PS 319 - Politics and the Internet

T. L. Towner, Assistant Professor
Office: VAR 426
Office Hours: TR 12:00-1:00pm,
T 3:00-4:00pm or by appointment
Phone: (248) 370-2351
Email: towner@oakland.edu
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/proftowner

Course Description
The Internet and its various outlets, such as email, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube, represent a significant change in the information environment. This course will investigate the Internet’s influence on democracy, politics and elections, including the role and potential of e-government, social capital and political participation, campaigning online, knowledge acquisition, the “digital divide,” and new structures for collective action. We will also probe specific technological features associated with the 2008 presidential election, often dubbed the “Web 2.0” election, to inform our understanding of contemporary electoral politics. This course draws on cutting-edge research in political science, communications, and computer technology, allowing us to examine important political phenomena from a variety of perspectives.

Course Objectives
On completion of this course, students will:
1. Understand the basic contours of the myriad resources for political information available on the Internet;
2. Understand how the Internet has shaped government and democracy;
3. Be able to explain the theories and findings on how political information on the Internet affects citizens’ attitudes and behaviors;
4. Be able to critically evaluate political information and ideas on the Internet;
5. Understand the state of the academic literature on this topic and be able to provide an analytical discussion in written form.

Required Texts

Required Journal Articles and Book Chapters
A majority of the required readings are journal articles and book chapters that are available on Moodle (http://moodle.oakland.edu/).

Course Requirements
A. Readings Assignments. This is your first and most important requirement: it is imperative that you DO THE READING. The required books, articles and chapters will be discussed in
class; therefore, it is expected that the readings listed with each class period be read in preparation for that class period.

**B. Class Attendance.** Students are required to attend class. Thus, I take roll every class session. Students receive two un- penalized absences, but absences beyond the second day will result in a loss of 2.5% percentage points out of the 15% for each class missed. This means on the 8th day that you are absent you will receive 0% for attendance. Only absences for official university events and performances (with documentation) are excused. Please inform me as soon as possible if you expect to be absent during the semester.

**C. Response Essays.** To enhance discussion, students are required to write four essays (2-3 pages maximum) that cover topics taken from lectures and readings. The questions for these response essays will be posted as an assignment on Moodle approximately a week before they are due. The essays will be assessed based on student’s mastery of the lectures and readings as well as student’s ability to find persuasive answers to the essay question.

**D. Website Analysis.** Students are required to present an effective and ineffective political website to the class. This will be a short presentation, ranging from 5-10 minutes. Students should be prepared to display and discuss the websites in class. The presentation should include an analysis of what makes these websites effective and ineffective and the general lessons that we can learn.

**E. Final Exam.** The Midterm Exam will be held during Week 7 (October 11th) and the Final Exam will be held during Week 15 (December 6th). These exams will consist of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, short-answer, and essay questions. The exam questions will require students to think analytically about the course material and to integrate information from readings, lectures, discussions, and where relevant, current political events. Each exam will be worth 100 points. The Final Exam will focus only on the course material covered since the Midterm Exam. Except for extraordinary circumstances, no make-up exams will be given.

**Grading Policy**
Throughout the semester, course grades will be posted on Moodle. Final grades will be determined according to the following formula below.

Class Attendance (15%)
Response Essays (20%)
Website Analysis (15%)
Midterm Exam (20%)
Final Exam (30%)

Please note that course grades are calculated according to the Oakland University 4-point scale: (99-100%) - 4.0; (97-98%) - 3.9; (94-96%) - 3.8; (92-93%) - 3.7; (90-91%) - 3.6; (88-89%) - 3.5; (87-88%) - 3.4; (85-86%) - 3.3; (83-84%) 3.2; (81-82%) - 3.1; (80-81) - 3.0; and etc. (70%) - 2.0; (60%) - 1.0.
### Weekly Topical Outline and Due Dates

#### Week 1: September 1

- Introduction to the course.

#### Week 2: September 5-11

Hong Kong is a major hub for international trade and finance. The death (or transformation) of the newspaper and the rise of the Internet.

- Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, Chapters 3 and 4 (pps 55-108)

#### Week 3: September 12-18

- Power: Online politics and reason?


#### Response Essay #1 Due

#### Week 4: September 19-25

- E-Government and Democracy


#### Week 5: September 26-October 2

- Political Participation and the Digital Divide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 6: October 3-9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Campaigns</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimber, Bruce, and Richard Davis. 2003. <em>Campaigning Online</em>, 3-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review for the Midterm Exam.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7: October 10-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Technologies - Twitter</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. MIDTERM EXAM. October 11th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancu, Monica. 2010. “From Soundbite to Textbite” in <em>Techno Politics</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8: October 17-23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Technologies - YouTube and Social Networking: Who’s using it and how are they using it?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 9: October 24-30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Technologies - YouTube and Social Networking: Does YouTube and social network use influence political attitudes and behaviors?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Essay #3 Due</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 10: October 31-November 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Technologies - Candidate Websites and Email</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 11: November 7-13

Election 2008: New Voices and New Voters


Week 12: November 14-20


Response Essay #4 Due

Week 13: November 21-27

Thanksgiving Break. NO CLASS.

Week 14: November 28-December 4

The Internet and Election 2012: Where do we go from here?
T. Summary of the course, discussion about the future of Politics and the Internet.
R. Review for the Final Exam.

Week 15: December 5-11

T. FINAL EXAM. December 6th from 8:00-11:00am.

Course Policies

Academic Misconduct: Cheating on examinations, plagiarism, falsifying reports/records, and unauthorized collaboration are considered serious breaches of academic conduct. Academic dishonesty in any form will NOT be tolerated and will be dealt with according to Oakland University policy. I will report suspected academic misconduct to the Office of the Dean of Students for consideration by the Academic Conduct Committee of the University Senate.

Disruptive Behavior: (1) Students should not be late for classes; (2) Students must keep cellphones off (or on vibrate mode) and put away during lecture. Students who create a disturbance with ringing cell phones or excessively texting will be warned; (3) Laptops and iPads are not to be used during lecture; and (4) Students should not engage in any extraneous activity during class such as reading newspapers, doing homework, text messaging, listening to your iPod, playing games on your iPhone, and etc.

Email Policy: Students are responsible for regularly checking their @oakland.edu email. Communication will be through the Moodle course and/or @oakland.edu email. Students are welcome to contact me via email at towner@oakland.edu. When contacting me, students should include their full name and the course name in all email correspondence. I respond to student email within 24-hours, expect for Saturdays, Sundays, and university recognized holidays.
Students with Disabilities:
Students with disabilities who may require reasonable accommodations should make an appointment with Oakland University's Disability Support Services office for assistance, by calling (248) 370-3266 or TTY: (248) 370-3268; faxing (248) 370-4989; or e-mailing dss@oakland.edu.