 Betrayal of Trust, What the Right Wants, What Unites Progressives, FAQ, & How to Respond to Conservatives pp. 75-119 (43 pages)

The Political Brain

Week 5

Blackboard Annotated Links III: Data, Data, Data!

Tuesday September 23: Westen, The Political Brain, Introduction & Chapter 1 Winning States of Mind pp. ix-23 (28 pages)

Thursday September 25: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapters 2 & 3 Rational Minds Irrational Campaigns & The Evolution of the Passionate Brain pp. 25-68 (44 pages)

Week 6

Blackboard Annotated Links IV: e-mail and Social Networking Sites

Tuesday September 30: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapters 4 & 5 The Emotions Behind the Curtain & Special Interests in Mind pp. 69-115 (47 pages)

Thursday October 2: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 6 Trickle Up Politics pp. 117-141 (25 pages)

Part II: Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail¹ **Going Positively Negative**

Week 7

Bonus Points Prediction II: Predict the Outcome of the Presidential Election on the Blackboard Web site.

Tuesday October 7: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 13 Positively Negative pp. 317-347 (31 pages)

Thursday October 9: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 14 Terror Networks pp 349-376 (28 pages)

October Surprise: Dirty Campaign Tactics and How to Rig an Election

¹ Apologies to the late Dr. Hunter S. Thompson

Week 8

Blackboard Annotated Links V: Low Blows and Dirty Tricks

Tuesday October 14: Raymond, How to Rig an Election, Forward – Chapter 3 pp. 1-47 (44 pages)

Thursday October 16: Raymond, How to Rig an Election, Chapters 4-8 pp. 49-120 (69 pages)

Note: Friday Oct. 17 fall break weekend

Week 9

Blackboard Annotated Links VI: Fundraising

Tuesday October 21: Raymond, How to Rig an Election, Chapters 9-12 pp. 121-187 (65 pages)

Thursday October 23: Raymond, How to Rig an Election, Chapter 13 – Epilogue pp. 189-240 (51 pages)

Race, Emotion & the Unconscious

Week 10

Bonus Points Prediction III: Predict the Outcome of the Presidential Election on the Blackboard Web site.

Tuesday October 28: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 7 Writing an Emotional Constitution pp. 145-169 (25 pages)

Thursday October 30: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 10 Racial Consciousness and Unconsciousness pp. 219-248 (30 pages)

How Are You Feeling on Election Day Morning?

Week 11

Tuesday November 4 (*Vote for the candidate of your choice!*): Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 12 Hope, Inspiration, and Political Intelligence pp. 283-316 (34 pages)

Election Postmortem

Blackboard Annotated Links VII: Results and Analysis

Thursday November 6: Web Readings only, Analysis of the Election

The Primaries Revisited

Week 12

Blackboard Annotated Links VIII: They Also Ran (the Primaries)

Tuesday November 11: Web Readings only, the Democratic Primary Revisited

Thursday November 13 (Note: Wolfe at SCiP): Web Readings only, the Republican Primary Revisited

"Third" Parties

Week 13

Blackboard Annotated Links IX: Third Parties

Tuesday November 18: Web Readings only, Other Political Parties

Did Issues Matter? A Review of Emotional Issues in Light of the Outcome

Thursday November 20: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 8 Aborting Ambivalence pp. 171-192 (22 pages)

Week 14

Tuesday November 25: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 9, Gunning for Common Ground pp. 193-218 (26 pages)

Thursday November 27 Thanksgiving

Week 15

Tuesday December 2: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 11 Death and Taxes pp. 249-282 (34 pages)

Thursday December 4: Westen, The Political Brain, Chapter 15 Civil and Uncivil Unions pp. 377-420 (44 pages)

The Next Big Thing

Week 16

Blackboard Annotated Links X: The Next Big Thing in Politics on the Web

Tuesday December 9: Graff, The First Campaign, Web 2.0 Meets Campaign 3.0 pp. 247-276 (30 pages)

Thursday December 11: Graff, The First Campaign, Conclusion: Our Collective Future pp. 277-289 (13 pages)

Final Exam Week December 15-19

Article for the International Journal of Internet Science due via e-mail during the regularly scheduled final exam period.