I. Course Description

This course explores the 2020 general election in the United States. Based in political science theory and evidence about elections, campaigning, and voting, the class will use contemporary literature to explain the context of the 2020 elections and offer explanations about its events as it unfolds. The course begins by studying the 2016 US election as important context, then moves to explain the candidate nomination process. From there, the class investigates the intricacies of campaigning, voter behavior and choice, and wraps up with analytical post-mortem of the election. The course is designed to be grounded in a social science understanding of elections, using 2020 as a case study, to help us understand the role that elections play in democracy.

II. Course Goals

Broadly, the goals of this course are to provide students with foundational knowledge from political science research about the role, value, and process of elections in the United States. Armed with this understanding, students have opportunities to repeatedly practice applying foundational knowledge to current events and everyday civic practice. I am for students to leave the course prepared to be responsible citizens of democracy and learned stewards of its values, conflicts, and practices.

III. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

There are five graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

- 97-100 A+
- 93-96 A
- 90-92 A-
- 87-89 B+
- 83-86 B
- 80-82 B-
- 77-79 C+
- 73-76 C
- 70-72 C-
- 67-69 D+
- 63-66 D
- 60-62 D-
- < 60 F
Quizzes (15%) A weekly reading quiz is available on Blackboard. Quizzes must be submitted by 11:59pm on Fridays. **It is not possible to make up missed quizzes.** You may take each quiz a maximum of twice and your highest score will be kept. When you start a quiz, you must complete it in one hour. After completing a quiz, Blackboard will tell you your score and which questions you got wrong. Correct answers to all questions will be available on Saturdays. The lowest two recorded quiz scores will be excluded from course grade calculations.

Civic Engagement Activities (15%) Ten times during the terms students will be responsible for performing and describing one civic engagement activity. CEAs can be completed in one of two ways. **Option 1:** complete the activity described on Blackboard and upload a document that describes or documents your participation. **Option 2:** Contribute to [Democracy Squad projects via Magnify](https://magnify.gp). Magnify is a public platform designed to help people solve collective problems using the tools of network and social science. Students may contribute to projects already posted in Democracy Squad, or create their own. Document and report your weekly Magnify activity and upload it to your CEA assignment. The activities are designed to help students practice applying lessons from class into real-life situations of politics and government, and to encourage responsible civic political activity. Late assignments will be accepted with a 5% per day late penalty.

Short Essays (10% each) Students will prepare two short essays (800 words maximum, each), which will be due in **weeks 6 and 12.** Essay prompts and instructions will be available on Blackboard. Students must submit original work and provide proper citations, using APSA or Chicago parenthetical, author-date citation style, with a complete bibliography. Students are encouraged to use [Zotero](https://www.zotero.org) to manage references. Late assignments will be accepted with a 5% per day late penalty.

Midterm Exam (25%) There will be one midterm exam in week 9. The exam is due **Friday, October 23 at 11:59pm.** The exam will be a take-home, essay-style exam, which will be submitted on Blackboard. Students are expect to submit original work that is only created by themselves and to follow [Mason’s Honor Code](https://www.gmu.edu/about/government-honor-code). Complete instructions will be available in Blackboard.

Final Group Project (25%) Students will be organized into groups of 4-5 students and will work collaboratively to produce a research poster on an assigned topic. The poster project will provide students the opportunity to use contemporary data or evidence to answer a pertinent question related to the 2020 elections. Posters will be evaluated by group, and each student in the group will receive the same grade. Students will present their work to the class in a synchronous session on **Tuesday, December 15, 1:30pm – 4:15pm.**

**IV. Extra Credit, Missing, and Late Work**

There are NO opportunities for earning extra or bonus credit in this course. Quizzes cannot ever be made up. Civic Engagement Activities and short essays may be submitted late for a 5% per day late penalty. If you are aware that you will miss an exam you must notify the instructor at
least two days prior to the due date or exam date. Make-up exams are conducted at the instructor’s discretion and are granted only in extraordinary circumstances, such as a verified illness (with doctor’s note) or family emergency (be prepared to provide documentation).

V. News, media, and consumption of political information

As a part of this course, it is your responsibility to be well-informed about current events and political news. Synchronous class meetings will include a segment called “What’s happening in politics?” (WHIP), where students will be expected to have information about current events. It is increasingly difficult to learn about political events in a way that is even-handed and non-partisan. Here are some tips about how to consume news in a way that will provide you with the most value:


2. Avoid television news altogether, except on election night.

3. Avoid getting your news exclusively from social media.

4. Avoid news sources that seek to provoke an emotional response. Try to consume news dispassionately. It’s okay to have passion about politics, rights, justice, issues, etc. But try to consume news with a sense of curiosity, rather than an urge to be outraged, touched, or emotive in any sense. Train yourself to read a headline and response with, “Huh, that’s interesting,” rather than automatically clicking forward, like, retweet, etc.

Instructions for access to news sources. As a Mason student, your tuition provides you access to dozens of subscription-only resources through the Mason library. These include many expensive, high quality news sources.

1. Install the Duo Mobile app on your smart phone. For complete instructions on enrolling in Mason’s two-factor authentication service (2FA) see this.


3. Access The Chronicle of Higher Ed and The Economist through the links given here, as they route you through the Libraries’ proxy server.


5. Podcasts are also an excellent way to stay abreast of the news. Many podcasts also have written blog sites. I recommend the following politics and news themed podcasts, which you can find on iTunes, or your favorite podcast service:

   - FiveThirtyEight Politics
   - Vox, The Weeds
   - NPR, Up First
   - NPR, Politics Podcast
   - The Economist Radio
   - The Ezra Klein Show
   - 5 on 45, Brookings
   - Mischief of Faction
   - Slate, Political Gabfest
   - NYT, The Daily
   - Political Research Digest, The Niskanen Center
VI. Resources for Students

College can be a stressful experience. It is normal to sometimes feel overwhelmed, out of place, or, insecure. Self-care strategies are important for maintaining your physical, emotional, and academic health. Developing self-awareness about stress, anxiety, or health issues is an important part of your development and success as a student. The following campus resources are available to you to help you learn to manage the complexities of your college:

- Center for Academic Advising, Retention, and Transitions
- Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics (including sexual misconduct and harassment; Title IX)
- Counseling and Psychological Services
- Covid-19 Information Page from GMU
- Disability Services
- Financial Aid
- International Programs and Services
- Learning Services
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Resources
- Mathematics Tutoring Center
- Military Alliance Program
- Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education
- Online Learning Services
- Safe Return to Campus Plan
- Student Conduct
- Student Emergency Assistance Funding
- Student Health Services
- University Career Services
- University Life
- University Writing Center

VII. Class Policies

A. Class Attendance and Participation. Learning is an active, rather than passive, exercise. To succeed in this class, complete all the activities each week: readings, watching lessons, attending synchronous sessions, quizzes, and activities. Attendance and participation are not credited for points, but students who do not participate may struggle to perform well on graded assessments.

B. Readings. As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is your responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. I will do everything I can to make this task easier for you. You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and take notes on them.

C. Technology. This is a Distance Learning (DL) class. Students must have a laptop or desktop computer and a high-speed internet connection to adequately participate in all aspects of the course. If you have difficulty obtaining adequate technology, or require training for using technology in the course, please contact the instructor. When watching lectures or attending synchronous meeting, do so from a quiet space, and eliminate distractions (electronic and otherwise) from your environment.
D. **Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.** Students in this course will be expected to comply with the George Mason University Honor Code (see [https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/](https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/)). There are three simple guidelines to follow with respect to academic integrity: (1) all work you submit must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the expectations for any assignment, ask for clarification. Any student engaged in any academic misconduct will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment. Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean’s office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else’s work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.

E. **Students with Disabilities.** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the instructor and contact Disability Services at 703.993.2474 or ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

F. **Diversity is a value.** George Mason University values diversity in its learning, research, and civic activities. All members of the Mason community are asked to show respect to one another at all times. The learning environment in this class respects a wide array of viewpoints, and students of all cultural, ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds are welcome. More information about Mason’s policies surrounding diversity can be found at the [Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education (ODIME)](https://ods.gmu.edu). Should you need accommodations related to observing a religious holiday, please contact the instructor. For your reference, a list of major religious holidays can be found here. It is students’ responsibility to communicate with the instructor if religious observations conflict with course requirements.

G. **Student Privacy.** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants students continuous access to educational records upon their request, allows students to amend their record if errors are found, and restricts how and when educational records can be disclosed. Your instructor will not release information about your academic record in this course to anyone without the student’s permission. [More information about FERPA is here](https://ods.gmu.edu).  

H. **Email.** Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information including messages related to this class. **Email etiquette:** An email is a professional correspondence; do not write it as if it is a text message, snap, tweet, or IM. Always use a salutation and sign your name. Consider creating a signature that
automatically inserts your name and basic contact information at the bottom of your emails. Use proper punctuation and grammar.

I. **Dropping or withdrawing.**
   
   August 31  
   Last day to add
   
   September 8  
   Last day to drop (no tuition penalty)
   
   Sept. 9 – 15  
   Drop with 50% tuition liability
   
   Sept. 16 – 28  
   Drop with 100% tuition liability
   
   Sept. 29 – Oct. 28  
   **Selective Withdraw** opportunity (results in “W” grade)

   After October 28 there are no options for withdrawing from the course. If you have concerns about your performance in the course, or you find yourself unable to perform for any reason, you should discuss your concerns with your teaching assistant, professor, advisor, and Assistant Dean (in that order). Students seeking to drop or withdrawal are responsible for doing so on their own in Patriot Web. If you need help or advice, please see your academic advisor (gvip@gmu.edu--Government and International Politics majors, or puad@gmu.edu--Public Administration majors).

VIII. **Course Materials**

Prior to the August 24, materials can only be purchased from Mason Bookstore will online. After school begins, the bookstore will be open, but limiting the number of customers in the store at any one time. Please order your materials from the bookstore’s official website in advance of the start of classes, to ensure delivery prior to classes beginning. The in-store pickup option will be available online just before school starts and students will be able to acquire their orders inside the bookstore. The bookstore will provide a full refund for all Fall 2020 textbooks through Monday, August 31. Those who drop classes will have until Tuesday, September 22, with proof of a schedule change.

*Required books*


*Recommended books*


IX. **Course Schedule and Assignments**

The course is broken into five themes: 2020 Context, nominations, campaigning, voters, and democracy. The following schedule follows a weekly pattern. Weeks begin on Monday. In includes the same general activities each week:

1. Do the readings first.
2. Watch the pre-recorded short video lessons.
3. Join the synchronous meetings Tuesdays and Thursdays.
4. Complete the weekly reading quiz.
5. Complete the weekly Civic Engagement Activity or short essay.
6. Repeat.

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Lessons</th>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>2020 Context: Campaign History</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #4 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong></td>
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<td>Civic Engagement Activity #4 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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<td>1.  C&amp;E, Ch. 3</td>
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<td>2.  <strong>Identity</strong>, Chs. 3-4</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>2020 Context: Campaign finance</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #5 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong></td>
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<td>Civic Engagement Activity #5 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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<td>1.  C&amp;E, Ch. 4</td>
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<td>2.  <strong>Cong</strong>, Ch. 4</td>
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<td>3.  <strong>B&amp;D</strong>, Ch. 2</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Nominations: The process of nominating candidates</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #6 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong></td>
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<td>Short Essay #1 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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<td>1.  C&amp;E, Ch. 6</td>
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<td>2.  <strong>B&amp;D</strong>, Chs. 5 &amp; 9</td>
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<td>3.  <strong>Identity</strong>, Ch. 5</td>
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<td><strong>Week 8</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Oct. 12 – 16  &lt;br&gt; <em>No class on Tuesday this week</em></td>
<td>Campaigning: Strategy and Choice</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #8 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Civic Engagement Activity #7 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; <strong>Reading</strong>  &lt;br&gt; 1. C&amp;E, Chs. 5 &amp; 9  &lt;br&gt; 2. B&amp;D, Chs. 3 &amp; 4  &lt;br&gt; 3. Identity, Ch. 6</td>
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<td><strong>Week 9</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Oct. 19 - 23</td>
<td>Campaigning: Themes and Candidates</td>
<td><strong>MIDTERM EXAM  Due Friday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; <strong>Reading</strong>  &lt;br&gt; 1. C&amp;E, Ch. 8  &lt;br&gt; 2. Cong, Ch. 6</td>
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<td><strong>Week 10</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Oct. 26 - 30</td>
<td>Voters: Organizations</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #9 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Civic Engagement Activity #8 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; <strong>Reading</strong>  &lt;br&gt; 1. C&amp;E, Ch. 7 &amp; 10 &amp; 11  &lt;br&gt; 2. Cong, Ch. 5  &lt;br&gt; 3. B&amp;D, Ch. 8</td>
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<td><strong>Week 11</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Nov. 2 – 6</td>
<td>Voters: Voting</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #10 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; Civic Engagement Activity #9 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong>  &lt;br&gt; <strong>Reading</strong>  &lt;br&gt; 1. C&amp;E, Chs. 12 &amp; 13  &lt;br&gt; 2. Identity, Ch. 7</td>
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<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Elections and Democracy: Reprise</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #11 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong>&lt;br&gt;Short Essay #2 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Reading</strong>&lt;br&gt;1. <em>Identity</em>, Ch. 8&lt;br&gt;2. TBD</td>
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<td>Nov. 9 – 13</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Elections and Democracy: Representati on</td>
<td>Reading Quiz #12 <strong>DUE Friday 11:59pm</strong>&lt;br&gt;Civic Engagement Activity #10 <strong>DUE Sunday 11:59pm</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Reading</strong>&lt;br&gt;1. <em>C&amp;E</em>, Ch. 14&lt;br&gt;2. <em>Cong</em>, Ch. 7&lt;br&gt;3. <em>Identity</em>, Ch. 9</td>
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<td>Nov. 16 – 20</td>
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<td>Nov. 23 – 27</td>
<td><em>Student holidays Nov. 25 - 27</em></td>
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<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Elections and Democracy: Reforms and</td>
<td>(No quizzes, essays, or CEAs this week. Work on group project.)</td>
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<td>Nov. 30 – Dec. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, Dec. 15,</td>
<td>FINAL GROUP PRESENTATIONS</td>
<td>STUDENT GROUPS PRESENT FINAL PROJECTS IN SYNCHRONOUS SESSION, THURSDAY 1:30 – 4:15PM</td>
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