

## PLS 4300 - 01 The 2020 Presidential Election

**Professor:** Lee Hannah, Ph.D.  
**Email:** [lee.hannah@wright.edu](mailto:lee.hannah@wright.edu)  
**Time:** WF 10:10-11:05 AM  
**Location:** Online

**Dates:** August 24 – December 12  
**Office:** 317 Millett Hall  
**Office Hours:** By appointment  
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### GENERAL INFORMATION

#### Course Description

This special-topics seminar focuses on presidential elections with a special focus on the 2020 presidential election. In particular, this course emphasizes political parties' role in governance and elections; the strategic elements of political campaigns; the federalized nature of elections administration; and the determinants of citizens' electoral behavior. We will learn about the peculiarities of presidential elections and use past elections to provide proper context for the 2020 election. While we will follow the big events that break in the 2020 race, we will also spend much of the course discussing the broader theories about campaigns, elections, and political behavior. The course is broken into four units: 1) The Design & Purpose of Elections; 2) The Campaigns and the Candidates; 3) The Electorate; and 4) Post-Election: Making Sense of the Results of the 2020 Election.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate the historical and constitutional origins of the election of the U.S. president.
- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences in the 2020 presidential election to others.
- Examine different theories related to vote choice and the persuasive effects of campaigns.
- Evaluate the strategies the candidates employ to win presidential elections. These include: persuading and mobilizing voters through get-out-the-vote strategies, advertising, candidate and surrogate appearances, and other messaging strategies.

#### Expectations

Students should commit to the following:

- **Attendance:** You are expected to make efforts to actively participate in class on a weekly basis. This will be captured through viewing the course lectures on Panopto and attending live online meetings on Wednesdays.
- **Preparation and Participation:** I expect you to read the assigned material and view the lectures before Wednesday's class and to be able to discuss what you read in class.
- **Respectful Discussion:** We are living in the midst of a very polarizing political era. We will be discussing controversial current events in this course. There will inevitably be divergent opinions, some of them very strong, amongst the class. It is important that you be respectful of your peers and their opinions, lived experiences, and beliefs.
- **Do Not Suffer in Silence:** Please do not suffer in silence throughout the course if you are struggling. Instead, let me know - as soon as possible - what things are not making sense and we can work it out. If you are having a problem of any kind in the course, please talk to me about it as soon as possible.
- **Academic Honesty:** All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Please consult the [Code of Student Conduct](#) for academic integrity.
- **COVID-19 Disclaimer:** Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a number of

challenges that we would have thought were unthinkable a few months ago. I understand how the pandemic may affect your ability to focus, and how it might impact you directly – either through job loss and new financial pressures or through you or a loved one contracting the virus. I will do everything in my power to work with you if unforeseen circumstances occur – please just let me know *within a reasonable time frame* so that we can devise a plan. At the same time, I or my loved ones could be impacted by the coronavirus, which may lead to some adjustments in the schedule. I think kindness and patience can go a long way during this time for all of us.

### Course setup

The class will have a mix of synchronous and asynchronous components.

1. Lecture videos will be posted on Monday of each week (~1-2 hours).
2. Live, online class (required) will be held on Wednesdays at 10:10 AM. (session will be recorded and posted)
3. Live, online class (optional) will be held on Fridays at 10:10 AM. (session will be recorded and posted)

### About Your Instructor

I am an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Wright State University. I grew up in Virginia and graduated from Virginia Tech with a B.A. in History and M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. I was a high school social science teacher before going back to graduate school (a year-long stint at the University of Alabama followed by Penn State). I joined the department in the fall of 2015 after completing my Ph.D. at Penn State University. Yes, I have been able to attend a lot of good college football games. I have published research in two key areas: the adoption and development of marijuana policies in the states and how political issues diffuse into secondary education curricula and pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> I have recently started a new research project that examines local political parties and their online presence and role in mobilization, activism, and elections.

I live in Vandalia with my wife (Jillian), two-year-old son (Henry), 4 cats (Amelia, Orville, Poppy, Tilly) and a dog (June). I'm a big sports fan (NFL, NBA, CFB, and tennis), and I enjoy music and guitar (you're probably going to see a lot of guitar ads as we talk about articles in the class). And since I've received one too many emails to "Ms./Mr./Dr. Lee," please note that my first name is "Lee" and last name is "Hannah". I prefer to be called Dr. Hannah or Professor Hannah.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Assignments

You will be evaluated in this course based on the following assignments (Further Information and Rubrics Available on Pilot):

- 1) **Podcast/Documentary Review** (20% of final grade) The podcast/documentary review gives students an opportunity to listen to and respond to a podcast/documentary that is related to course content.
- 2) **Prediction Memo** (30% of final grade) Students will apply the theories that we have learned in class to writing their own paper with analysis and prediction of how the election will turn out. This paper will include a closer analysis of a swing state.
- 3) **Final Project** (30% of final grade) Students will have an option to write a final paper that explores a specific question related to the 2020 election or create a podcast (solo or with up to 2 peers) that reflects on key aspects of the 2020 election.

<sup>1</sup> If you're interested, you can access my publications on my [Google Scholar](#) page.

- 4) **Participation and Attendance** (20% of final grade) You are expected to make efforts to actively participate in class on a weekly basis. This will be captured through viewing the course lectures on Panopto and attending live online meetings on Wednesdays. I will update your participation score on a weekly basis based on Panopto data and Wednesday attendance.

### Readings

The readings for the course are listed for each week on the syllabus. There is no assigned text for the course. You should be able to click on the embedded links in the syllabus to either go to the library webpage (where you can download a PDF of the reading) or to an external website. I have also set up folders on Pilot for each week that include links and files. I have also included PDFs on Pilot for articles that come from gated sources like the *Wall Street Journal* or *New York Times* or from chapters out of books.

### Integrated Writing Course

PLS 4300 is designated as an “Integrated Writing” (IW) course, designed to meet WSU guidelines for developing effective writing skills. Students will be expected to produce writing that:

- 1) Demonstrates their understanding of course content,
- 2) Is appropriate for the audience and purpose of a particular writing task,
- 3) Demonstrates degree of mastery of disciplinary writing conventions appropriate to the course (including documentation conventions), and
- 4) Shows competency in standard American English.

Effective writing counts toward the final course grade. Students will meet IW requirements through the prediction memo, the midterm exam, and the final paper. Students should pay careful attention to grammar, mechanics, and clarity of prose in completing the course assignments.<sup>2</sup>

## University Policies & Resources

### Mental Health Resources

Wright State University is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety and stress, substance abuse problems, and depression, directly impacts students’ academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact the Counseling and Wellness Services at Wright State located in Student Union 053: <https://www.wright.edu/student-affairs/health-and-wellness/counseling-and-wellness>

### Title IX

Wright State University is committed to providing an educational environment that ensures all students can learn and live together with a sense of personal safety and mutual respect. Members of the Wright State University community, guests and visitors have the right to be free from all forms of sex and gender-based harassment and discrimination. Under its policy (as well as the federal law Title IX), Wright State University has defined categories of sex and gender-based discrimination which are prohibited. These include, but are not limited to, sexual misconduct, examples of which can include acts of sexual violence, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, relationship violence (including domestic violence and dating violence), and stalking. All members of the campus community, guests, and visitors are protected by this policy regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wright.edu/academic-affairs/programs/writing-across-the-curriculum/requirements>

university has jurisdiction over all acts of sexual misconduct involving members of the campus community, no matter where they occur, whether on or off campus. For more information on the policy, definitions, your rights, reporting options and resources, please visit <http://www.wright.edu/titleix>.

### **Academic Honesty**

All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Please consult the Code of Student Conduct for questions about academic integrity.

### **Disability**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated. It is your responsibility to notify me during the first week of the semester if such accommodations are needed. If you have questions about this, contact the Office of Disability Services at 937-775-5680 or [disability\\_services@wright.edu](mailto:disability_services@wright.edu).

The course schedule starts on the next page.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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### Unit I: The Design & Purpose of Elections

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#### **August 24 – Course Introduction: The Basics & Party Conventions**

Monday, August 24 – Thursday, August 27 – Republican National Convention

##### Required Readings

1. Sides, John, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossman, and Keena Lipsitz. (2018). "Introduction." Chapter 1 in *Campaigns and Elections*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. W.W. Norton and Company.
2. Azari, Julia. (17 August 2020). "When Conventions Have Mattered." *FiveThirtyEight*. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Malone, Clare. (2019 May 6). "How CNN's Town Hall Industrial Complex is Shaping the 2020 Race." *FiveThirtyEight*. [\[LINK\]](#)
4. Gelman, Andrew and Julia Azari. (2017). "19 Things We Learned from the 2016 Election." *Statistics and Public Policy* 4(1): 1-10. [\[LINK\]](#)

#### **August 31 – The Parties & Electoral Rules: The Nomination Process**

##### Required Readings

1. U.S Constitution Article I, Sections 1-5 and Article II, Section 1 [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Hamilton, Alexander or James Madison. (1788 February 8). Federalist #52. *The Federalist Papers*. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Kamarck, Elaine C. (2016). "The Good Old Days? When Parties Controlled Nominations and Primaries Were to be Avoided at All Costs" Ch. 1 in *Primary Politics: Everything You Need to Know About How America Nominates Its Presidential Candidates*. Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C.
4. Hershey, Marjorie R. "What Are Political Parties?" *Party Politics in America*, 17<sup>th</sup> Ed. Routledge.
5. Drutman, Lee. (2020 January 2). "America Is Now the Divided Republic the Framers Feared." *The Atlantic*. [\[LINK\]](#)
6. Montellaro, Zach and Elena Schneider. (2020 August 21). "Inside the Democratic Party's plan to prevent vote-by-mail disaster." *Politico*. [\[LINK\]](#)

##### Recommended Reading

1. Ofuso, George Kwafu. (2019). "Do Fairer Elections Increase the Responsiveness of Politicians?" *American Political Science Review* 113(4): 963-979. [\[LINK\]](#)

#### **September 7 – Electoral Rules: The Electoral College & Local Control**

##### Required Readings

1. Hamilton, Alexander. (1788 March 14). "No. 68: The Mode of Electing the President" *The Federalist Papers* #68. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Shaw, Daron. (2006). "The Truth About Electoral College Strategies." Ch. 3 in *The Race to 270: The Electoral College and the Campaign Strategies of 2000 and 2004*. (pp. 41-60). The University of Chicago Press.
3. Springer, Melanie J. 2014. "Where are the High Turnout States?" Ch. 5 in *How the States Shaped the Nation: American Electoral Institutions and Voter Turnout, 1920-2000*. University of Chicago Press pp. 115-136.
4. Fessler, Pam. (2020 April 10). "Coronavirus May Reshape Who Votes and How in the 2020 Election." *NPR*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Podcast

1. “Should the Electoral College be Abolished.” *Politics in Question*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Recommended Reading

1. Gimpel, James G., Karen M. Kauffmann, and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz. 2007. “Battleground States versus Blackout States: The Behavioral Implications of Modern Presidential Campaigns.” *Journal of Politics*, 69(3): 786-797. [\[LINK\]](#)

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*Unit II: The Campaigns & the Candidates*

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**September 14 - The Evolution of Campaigns**Required Readings

1. Sides, John, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossman, and Keena Lipsitz. (2018). “The Transformation of American Campaigns.” Chapter 3 in *Campaigns and Elections, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* W.W. Norton and Company.
2. Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. (2017). “How Trump lost and won.” *Journal of Democracy* 28(2): 34-44. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Masket, Seth. (2020 August 20). “How Clinton’s Loss Paved the Way for Biden.” *FiveThirtyEight*. [\[LINK\]](#)
4. Thompson, Alex. (2020 August 14). “‘The President Was Not Encouraging’: What Obama Really Thought About Biden.” *Politico*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Podcast

1. “Maverick: Mark McKinnon.” *Campaign Secrets with Matt Wyatt*. [\[LINK\]](#)

Recommended Reading

1. Jacobson, Gary C. (2015). “How Do Campaigns Matter?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18: 31-47.

**September 21 – Do Campaigns Matter?**

**\* Podcast/Documentary review due on Friday, September 25 at 11:59 PM.**

Required Readings

1. Devine, Christopher J. (2018). “What if Hillary Clinton Had Gone to Wisconsin? Presidential Campaign Visits and Vote Choice in the 2016 Election.” *The Forum* 16(2): 211-234. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Thompson, Alex. (2020 August 4). “Trump’s campaign knocks on a million doors a week. Biden’s knocks on zero.” *Politico*. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Feltus, William J., Kenneth M. Goldstein, and Matthew Dallek. (2018). “Political Math: How Campaigns Matter.” Ch. 2 in *Inside Campaigns: Elections through the Eyes of Political Professionals, 2nd Edition*. CQ Press.

Recommended Reading

1. Kalla, Joshua L. and David E. Broockman. (2018). “The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 112(1): 148-166. [\[LINK\]](#)

Recommended Documentary

1. “The Choice 2020: Trump v. Biden.” *PBS Frontline*. [\[LINK\]](#) (Set to air on September 22)

## September 28 – Campaign Events: Debates

Tuesday, September 29 – First presidential debate from Cleveland, OH.

### Required Readings

1. Schroeder, Alan. 2008. "The Predebate Debate." Chapter 2 of *Presidential Debates: Fifty Years of High-Risk TV, 2nd Edition*. Columbia University Press.
2. Halperin, Mark and John Heilemann. 2013. "Mile-High Meltdown" and "Intervention." Chapters 21 and 22 in *Double Down: Game Change 2012*. (pp.412-450.) New York: Penguin.
3. Winneg, Kenneth and Kathleen H. Jamieson. (2017). "Learning from the 2016 U.S. General Election Presidential Debates." *American Behavioral Scientist* 61(4): 362-378. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Recommended Reading

1. Prior, Markus. (2012). "Who watches [US] presidential debates? Measurement problems in campaign effects research." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(2): 350-363. [\[LINK\]](#)

## October 5 – The Vice Presidents

Wednesday, October 7 – Vice presidential debate from Salt Lake City, UT at 9:00 PM

### Required Readings

1. Devine, Christopher J. and Kyle C. Kopko. (2020). "Do Running Mates Matter?" Ch. 1 in *Do Running Mates Matter? The Influence of Vice Presidential Candidates in Presidential Elections*, University of Kansas Press. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Sigelman, Lee and Paul J. Wahlbeck. 1997. "The "Veepstakes": Strategic Choice in Presidential Running Mate Selection." *American Political Science Review*, 91(4): 855-864. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Podcast

1. "Obama's Staff Reveals How a Vice President is Selected." *Crooked Media*. [\[LINK\]](#)

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### *Unit III: The Electorate*

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## October 12 – Group Identities in the 2020 Election

Thursday, October 15 – Second presidential debate from Miami, FL.

### Required Readings

1. Porter, Eduardo. (2020 January 27). "How the G.O.P. Became the Party of the Left Behind." *New York Times*. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Monnat, Shannon M., and David L. Brown. (2017). "More than a Rural Revolt: Landscapes of Despair and the 2016 Presidential Election." *Journal of Rural Studies* 55 (2017): 227-236. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Weiss, Joanna. (2020 July 6). "What the Lincoln Project Ad Makers Get About Voters (and What Dems Don't)." *Politico*. [\[LINK\]](#)
4. Dittmar, Kelly. (2020 July 7). "The Masculinity Trap in Electoral Politics." *Center for American Women and Politics*. [\[LINK\]](#)
5. White, Ismail K. and Chryl N. Laird. (2020 February 11). "Why Black Voters Stick with Democrats." *The Atlantic*. [\[LINK\]](#)
6. McAdam, Doug and Sidney Tarrow. (2010). "Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements." *Perspectives on Politics* 8(2): 529-542. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Recommended Reading

1. White, Ismail, Chryl N. Laird, and Troy D. Allen. (2014). "Selling Out? The Politics of Navigating Conflicts between Racial Group Interest and Self-Interest." *American Political Science Review* 108(4): 783-800. [\[LINK\]](#)

## October 19 – Elections and the Information Environment

Thursday, October 22 – Third presidential debate from Nashville, TN.

### Required Readings

1. LaFrance, Adreienne. (2020 June). “The Prophecies of Q.” *The Atlantic*. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Young, Dannagal G. and Shannon C. McGregor. (2020 February 14). “Mass propaganda used to be difficult, but Facebook made it easy.” The Monkey Cage Blog at the *Washington Post*. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. “Showdown at the Oasis” and “Models and the Matrix.” Chapters 8 and 9 in *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns* (pp. 212-271). New York: Crown Publishers.
4. Issenberg, Sasha. (2012 December 19). “How Obama’s Team Used Big Data to Rally Voters.” *MIT Technology Review*. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Podcast

1. “The Victory Lab: Sasha Issenberg.” *Campaign Secrets with Matt Wyatt*. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Documentary

1. “United States of Conspiracy.” *PBS Frontline* [\[LINK\]](#)

## October 26 – Hacking the Electorate: Campaign Analytics

**\* Prediction memo due on Friday, October 30 at 11:59 PM.**

### Required Readings

1. Lapowsky, Iffie. (2019 April 2). “Inside the Democrats’ Plan to Fix Their Crumbling Data Operation.” *Wired*. [\[LINK\]](#)
2. Rivers, Douglas and Benjamin Lauderdale. (2016 November 1). “Beware the phantom swings: Why dramatic bounces in the polls aren’t always what they seem.” *YouGov*. [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Arthur, Rob. (2020 February 4). “Pollsters got it wrong in the 2016 election. Now they want another shot.” *MIT Technology Review*. [\[LINK\]](#)
4. Edwards, Levy, Ariel. (2018 November 4). “Here’s How Polling Has Changed Since 2016.” *Huffington Post*. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Podcast

1. “The Uncertain Science of Election Polling.” *NPR On Point Radio*. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Recommended Documentary

1. “The Facebook Dilemma.” *PBS Frontline*. [\[LINK\]](#)

## November 2 – The Election

**\*Live meeting on Monday and Wednesday this week.<sup>3</sup>**

Readings: TBA (Readings will be selected closer the election)

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<sup>3</sup> Classes will be cancelled in the event of an [asteroid strike](#).



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*Unit IV: Post-Election: Making Sense of the Results of the 2020 Election*

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**November 9 – The 2020 Election Results**

\*Meeting on Monday this week due to Veteran’s Day on November 11.

Readings: TBA (Readings will be selected after the election)

**November 16 – Lessons Learned from the 2020 Election and Campaign Finance Reform**

Special Guest: Jessica Church, Deputy Political Director at End Citizens United

Required Readings (Additional readings may be assigned after the election)

1. Sides, John, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossman, and Keena Lipsitz. 2018. “Financing Campaigns.” Chapter 4 in *Campaigns and Elections, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* W.W. Norton and Company.

**November 23 – Thanksgiving Week**

\* Recitation Meeting on Monday this week due to Thanksgiving holiday. No new materials

**November 30 – Assessing American Presidential Elections and Suggestions for Reform**

Required Readings (Additional readings may be assigned after the election)

1. Streb, Matthew J. 2016. “The Electoral College.” Chapter 9 in *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy, Third Edition.* (pp. 160-180.). New York: Routledge.
2. Skelley, Geoffrey. (2019 April 2). “Abolishing the Electoral College Used to be a Bipartisan Position. Not Anymore.” *FiveThirtyEight*. [[LINK](#)]
3. Gorton, William A. (2016). “Manipulating Citizens: How Political Campaigns’ Use of Behavioral Social Science Harms Democracy.” *New Political Science* 38(1): 61-80. [[LINK](#)]

**December 7 – Exam Week**

\* **Final project due on Wednesday, December 9 at 12:00 PM**