1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide you with a new lens to view American voters and the American electoral system more broadly. We will consider cutting-edge research on voters and elections. In the first part of the course, we will learn about voters, the decisions they make, and the forces that influence them. We will discuss recent scholarship in political science, psychology, economics, and even genetics. A persistent question to democratic theorists is whether voters possess the capacity to obtain the knowledge required to contribute to democratic politics. We will examine research that finds that voters irrationally reward presidents when their hometown sports teams win, and other research that suggests voters do a fine job using informational short-cuts to make choices about candidates. Second, we will explore electoral politics. Presidential campaigns today are entirely new enterprises from what they were just a decade ago in the era before new media and big data. We will examine how these new influences shape modern campaign behavior and how long-present factors like the ground game, money, and news media determine how presidents and members of Congress campaign. Finally, we will examine the consequences of elections. Do they really make a difference for policy outcomes?

2. EVALUATION

Attendance and Participation (10%): At each meeting, I will take attendance. If you miss a class, you are responsible for going over the lecture material and asking me any questions you may have. If you are more than fifteen minutes late to a class, you will not get credit for attendance for that day.

Two Response Papers (30%): You will write two 3 to 4 double-spaced page papers that respond to prompts provided by me. You will email these papers to me by 5PM the day before we meet.

Midterm Exam (30%): The midterm exam will be during class time. The exam will be “closed book” and it will cover the material discussed until the exam day. Make-up exams will only be given in cases of
health or family emergencies.

**Final Term Project Presentation (30%)**: During the last week, you will make a 7 to 10 minute presentation based on your term project. You should use presentation software (keynote or powerpoint). Details about the final project are as follow:

- The final project is *Introducing My Congressional District*.

- The presentation should include
  - An introduction. Where is your district? Describe the district’s characteristics that are most relevant for the congressional race. If you are an international student, select a district interesting to you for any reason.
  - The incumbent. Who is the incumbent? Is he or she well-suited to represent the district? What is her background? What is his electoral outlook for the upcoming election. If there is no incumbent, you can describe who the last office holder was and explain why the seat is open.
  - Local issues. Describe the local issues that will play the largest role in the congressional race. Why are these issues important?
  - National issues. Describe the national issues that will be most influential in the congressional race. Explain why you think they will be important.
  - The race. How do you see the race shaping up? Will local or national issues be most relevant? Why?
  - Research question. Based on your research on the district, what testing would you like to do? You might, for example, develop and test different messages to judge their effectiveness in the campaign.
  - A chance for the audience to ask questions.

3. **COURSE OUTLINE**

- Week 1: Introduction

- Week 2: Voters and Participation


• Week 3: Voters and Knowledge


• Week 4: Voters and Partisanship


• Week 5: Patterns of Voting


• Week 6: Economic Voting I

  Response Paper 1 Due Before Class


• Week 7: Economic Voting II


• Week 8: Review and Midterm Exam

• Week 9: Presidential Primaries


• Week 10: Campaigns and Big Data


• Week 11: Congressional Elections

• Week 12: Elections and Representations


• Week 13: Policy Consequences

  – Response Paper 2 Due Before Class


• Week 14: Election Cycles and Economy


• Week 15: Presentations