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## Class prepares students for political campaigns

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Earlier this year, senior political science and history major Scott Czasak considered turning his interest in politics into a job by running this fall for a seat on the Clinton Township Board of Trustees. Without having much of an idea on how to stage a campaign, Czasak figured he'd go door to door and try to build a grassroots following. Now his strategies have broadened considerably based on what he's learning this semester in his Political Campaigns (PS 326) class.

"I always wanted to be involved in politics, and I took this class because I wanted to learn the nuts and bolts of how the whole system works," Czasak said. "I used to think that if I ran for a board seat I'd have to go out and try to meet everyone. But in this class, I learned that you have to target your voters and form strategies to motivate them to come out and vote for you. The class has given me some basic ideas on how to do that."

Professor of Political Science John Klemanski, who recognized a need among both political parties for trained campaign managers, developed the PS 326 course in 2001. Students in the class gain the skills and knowledge necessary to step right into managing a political campaign.

"Both parties are always looking for someone to manage a campaign," said Assistant Professor of Political Science Dave Dulio, who's teaching the course this semester. "We focus on the strategies of managing state and local races. But we don't give the students a step-by-step process. Managing campaigns is more like an art than a science. You have to take many elements into account and focus on building a skill set as well as handling all types of tasks."

In the class, students work on developing their analytical thinking and communications skills, which are critical to crafting a message for a candidate. They also learn how to perform opposition research, candidate research, prior electoral research, demographic research, district analysis and more.

"All of the research flows together when you craft the right message that resonates with the people," Dulio said. "We don't talk about theories of voting behavior. We talk about the everyday nuts and bolts of politics. It's a practical as opposed to theoretical class. The vast majority of students love it."

The students also put the concepts into practice by working in small groups to develop campaign plans for real candidates.

"There's no one right answer to designing a campaign," Dulio said. "It also takes practice in order to do it well. But theoretically, the plans the students are creating for their class projects could be used in a real campaign. For those students who are interested in doing it as a career or as part of an election cycle, they're able to first create a campaign plan in a non-pressure setting. The students should feel more comfortable going into a real campaign after completing the class."

Dulio supplements his class work nearly every week with real-world knowledge imparted by a prominent guest speaker. Among the class guests this semester are Samantha Moffett of the Michigan Republican Party; Al Mann, an OU alum and director of public opinion research for the Michigan House Republican Caucus; Lee Dryden, community news editor of "The Oakland Press;" and Mark Brewer, executive chair of the Michigan Democratic Party.

"In southeast Michigan, Oakland's Political Campaigns class is pretty well-known," Brewer said. "I get calls from people looking for campaign managers who ask about the class, and I recommend it very highly. Many times people learn about campaigns by starting out as volunteers and end up becoming good at one facet of campaign management. But the students who come out of this class have the big picture on how to get a campaign plan together. It's a combination of academics and practicality."

The students also are gaining real campaign management opportunities. Each week Dulio brings to class at least two

new campaign manager requests from both parties. Several students, including Czasak, also were invited to attend a local GOP Campaign Management School, a three-day intensive designed to train campaign managers for the fall.

"I learned about the GOP school from Al Mann when he came to speak to the class," Czasak said. "This class isn't just about lecturing. All of the guest speakers are currently out in the field doing this type of work every day and can speak from real experience. From them and the class, I'm learning how to best sustain a campaign, whether it's my own or if I'm helping someone else run for office."

Even if they choose not to enter the political arena, the students learn a variety of skills useful in many different employment settings.

"The skills students develop in the class – the research, budgeting, event planning, etc. – can be used in so many different ways," Dulio said. "In the class, I have journalism, biology, philosophy, women's studies, psychology, English and many other majors. The class has many different applications for a wide variety of employers."

For more information on PS 326, visit the **Department of Political Science** Web site or contact Dave Dulio at (248) 370-2523 or [ddulio@oakland.edu](mailto:ddulio@oakland.edu).

#### **SUMMARY**

OU students in PS 326 are gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to step right into managing a political campaign. In addition to working on developing their analytical thinking and communications skills, they also learn how to perform opposition research, candidate research, prior electoral research, demographic research, district analysis and more.

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