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Design Project Report #1

PROJECT TITLE:

Understanding the Upcoming Presidential Election

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

As the United States of America begins its primary season, ultimately leading to the general election for President of the United States in November, many Americans struggle with the mechanics of the race. What was once a few month process has turned into a four-year cycle of speculation, fundraising and campaigning. In Deron Shaw's work (2006) he found that almost 80% of adults could not explain the electoral college process accurately, in essence stating 80% of Americans do not know how we score the election or how to pick the President of the United States. With the average American deficient in understanding many of the mechanical aspects of the race which are evident, there can be even more confusion for many elements of elections which are hidden from the public. As the primary season has already begun and with the Florida primary itself to be in the news, I will be taking two weeks out of the normal curriculum for the American Government online course I have designed to highlight the upcoming election. Hopefully, this special unit will help answer the questions of would be voters, make the students more comfortable with the process and ultimately foster more interest in the election.

In addition to my work at the University of Florida, I continue to be an adjunct

professor and course designer for Southwest Florida College, located in Fort Myers, Florida. While I have taught face to face courses their before, I currently only teach and design online classes within social studies. This term I am constructing one American Government class, which has 23 members in it from the Fort Myers area, as well as the Tampa area which is one of the school's satellite locations. This current course is composed of 13 females and ten males. Everyone in the class is taking this as an elective for their bachelor's degree, meaning they all are in their third or fourth year of classes at the school. Within the 23 students, nine of the students declare nursing as their major and the other 14 students declare criminal justice as their major. The oldest student in the course is 56, the youngest student being 19, with the class mean at 26.4. Related to geographical location, 15 of the course students reside in the Fort Myers area and eight of the students reside near the Tampa location.

In this two-week unit, we will break up the topics into two-one week sessions. The first session will focus on what we see of politicians in the media, we will focus on how candidates are featured by the media, what forms of media they use and ultimately we will discuss media bias. Within this first unit, we will a combination of tools to cover the material. To start, we will use the student's textbook *American Government and Politics Today, 15th Ed.* by Bardes, Shelley, Schmidt, 2009. Using the textbook as a foundation, we will cover the history of media in politics as well as give students some ideas on how the politicians and media are able to engage with one another during a campaign. Finally, we will work to build a collection of tools on how to identify media bias and also process if this is an avoidable part of covering campaigns. In addition to the

textbook, this week will feature a discussion board where students are to bring in 3 examples of what they consider media bias, as well as a video library of clips pre-selected by the instructor of recent debates. The week will conclude with a quiz over the material and an application assignment showing how elections have changed related to technology over the last 100 years and a guess as to how they will look 100 years from now.

Week two of the election unit will focus more on the mechanics of a presidential race. This unit will cover the concept of campaign finance, the primary process, and finally the general election. Specific topics to be covered are interest groups, lobbying, PACS, primaries, caucus, conventions and the Electoral College. To facilitate all of these concepts, students will again start by reading a chapter of their text, from there they will be participating in a discussion board focusing in on why they feel would make the ideal candidate in America today based off of being able to fundraise as well as win the electoral college map. The week will be embedded with PowerPoint instruction on the Electoral College, as well as video clips of conventions and election nights. Students will write a short application essay centering on making an argument for or against the Electoral College and the week will end with a short quiz on the terminology of the week.

DESCRIPTION OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

To properly design a lesson on the upcoming election for a class of Southwest Florida College online students, a needs assessment was needed to gauge the student's prior knowledge and interest in the election. With this lesson covering various areas, related to a topic that many students have had the opportunity to learn about, it was

paramount as the instructional designer to see how specific the students could recall the terminology of the lesson as well as how strong their beliefs were towards the current political climate. To help facilitate gathering various information related to this total project, I set out to create a survey for the students to take in week one of the course. As part of their introduction to class, one of their assignments was to take a 25-question survey through a site called Survey Monkey. In the end, the students had one week to complete the survey, it counted as a participation grade and the results came to me in the form of a total count of which responses were given for each question.

The week one needs assessment survey was broken into four areas: terminology, interest, bias and recognition. In the first section 10 terms related to the political campaign were given in a pre-test form, including words like: *caucus, convention, delegate, elector, etc...* In the second section, students were given five questions related to how interested they are about various moments in a campaign, where they were to answer from strongly interested, interested, neutral, disinterested, do not care. Five other questions were asked, using the answer choices: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree related to how the media and various television networks portray candidates. Finally, five questions were asked related to recognizing current candidates running for election. Students were given a short bio and a picture and four names to choose from to see if they could determine the candidate.

SUMMARY OF YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT OUTCOME:

TABLE A: Terminology

<u>TERMINOLOGY</u>	<u>CORRECT</u>	<u>INCORRECT</u>
Caucus	6	17
Convention	12	11
Delegate	10	13
Elector	8	15
Electoral College	14	9
PAC	5	18
Primary	17	6
General Election	15	8
Interest Group	17	6
Lobbyist	15	8

TABLE B: Interest

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
You enjoy watching media coverage of the election	3	5	9	3	3
You enjoy watching parts of the debates	2	5	10	3	3
You enjoy reading about the election online	1	3	12	4	3
You enjoy learning about what each candidate stands for	5	7	8	2	1
You plan to	8	8	4	2	1

vote in this election					
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TABLE C: Bias

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
You think the media is “pro” Barack Obama and his plans to govern	5	5	9	3	0
You think the media does a thorough job covering all of the candidates equally	2	5	3	5	10
You think the media covers the election in a neutral fashion	1	3	6	10	3
You think CNN is neutral when covering the election	7	7	8	1	0
You think Fox News is neutral when covering the election	2	3	4	9	5

TABLE D: Recognition

	Identified	Did Not Identify
Mitt Romney	17	6
Newt Gingrich	15	8
Rick Santorum	5	18

Ron Paul	8	15
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With this data, I was able to learn a lot about our learners prior to making all of the course material. For example, students did fairly well in identifying elements of campaign finance, (lobbyists, interest groups) while not as well as with elements of the early stages of a political campaign (caucus). When it came to demonstrating their interest in the political campaign, many students answered neutral to the majority of questions, which could leave one to believe they truly do not care one way or the other or that they are interested but do not have the motivation to truly participate. As for the media bias, it appears the learners are skeptical of the media, but feel more comfortable watching CNN than Fox News. Finally, as expected the most recent frontrunners in the election did best in the recognition section of the survey, even though six people did not know Mitt Romney and eight people did not know Newt Gingrich.

GOAL STATEMENT:

In this project based on giving the foundations of the elements and events of the upcoming presidential election, I plan to see students score an 80% or above collectively on the terminology words at the end of the two week lesson, as well as having a 100% identification score on the major candidates running for office. Furthermore, students should be able to articulate how they plan to participate and watch this upcoming election, as well as what elements within the media they will be paying attention to when they are viewing.

ENTRY COMPETENCIES:

Knowledge:

- Students should have a basic understanding of how presidential candidates raise campaign finances
- Student should have a basic understanding of the differences between the Democrat and Republican party
- Students should have some basic knowledge of the candidates running for office
- Students should have basic knowledge on how voting occurs in America

Skills:

- Students should be able to watch and analyze elements of a debate
- Students should be able to articulate their feelings about candidates and media coverage
- Students should be able to relate elements of the campaign being debated to elements in their personal lives
- Students should be able to read and understand their textbook, including the key words for the unit
- Students should be able to write a weekly two-page reflective essay
- Students should be able to answer the question on a discussion board as well as converse with their classmates

Attitudes:

- Hopefully students can remove pre-conceived notions about how Presidents are elected
- Hopefully students can judge what candidates do and say, versus judging them on

preconceived notions

- Hopefully students should be motivated to learn how this election effects them

LEARNER INTERVIEW:

After completing the needs assessment and creating the goal statement, I was able to set up an interview with Student X, using the Elluminate Live! feature embedded within the online course. Student X is a 26-year-old female, who is a nursing student. She was emailed, after I chose her student ID number at random.

Student X conferred to me that she is excited to take the course, as her husband and father talk about politics all of the time. She considers herself to be a Republican, as her whole family was growing up and her husband is “not a fan of the current President”. Student X, says that she sometimes turns on the debate, but once they ‘get yelling at each other, I turn the channel”. At this point in the race, she really does not have a favorite, but she thinks her husband is for Ron Paul. She is excited to take the class, so she can learn the way “things are supposed to be” and hopefully she will better understand things now that she will see on TV. Student X has also expressed that she has taken online classes before. Sometimes she likes the online discussions as long as others have interesting things to say. She does not seem to like this textbook, but figures she has no other way to learn considering she is taking an online class. When asked if she comes to the chats and office hours, she says “usually no, unless it is a math class”. Student X says she has no problem with the reflective piece, but usually is scrambling to do them late at night on Sunday.

DESCRIPTION OF LEARNERS:

To date this online class has met for three weeks. With 23 students in the class, it seems to be lively and they have been averaging 87 posts on the discussion board a week to date. To date, many of the topics have covered basic governmental foundations, including the Constitution, so there have not been a lot of strong political debates. No student has entered the office hours for help, but I have received 14 emails from students for help. Students also seem to not be using the PowerPoint's which are embedded in the course and are instead reading their textbook for content. To date, students have averages an 84% on quizzes and a 91% on reflective application essays. Many of the students to date have expressed that they grew up in political families and still consider themselves related to the same political party their parents are. Many students have expressed not watching much of the debates, but feel they will become more interested when it is one candidate facing Obama.

PERFORMANCE CONTEXT:

Southwest Florida College uses the eCollege-learning platform designed by Pearson. Within this platform the course has a main page which shows the syllabus, announcements and all learning resource material. From there, the course is broken up by week, with each week having the same tabs of: Introduction, Multi-media clips, PowerPoint, Discussion Board, Links, and Application Assignment. Socially, the students mostly interact in the discussion boards, or emailing one another if there is a collaborative project. The platform does have Elluminate Live! embedded, which is there for office hours though most students do not attend. Each week has a collection of links

from the textbook manufacturer, as well as links to state and federal government sites, a pre-made PowerPoint on the chapter from the textbook company and various YouTube clips related to the topic.

RELEVANT CURRENT REFERENCES:

In designing this lesson on the upcoming political election, I used the work of Martin (2011) as the foundation when considering the instructional design of the lesson. To start, Martin's work is specific to community college which is something specific to consider related to my student demographics. Martin also stresses the importance in not only getting each element of an instructional design model correct, but sometimes it is more important in how you align the different elements (Martin, 2011, p.957). Considering I was inserting a lesson into an already created course, as well as trying to cover such a large subject in just two weeks, I worked hard to find a sequence which built off of elements the students knew about campaigns and then built in unfamiliar aspects. Building off of Martin's work I also tried to incorporate the theme of Wooley's essay (2011) which stressed the importance of how the content centers on the individual. Relating to politics, I was hoping to take a collection of students and guide them on a journey where they would all end up in their own personal space of where they felt comfortable politically. Taking a group of people on the same journey, and having them land in different spots, without biasing the effort is a true challenge (Wooley, 2011, p. 56). With politics being such an emotionally charged topic in America today, I worked for there to be a lot of theoretical work done together but also some reflective time where

students could apply these concepts and build a political socialization.

Relating to specifically placing social studies content in an online format, I centered much of my design process on the work of Glynn, Huge, & Hoffman (2012). They express that in the world of social media, students are becoming more used to getting news in real time. When a few years ago, many teenagers might not have watched about an earthquake in Japan on the news, they do pay attention to it when someone brings it to their attention on Facebook (Glynn, Huge, & Hoffman, 2012). With that in mind, I need to always make my content fresh relating to current events. The discussion board is a great medium to discuss current events, or recap the day, but I also need to work to keep my multi-media up to date. In the past, to show the concept of a debate it might have been acceptable to have an old clip from Reagan, but today with YouTube I work to get a clip from the previous night's debate.

References

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