GU POLITICS FELLOW DAN SENA
Discussion Group Outline
A Behind the Scenes Look at the 2018 Battle for the House

Discussion Group Synopsis
The 2018 midterm election was unlike any in history. From the impact of President Trump to the sheer number of candidates running for office, the election cycle was one for the history books. What were the important influences that went into the Democrats winning back the House of Representatives and what does it all mean for 2020? How did a record number of seats flip? Will the 2018 election shape the 2020 landscape? In the discussion groups we will look at these questions and others to unpack the evolution of the 2018 midterm election and what they mean for 2020 and Congress going forward.

Week 1 — 2018 MIDTERM OVERVIEW AND THE IMPACT ON 2020
At the most basic level, the 2018 battle for the House would be won or lost based on the number of viable Democratic challengers, the debate over health care, Trump, and which campaign most effectively communicated their message. We will look at the strategies that were successful in 2018 and what it all means for 2020.

Week 2 — THE 2018 MESSAGE BATTLE AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR 2020
Delivering a clear reason to vote for or against a candidate is core to any election. How did Democrats design positive and contrast messaging that won Trump districts? How did long term Republican incumbents craft a strategy to survive a perceived blue wave, and were they successful? What strategic clues can be learned for 2020 and how are new candidates already using them?

Week 3 — GRASSROOTS MONEY VS SUPER PACS
Why was raising money in 2018 easier for Democrats than Republicans? Why were Republican super PACs able to raise record amounts of money and attack Democrats early? What are the positives and negatives of both strategies and what does the record level of fundraising mean for the 2020 elections?

Week 4 — WHO VOTED IN 2018 AND WHAT DOES RECORD TURNOUT MEAN FOR 2020?
Understanding and predicting who would vote was one of the biggest challenges in 2018. Historically, women in the suburbs have been the key swing voter to win. What did they want from a candidate in 2018 and what drove their decision making? Will it be the same for 2020? We will examine how rural, urban, x-urban and suburban voters performed in 2018 and what they will mean for 2020.
Week 5 — HOT FOR TRUMP, COLD FOR TRUMP
President Trump exists in a political orbit all to himself. In 2018 both Democrats and Republicans had to design strategies to successfully navigate his presidency on the national stage. What are the hot buttons Trump used and why? Why did some candidates embrace him and other run from him? What could his 2018 playbook mean for his 2020 re-election campaign and what does it mean for everyone else running in 2020?

Week 6 — BUY TV, CABLE, YOUTUBE - IN THAT ORDER?
Modern campaigns have to advertise and tell their stories over multiple platforms. Understanding who is watching which platform and what to say to them is critical to electoral success. We will examine the use of digital mediums and their impact in the advertising strategies across different types of political campaigns. In particular in 2018, the amount of money spent on digital mediums tripled. Will this trend continue into 2020? What is the positive role of Twitter and Facebook in this new terrain? What 2020 candidates are winning the early messaging fights and how are they building off the 2018 playbook?

Week 7 — THE GOOD THE BAD THE UGLY – BOTS, TROLLS AND OUTSIDE INFLUENCES ON ELECTIONS
Trolls, bots, Twitter and Facebook disinformation played a huge role in the 2016 election and introduced a new dimension to modern campaigns. In 2018, new technology, corporate responsibility and political pressure led to changes for some of the digital platforms, however despite reform, bots played a key role in 2018. We will look at how bots are detected, used and manipulated by both foreign and domestic actors. How are these tactics used today and how might they impact the 2020 elections?

Week 8 — WHAT DOES THIS ALL REALLY MEAN FOR 2020?
Winning the house back means Democrats will now have to govern, that’s a good and bad thing. What is the current state of play for Democrats in the house and how is the battle between different branches of government playing out? Did the leadership fight on either side impact their ability to govern? Are either party able to triangulate and win over swing voters? What strategies are both parties deploying to prepare for the 2020 elections and who has the current upper hand? We will review what 2018 lessons are key to 2020 and end the class with our own crystal ball predictions for 2020.