Donald Trump—not that long ago, who would have ever thought that the GOP standard bearer for election year 2016 would be “The Trump?” What ever happened to the other Republicans seeking the presidential nomination? Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio and many (too many) others tossed their hats into the ring and emerged empty handed or should I say, empty delegated? The Democrats did it differently. From the beginning Hillary Clinton was the heir(ess) apparent and despite the “burn” for Bernie it was not to be. So thus it is. In a few short weeks millions of Americans including the members of this class will cast their votes for the next chief executive. What an unbelievable election season this has been and continues to be! How to explain it all, how it happened the way it did, and what it all will mean for the American political party system, the American nation and the broader global scene? These are big questions with not very many answers. Some among you have suggested that this election cycle is business as usual, a normal election year. That simply is not true!

In November either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton will emerge as the next leader of the United States and unquestionably will also be a major player on the larger world stage. Who of the two major political parties nominees of the major parties that will be to the one to occupy the Oval Office? It may at this point seem easy for many to predict the probable winner of the contest but politics are always providing us with the unexpected. We know that fact well from having followed the steps so far in this election journey that have brought us to this point of having selected the nominees. Our task is now to figure it all out as we examine the process of presidential campaigns as that process takes place day by day and week by week in the time we are together. Even by the end of this term we are not likely to have complete answers to all of our questions. Our focus will be upon the campaign itself. The issues and events as well as the strategies and methods employed by those seeking the Oval Office will provide a “real time” laboratory for us as we do our work. This quadrennial exercise in participatory democracy allows us the unusual opportunity to be front seat observers as well as participants regarding every word or action leading up to the November decision. I cannot help but stress that as first time voters who are highly intelligent you are fortunate to be in a class of this nature at this time in your life participating for the first time in the drama of American politics. What a drama it has been and continues to be.

Herein though, are the upside and the downside of it all. This course requires that students and the course instructor be ready for a considerable amount of flexibility and adaptability. At the same time the course must have structure. We will study politics, especially elections and voter behavior within a theoretical framework. The events of the political season will be in constant motion, changing the actors and the script in the drama almost on a daily basis. Maintaining flexibility is an upside aspect of the course as we actively engage in following current events and simultaneously attempt to figure out what all the action means in the context of the American democratic process. It will be a challenge and we will do our best to measure the distance from what might be expected to happen in politics to what actually does happen. My goal for the course is twofold. The course must be both instructive and enjoyable as it combines theory and practice.
The limited size of the class allows a high degree of student participation and interaction. Both are major elements of the course and are indispensable to the success of our collective endeavor. The course instructor will be able to engage more regularly with the class members than might be possible in other larger classes and in other settings. Students and the instructor and will benefit significantly from the opportunity.

Perhaps it is needless to stress the point, but it should be obvious that in order for this class to work well, we must all adhere to attitudes of tolerance and to be willing to engage in honest dialog. That tolerance must be extended even to those having clearly incorrect opinions (meaning opinions differing from our own). Your individual views (and mine as well) are quite naturally correct and our information is certainly vastly superior to those of others. Nonetheless, restraint and civility are a necessity. It will require a high degree of sophisticated maturity to endure the association of those in the class who possess neither the wisdom nor the insight that we possess. We will make every effort to practice some restraint but not so much that we do not generate energy and passion in our work and in our discussions. As your course instructor, I freely admit that the foregoing words are also directed at me. I too, will endeavor to be fair minded and objective maintaining at all times a completely professional demeanor.

Course Requirements

Given the nature of this course, our class will not always be confined to the classroom. This setup will require you to make adjustments for some varied meeting times. For example, several presidential debates will take place during the term. How many and when those debates will take place are decisions yet to be made. Negotiations are underway and it’s anybody’s guess whether or not the candidates and their organizations will be able to reach meaningful agreement. We will watch the debates together, likely in the Johns Hall common room. You will be expected to be an eager participant on those occasions. Other events will merit our attention and I will keep you informed. Please know that if your time is required for some events I will compensate you by foregoing a regularly scheduled class meeting when that is possible. Any function, including debates, will require you to write an intelligent analysis of what you have heard and must be submitted within a week of the event.

There are two required texts in the course. These books will help you to integrate the actualities you will be experiencing within the theoretical and historical contexts of American politics.

The required readings are as follows:

**A History of American Elections From George Washington to Barack Obama**
Marc Schulman

**Presidential Elections**
Nelson Polsby

**New York Times**

In addition to the above books and the newspaper, additional reading will be assigned by the instructor. As events unfold during the campaign it will be imperative to study and analyze those events in the context of the materials presented through the reading and in class discussions, theories that attempt to
explain the workings of our political system and the structure of the American political process. As Frank Lloyd Wright, renowned American architect, would likely express the question, does form follow function or would it be more likely that there is possibly very little correlation in the rough and tumble realities of American politics to any recognized theories and ideals of American democracy?

I will provide you articles and references to articles throughout the election process. These articles will include commentaries regarding the developments taking place concerning candidates, issues and the electoral process itself. Your written reports will take many forms. Reaction papers much like op-ed pieces based upon critical analysis and supported with knowledge gained by your research efforts will demonstrate the value of the participant-observer approach that is a major part of the focus of the course.

Some of you will choose to work during the semester for a candidate or party organization. If so, you will maintain a careful record of your activities presenting critical analyses and reflections concerning your experience. Inasmuch as this course is a writing course, you will carefully construct you reports and papers. To that end we will work with our general library with Professor Fairburn in the library so that your skills will be well honed, producing high quality results. We will make arrangements to facilitate that experience.

Each student will submit a research paper concerning some facet of the 2016 election. The topic of the research paper may center on a candidate, a campaign issue or upon a particular part of the election process. I will make every effort to work with you in the selection of a topic. You will be instructed as to the appropriate format for your paper as the topic you select may suggest the form that will best suit your chosen topic. Topic selection will be made by September 26th after consultation with the course instructor.

Course grading:

Debates and other event reports  20%
Class participation  20%
Midterm (October 7th)  20%
Research Paper  20%
Final Exam (December 12th 8:30 A.M.)  20%

100%