

## **MEJO 490: Seminar in Undergraduate Research in Political Communication**

Mondays 2:00-4:45pm

Note: Because we have so many instructional contact hours in Iowa, we will not meet every week (See Schedule on last page)

Room: 340A

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**Hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30pm-2:30pm

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and by appointment

### **Course Goals**

The purpose of this course is to involve undergraduate students in the conduct of supervised research related to political communication during the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. This research will take shape around the 2020 Iowa Democratic Caucuses. This course will be organized around training for this research project, data analysis from the Iowa trip, and further analyses both quantitative and qualitative of campaign communications during the 2020 presidential cycle. Students will analyze how social identity appeals take shape on the ground through the work of candidates and campaigns during the 2020 Iowa caucuses. Students participating in this research project will complete certification in human subjects research through the UNC Institutional Review Board and receive training in qualitative field research methods. Students will attend political events and rallies, document campaign social media strategies, observe the workings of field offices, and conduct interviews with campaign staffers and citizens, while systematically documenting their experiences. Students will then engage in analyzing the data and work on additional analyses of social media content from the 2020 presidential election.

### **Required Text and Readings**

In addition to readings available on Sakai, there is one required book for this class: John Sides, Michael Tesler & Lynn Vavreck. *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

### **Sakai**

Other than this syllabus, important information can be found on Sakai. The UNC Sakai service can be found at <http://sakai.unc.edu>. Updates will be frequent, so check back often for important course information. You are responsible for any course changes that may be made on Sakai, including changes to the syllabus or assignments.

### **Class E-Mail**

**Check your school email.** You are responsible for any course communications we send through email.

## **Extra Credit**

It's unlikely you will receive many, if any, extra credit opportunities in this course. In the rare event that they occur, they will be class wide, so don't ask for individual extra credit assignments.

## **Devices**

People's heads buried in their laptops and other digital devices diminishes classroom discussion. Because of this, we all have to digital detox a bit, so no laptops or mobile phones in class unless otherwise noted by the instructors.

## **Special Accommodations**

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/>

## **Seeking Help**

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, an illness, etc.

## **Honor Code**

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

## **Diversity**

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2017-2018 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

## **Accreditation**

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on:

- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.

### Grades

Class Participation	150
Assignments	250
Final Presentation and Project	600
	<b>1000</b>

### GRADING SCALE

A = 93.0-100%	C+ = 78.0-79.99%	F = <60.0%
A- = 90-92.99%	C = 73.0-77.99%	
B+ = 88.0-89.99%	C- = 70-72.99%	
B = 83.0-87.99%	D+ = 68.0-69.99%	
B- = 80-82.99%	D = 60.0-67.99%	

### Participation

This course is premised on active discussion. You are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss them. There is a meaningful reading load in the course, especially early in the semester, but it comes in lieu of other assignments. In addition, you are expected to be following the daily political media of whatever stripe. This course is also premised on an Iowa Caucus trip marked by numerous visits and observations. You are required to participate in all of these, and be attentive, respectful, engaged and professional in all class activities. Doing “nothing wrong” does not equate to an “A” in participation. Instead, you need to “earn” an “A” on participation, just like all other assignments.

Unless otherwise noted on the syllabus, each week we meet you are responsible for posting *one* response to the readings on the Sakai forum. This should be in the range of about 250 words – so a meaningful comment. These comments are due by 10pm the night before class.

### Assignments

*Field Observations and Interview Notes (125 Points)*

Assignments for this class are designed to produce social science research data. As such, the primary things that you produce for this class – field observations and interview data – will form the basis for a qualitative study of political communication during the 2020 Democratic primaries.

During our visit to Iowa, in groups you will conduct daily field observations of election-related events that you will write up individually *at the conclusion of each day* in the style of ethnographic field notes and also document through either photographs or videos. We will talk more about this assignment in class, and an additional rubric may be provided. Field observations must be submitted in written form with supplementary evidence. We will discuss the format in class.

You will also be conducting interviews in groups with voters in Iowa during our visit. These interviews will be audio recorded and we will produce transcripts after the caucuses.

In groups, you will present your documentary evidence to the class in a presentation that will last about 8 minutes after we return from the caucuses. We will discuss this assignment more in person.

Outside of the field observations (both written and multimedia) and interview data that you produce for this research project, you are free to produce public-facing work for your own purposes such as photographs and videos of public events. You are also welcome to independently conduct journalistic interviews for your portfolio.

### *Content Analysis Assignment (125 Points)*

After we wrap up our trip and work in Iowa, the second half of the semester will build upon this qualitative data with quantitative insights from a content analysis. The goal is to examine content from campaigns – or similar – to look at how campaigns or media discuss issues of politics and identity.

Students will be expected to:

- Build upon an existing code sheet;
- Work through coding pre-tests for reliability;
- Do final coding;
- Offer a summary of findings.

### **Final Project**

For your final class project, you will combine your qualitative experiences with your quantitative data to analyze some aspect of the 2020 primary contest. You can focus on a particular campaign, a political party, or examine a specific group of voters through the lens of political and social identity, campaign strategy, or electoral outcomes. Analyses must incorporate some form of media (whether it is social media posts, digital political ads, or television ads more generally), which can also be paired with analysis of things such as field campaigning or

candidate rhetoric.

You will be asked to give insights, takeaways, and/or strategic recommendations. There is considerable flexibility with this assignment, and what you produce should fit with your own career interests. For example, if you are interested in working on campaigns or in communications for political organizations, you can write an analysis of a candidate's media and digital strategy that includes what groups the campaign likely was appealing to and the content of those messages. If you desire to become a journalist, you can produce a long form piece of journalism about what the candidates are doing on social media or in their advertising, and how that reveals strategy, all through the lens of what is important for the public to know.

Broadly, your analysis should have the following elements:

- A stated problem or issue your analysis is attempting to examine;
- A qualitative analysis that answers that problem, based on your findings from Iowa and elsewhere;
- A quantitative analysis that answers that problem, based on your findings throughout the primary season;
- A discussion of the topic of identity (this may be embedded throughout);
- A detailed analysis of how these findings apply to a specific audience or audiences;
- A discussion of your findings about media content, as it relates to your project (be it the content of the campaign, the content of competing campaigns, the content of news coverage, and/or other relevant content);
- A discussion and conclusion that provide meaningful insights, recommendations and/or lessons from this election cycle.

You will be asked for informal updates throughout the second half of the semester, and you will give a 10-minute presentation during our final block of time. **If you're doing this in a group** or with a peer, these should last 15 minutes. Additional rubrics may be provided.

### **2020 Spring Schedule:**

#### **January 13:**

Topic and Discussion: Intro; IRB; Overview of Iowa Caucuses, the 2020 Election, and our research project you will be participating in.

Due: Sakai Post 10pm the Night Before Class

1. John Sides, Michael Tesler & Lynn Vavreck. Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. Read at least the first three chapters before class – you will be expected to have completed the book before we go to Iowa.
2. *How do the Democratic and Republican caucuses work in Iowa and how they are different than a primary?*, Des Moines Register, <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2019/08/30/iowa-caucus-how-democratic-republican-caucuses-work-differences-presidential-preferences-primary/2164118001/>

### **January 27:**

Topic and Discussion: Field Notes, Observations & Interviewing; Analysis of Previous Iowa Caucuses Data

Due: Sakai Post 10pm the Night Before Class

1. Robert S. Weiss, *Learning From Strangers*, Chapters One and Four (available on Sakai).
2. Robert M. Emerson. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chapters One, Two, and Six* (On Sakai)  
(2nd Edition). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2001;
3. Do your own analysis of the last few Dem Iowa Caucuses – This could include previous polling (available on Real Clear Politics or Wikipedia), or actual results by county (available on Wikipedia, Politico, the NYT or the Iowa Board of Elections)

### **January 30-February 4:**

Topic and Discussion: Iowa Caucus or Bust: Trip to Iowa, Field Notes, Interviews & Observations

Due: Come prepared to take field notes and conduct interviews! Field notes from your observations should be uploaded to Sakai at the end of each night or the following morning before new research begins. Interview audio recordings and notes should be uploaded after the conclusion of the field portion of the day. Don't forget your chargers. Don't miss your flight!

Due: Before you arrive, finish *Identity Crisis* and the following two articles for background context on our research project in Iowa:

1. Kreiss, D., R. Lawrence, and S. McGregor. (In press). "Political Identity-Ownership: Symbolic Contests to Represent Members of the Public." Special issue of *Social Media & Society*. (On Sakai)
2. Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. "The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129-146. (On Sakai)

### **February 10:**

Topic and Discussion: Iowa Trip Debrief; Identity and Politics; Discuss Implications for NH

**Due: At least a two-page, single spaced analytical memo based on field and interview notes where you discuss the larger themes that emerged from your observations and interviews and reflect on your experiences conducting this research. See the Emerson text for more details.**

1. **Do 8-Minute Presentations of your Caucus Findings**
2. Achen, Christopher, and Larry Bartels. "Democracy for realists: Holding up a mirror to the electorate." *Juncture* 22, no. 4 (2016): 269-275.
3. Walsh, Katherine Cramer. "Putting inequality in its place: Rural consciousness and the power of perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 517-532.

### **February 24:**

Topic and Discussion: New Hampshire and Nevada Debrief; Content Analysis

Due: Sakai Post 10pm the Night Before Class; **Find a peer and begin your reliability coding.**

1. Do your own analysis of the results from the New Hampshire primary and the Nevada Caucus; Compare these with your findings from Iowa; Be prepared to apply these to South Carolina
2. Sjøvaag, H., & Stavelin, E. (2012). Web media and the quantitative content analysis: Methodological challenges in measuring online news content. *Convergence*, 18(2), 215-229.
3. Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.
4. Franzosi, R. (2008). Content analysis: Objective, systematic, and quantitative description of content. *Content analysis*, 1(1), 21-49.
5. Submit your Field Notes and Observation Assignment; Present Your Findings in Class (Come prepared with your Presentation)

**March 16:** Super Tuesday Debrief; Discuss your Content Analysis Findings So Far; Ads and campaigns; Pronominalization of politics

Topic and Discussion: Continue Content Analysis Discussion; Identity Cont'd

Due: Sakai Post 10pm the Night Before Class

1. Do your own analysis of the results from South Carolina, Super Tuesday and the results from our last class; Compare these with your findings from earlier in the semester
2. **Have your reliability coding COMPLETE and approved by now. Note: This may take several rounds. There are weeks between this and the previous classes. So, start early.**
3. Bennett, W. L. (2012). The personalization of politics: Political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 644(1), 20-39.
4. Amber Phillips, 13 Ads that define these midterm elections, *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/10/12/ads-that-define-these-midterm-elections/>

**March 30:** We are not unique – examinations of media, politics and identity from abroad;

Topic and Discussion: Continue Content Analysis Discussion; Identity Cont'd

Due: Sakai Post 10pm the Night Before Class

1. Submit your Secondary, Historical and Content Analysis Assignment; Present Your Findings in Class (Come Prepared with your Presentation)
2. Adam Henshall, How social media and big data shaped the Brexit campaign strategy, *Business2Community*, <https://www.business2community.com/social-data/social-media-big-data-shaped-brexit-campaign-strategy-01770554>
3. Helen Lewis, Brexit and the failure of journalism, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/brexit-journalism-failure/600580/>
4. David Deacon, David Smith & Dominic Wring, UK Election 2019: is Brexit dominating the media campaign?, <http://theconversation.com/uk-election-2019-is-brexit-dominating-the-media-campaign-127629>

5. Shamni Pande, Just the right image, *Business Today*,  
<https://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/case-study/case-study-strategy-tactics-behind-creation-of-brand-narendra-modi/story/206321.html>

**April 13:**

Topic and Discussion: Final project progress; End of primary season analysis; Minorities and social movements; Closing thoughts on identity and politics

Due: Sakai Post 10pm the Night Before Class

1. **Submit Content Analysis Findings; Present Your Group Findings From Content Analysis**
2. Be prepared to discuss the election results, media coverage and media strategies of campaigns since the last class;
3. Andrews, K. T., & Caren, N. (2010). Making the news: Movement organizations, media attention, and the public agenda. *American Sociological Review*, 75(6), 841-866.
4. Cottle, S. (2008). Reporting demonstrations: The changing media politics of dissent. *Media, Culture & Society*, 30(6), 853-872.
5. Amy Chua, How America's identity politics went from inclusion to division, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/01/how-americas-identity-politics-went-from-inclusion-to-division>
6. Shamira Ibrahim, Kamala Harris and the fallibility of identity politics, Vox, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/12/5/20995569/kamala-harris-identity-politics>

**May 5:** Final Exam Meeting – 8:00-11:00am

Topic and Discussion: Final presentations; closing thoughts

Due: Final Projects (at the start of class) and Presentations