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# An Applied Learning Experience: Field Research and Political Reporting at the 2012 National Party Conventions

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The background of the slide is a stylized, wavy American flag with red and white stripes and a blue field with white stars.

# **An Applied Learning Experience: Field Research and Political Reporting at the 2012 National Party Conventions**

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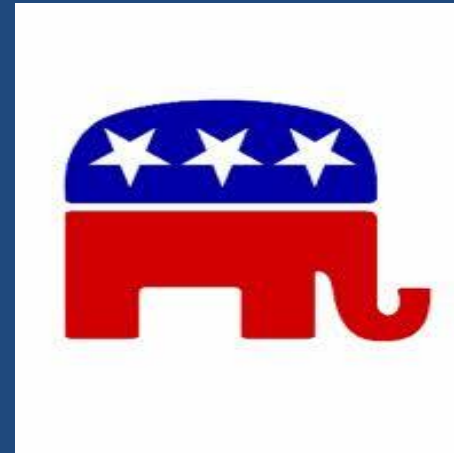
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An Applied Learning Experience.

In 2012 19 KSU Political Science and  
Communication Students Attended the 2 Main  
Political Conventions:



Charlotte, NC



Tampa, FL

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## Primary Goal

Engage Students in an Experiential Educational Experience!

COM Students: Writing Daily News Stories in COM 4490  
Reporting at the Political Party Conventions

POLS Students: Surveys for Pol. Research POLS 4490  
Political Party Conventions Field Study

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## Overall Course Goals....

Effectively Convert the Convention Halls and Meeting Rooms into Active Classroom Learning Environments!!

Specifically, COM Students Produced Daily News Stories and POLS Students Interviewed Convention Activists About the Delegate Experience, Political Communication, and Social-political Activism

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## The Educational Goal Had Several Challenges:

1. Access to GA Political Parties at the Convention Sites
2. Financing the Trip
3. Awarding Course Credit
4. In-Class Preparation for “Real World” Experience
5. Hurricane Isaac!

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## Overcoming These Obstacles Was Not Easy! Additional Challenges...

- GA GOP Charged \$400 to Cover Student Meals and Tickets to Convention Arena
- GA DEMS Were Disorganized
- Find Hotel within KSU's Budget (not near delegates accommodations)
- Transportation of Students

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Challenges Were Met Including a Grant from the  
Art Pope Foundation to Pay for Student Access  
to GOP Convention

Even Hurricane Isaac Did NOT Impede our  
Success!



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## Courses in Depth

### POLS 4490 Political Party Conventions Field Study

- Respectfully observe the American political process in practice
- Systematically conduct participant observations in the field
- Demonstrate the ability to conduct interviews in the field
- Accurately describe and thoughtfully reflect on daily field experiences
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze qualitative (and/or quantitative) data
- Produce and present high quality research paper relevant to the topic of political party conventions

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- POLS Students Gathered Data Through Surveys from Convention Participants (delegates, party leaders, and activists)
- Worked in Teams of 2
- Each Tampa Student Paired with a Charlotte Student!
- Data Represented Cross Sections of GOP and DEM Activists

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- The POLS Students Used This Learning Experience to Propose and Implement a Research Design In a 2 Month Time Frame...
- *Ethics Training*
- *IRB Approval*
- *Actual Data Collection/Analysis*
- *Writing the Paper*
- *Presenting in an On-Campus Venue*

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## COM 4490 Reporting at the Political Party Conventions

- Propose and produce original political stories
- Interview party activists and leaders
- Upload this content to a specialized news website
- Demonstrate competency in reporting and writing political stories on hourly and daily deadlines
- Use Associated Press writing style in each story
- Record photos and videos to accompany their stories
- Work on deadline!

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## Each Day COM Faculty Held a News Meeting

- *Students Updated Faculty on Story Progress*
- *Each News Story was Edited and Graded On-Site*
- *Students Blogged Daily About Reporting Exp.*
- *Presented Their Stories in On-Campus Venue*

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## Students' Daily Routine = Experiential Education (12 hour days)

- *Daily Breakfasts with State Delegations*
- *Delegation Meetings (open and closed)*
- *GOP: Nightly Convention Attendance*
- *DEMS: Daytime Caucus Meetings*
- *Encountering the Unexpected (non-scheduled interviews local, state, and national politicians)*
- *A Part Of and Included in the Political Process!*

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## Student Perceptions Based on Experiential Ed.

Pre and Post-Convention Survey of *Self  
Perception of Political Knowledge,  
Understanding Course Content, and Attitude  
Toward the Media*

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# Survey Results

	Overall	
	Pre	Post
Interest in politics and public policy	2.8 (.45)	2.9 (.34)
Understand important political issues facing country	4.6 (.63)	4.6 (.50)
Consider myself to well qualified to participate in politics	4.4 (.62)	4.3 (.86)
Understand the process of nominating candidates	2.4 (.62)	2.9 (.34)
Understand role of state political party organizations	2.1 (.72)	2.7 (.60)
Understand why delegates attend party conventions	2.3 (.70)	2.9 (.34)
Understand how delegates are selected	2.1 (.77)	2.4 (.62)
General public access to convention activities	1.6 (.63)	1.8 (.91)
Media access to convention activities	2.7 (.48)	2.4 (.51)
(N)	16	16



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## Analysis

Students revealed substantial post-convention increases in...

- The nomination of candidates (2.4 - 2.9),
- The role of state party organizations (2.1 - 2.7)
- Why delegates attend the convention (2.3 - 2.9)
- How they are selected (2.1 - 2.4)

*These results suggest a boost in student confidence regarding their understanding of the course content as delivered*

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# Results by Major

	Reporting at the Convention (COM)		Political Party Conventions: Field Study (POLS)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Interest in politics and public policy	2.7 (.50)	2.8 (.44)	2.9 (.38)	3.0 (.00)
Understand important political issues facing country	4.3 (.71)	4.4 (.53)	4.9 (.38)	4.9 (.38)
Consider myself to well qualified to participate in politics	4.4 (.53)	3.8 (.83)	4.3 (.76)	4.9 (.38)
Understand the process of nominating candidates	2.3 (.71)	2.8 (.44)	2.4 (.53)	3.0 (.00)
Understand role of state political party organizations	2.1 (.78)	2.6 (.73)	2.1 (.69)	2.9 (.38)
Understand why delegates attend party conventions	2.3 (.71)	2.8 (.44)	2.3 (.76)	3.0 (.00)
Understand how delegates are selected	2.0 (.20)	2.1 (.69)	2.1 (.69)	2.4 (.62)
General public access to convention activities	1.7 (.71)	1.7 (.87)	1.4 (.53)	2.0 (1.0)
Media access to convention activities	2.7 (.50)	2.3 (.46)	2.7 (.49)	2.6 (.53)
(N)	9	9	7	7

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## Analysis

- \*The political science students' self efficacy increased dramatically after the convention (4.3 - 4.9),
- \*The communication students decline by a roughly equal amount (4.4 - 3.8).

*The divergent results on political efficacy are likely produced by the contrasting course requirements and motivational tendencies of students pursuing these two majors*

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## Other Analyses

On self-reported level of understanding... *of convention processes, party organizations, and delegates' roles*, both sets of students showed *significant increases after the convention*.

This finding represents the students' positive self-assessment of “content learning” in the two courses.

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## Self Assessment: Charlotte vs. Tampa

	Democratic National Convention		Republican National Convention	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Interest in politics and public policy	3.0 (.00)	3.0 (.00)	2.6 (.53)	2.8 (.44)
Understand important political issues facing country	4.6 (.79)	4.6 (.53)	4.6 (.53)	4.7 (.50)
Consider myself to well qualified to participate in politics	4.4 (.79)	4.4 (.53)	4.3 (.50)	4.1 (1.1)
Understand the process of nominating candidates	2.3 (4.9)	2.9 (.78)	2.4 (.73)	2.9 (.33)
Understand role of state political party organizations	2.0 (.58)	2.6 (.53)	2.2 (.83)	2.8 (.67)
Understand why delegates attend party conventions	2.3 (.76)	2.9 (.38)	2.3 (.71)	2.9 (.33)
Understand how delegates are selected	2.1 (.69)	2.4 (.53)	2.0 (.87)	2.3 (.62)
General public access to convention activities	1.4 (.53)	2.0 (.82)	1.7 (.71)	1.7 (1.0)
Media access to convention activities	2.7 (.49)	2.7 (.49)	2.7 (.50)	2.1 (.35)
(N)	7	7	9	9

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## Analysis

*Results revealed little to no change in political efficacy and those relating to the students' perceived understanding of course content.*

*BUT...*

*Perceptions varied greatly on the question of public and media access to convention activities. Ratings of public access increased among attendees of the DNC (1.4 - 2.0) while ratings of media access declined among those who traveled to the RNC (2.7 - 2.1).*

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## Conclusions

Overall, a Successful Experiential Learning  
Experience!

Based on 2 Points....

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The Trips to Charlotte and Tampa were “Uneventful” (all students followed expected off-campus rules/behavior)

- All students interacted with and interviewed GOP and DEM party activists
- News stories written on a consistent daily basis and presented in public forum
- POLS research papers written on deadline and presented in public forum



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As an experiential learning project...

Student self-knowledge of American politics –  
political party conventions – increased as  
evidenced in their course projects

*Includes a self assessment of being more  
engaged in civic society*