

PSC215

Fall 2006

Dewey 1101 9:40—10:55 T-Th

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American Elections: Presidential, Congressional, and State

This course examines primary and general elections for the American presidency, Congress and state legislatures. It focuses on the decisions of candidates, voters and activists that structure these contests, and on the policy representation that emerges from these electoral processes.

Course Outline and Readings:

The class will involve both discussions and lectures. In addition, there will be frequent short assignments, a midterm, and a final. Class attendance is expected, and grades will reflect participation.

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11-noon, and by arrangement.

Texts:

Morton, *Analyzing Elections*, Norton

Nelson, *Elections of 2004*, CQ Press.

Streb, *Law and Election Politics*, Rienner.

Fiorina, *Culture War*, Pearson.

Dudley, *American Elections: The Rules Matter*, Longman.

Current readings may be added and listed on the Internet through the library portal.

Assignments:

All assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Assignments will count toward the class participation grade. You should do **five** of the assignments for the semester and skip the rest. Homework assignments are due in class at the beginning of class. Because there is flexibility built into the system, late work will not be accepted. Because of the unpredictability of class discussion, and of the current events in American politics, some changes may occur in the schedule. If you should miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what the assignment is for the next class period. The syllabus may be updated periodically with additional readings.

Students who are registered for the writing section of the course must write a term paper of 10-15 pages (about 3500 words). Students must turn in either a two page prospectus for the paper or a draft of the paper. Students who are doing the writing requirement may skip an additional two homework assignments in addition to the five that all students may skip. Choose a House district in 2006, which had at least one primary election that involved two or more candidates. Discuss the influences of district partisanship and

incumbency on candidate emergence, and candidate quality in both primaries. What other factors, redistricting etc were involved and what effects did they have on the primary election? How did these factors influence the result of the general election? (If you do the long paper, you may not do the similar class assignment). Papers are due the last day of class. A draft or a prospectus is due 3 weeks earlier in class. Also the class participation and assignment section will count 25%.

Grading:

Class Participation and Assignments	20%
Midterm October 18	35%
Final	45%

Introduction. September 5, Tuesday

Partisanship—Voters and Electorates. September 7 (Th) and September 12 (Tues). Morton Ch 1, pp1-9, Ch 2 -3; Streb Ch. 9; Dudley Ch. 1 pp1—14. Readings should be completed before the September 7th lecture.

Assignment (due Sept 12th): In addition to the above readings, use the National Journal online Almanac of American Politics to print out information on one House member, including information on their district and on their key votes. Bring to class. (You may find the Almanac by starting at Rush Rhees library’s home page; proceed to databases; choose National Journal and within the Almanac, choose elected officials.)

House Districts, Apportionment and Redistricting. September 14 (Th) and September 19 (Tues). Streb Ch. 10; Dudley Ch.1 pp 14—28 Morton Ch 11 pp397-426 and Ch 15.

Assignment (Due Sept. 19th): In addition to the above readings, look at the redistricting process for the U. S. House in one state. (Be sure to choose a state that elects more than one representative to Congress.) Bring a one-page summary to class. Your discussion should include how the redistricting decision is made in the state, the partisanship of the key players, key local issues, and the current status of redistricting in that state. Sources: you may find the following internet sites useful as the basis for your research: Cook’s Report on the 2002 Redistricting, which is part of the National Journal online site. You may also be able to reach Cook’s as follows from on campus:

<http://www.bepress.com/rhodescook/> Many states have their own internet sites, and are listed on www.ncsl.org. (Use issue areas, redistricting and links)

House and Senate Primary Elections. September 21 (Th) and September 26 (Tues). Streb Ch. 2; Dudley Ch. 2; Morton Ch 4. Also read the article in Campaigns & Elections (available from Lexis-Nexis through the library portal) “Three Davids, No Goliath and Plenty of Slingshots” Kristin Brainerd September 1999. This article discusses one House campaign. Note in particular the limited ability of leaders to constrain candidate entry,

and also the unique character of Louisiana's election structure and, for future reference, the discussion of the general election campaign. Alternatively read any thorough article on any contested Louisiana primary and general election in 2006.

Assignment (September 26): Choose a House district in 2006, which had at least one primary election that involved two or more candidates. Discuss the influences of district partisanship and incumbency on candidate emergence, and candidate quality. How did these factors influence the result of the general election. This assignment should be no more than 1 page in length. If you are taking this as a W writing course, you may not do this assignment.

Presidential Primary Elections. September 28 (Tues) and October 3 (Thurs).
Morton Ch 12, Nelson Ch. 2. Dudley Ch. 2 is also relevant here.

Assignment (Due Oct 3): For the 2004 presidential election describe the rules used in one state to choose delegates to the Democratic national convention and indicate the 2004 result.

Money in Elections. October 5 (Thurs) and October 10 (Tues).
Morton Ch 6-7; Dudley, Chapter 3, Chapter 4 pp 87-99. Streb, Chapters 4 and 5, Nelson Chap 6.

Assignment (Due Oct 10) Choose a member of the House or Senate. Locate information that indicates how much money this individual raised and spent in the 2004 election. If possible find out how much any opponents raised and spent. Also identify what proportion of the money to the winner was from individuals, parties and major categories of PACs. Find what percent of the money was raised in state versus out of state, and what major types of PACs provided contributions (eg labor, pharmaceuticals, pro-life etc). You can probably get this information from CQ's print edition of Politics in America, 2006, National Journal's 2006 online or print edition of the Almanac of American Politics, and from the online sources: www.opensecrets.org, and www.fec.gov. You should not need to write much, if anything, but can simply print off no more than 10 pages of material (perhaps adding a few sentences in ink) from the Center for Responsive Politics (the opensecrets web site) and the Federal Election Commission Site. The web sites are slow, so try at non-peak times. On the FEC website you can search for information on all candidates in a particular House or Senate race. Be sure that you choose the 2003-2004 election cycle. The FEC site gives good summary information on all candidates. For useful detail, the Center for Responsive Politics breaks down the contributions to winners into useful types by in state vs. out of state, type of industry etc.

Measuring Public Opinion—What Does Polling Reveal? October 12 (Thur)
Morton Ch 10.

Assignment (Due Oct 12) Find several polls online taken about the same time that focus on one of the 2006 U.S. House or Senate races. Who was surveyed?

(If likely voters were surveyed, how were they defined?) How many individuals were surveyed? How was the vote question asked? Were there any questions preceding the vote question that might have biased the answers? Did the predictions of the polls vary, if so how? Hint: Try the National Journal in Databases through the library portal. Then go to Hotline and Tipsheet for any House and Senate race and click on the link for poll results. To get details on how the poll was done try googling the particular polling company they cite.

Finish Lecture Material & Review for Midterm. October 17 (Tues).

Midterm. October 19 (Thur).

Culture War & Ideological Polarization. October 24 (Tues) and October 26 (Th)
Morton Ch 5. Fiorina—read all chapters. Nelson Ch 8.

Assignment (Due October 26) Find a poll on abortion that compares the attitudes on abortion of one of the following: Democrats to Republicans, old to young, one religion to other religions or to none, men to women or any similar demographic of the type Fiorina analyzes. Do your results agree or disagree with his? Turn in the numbers from the poll you find.

Minor Parties and Independent Candidates. October 31 (Tuesday).
Morton Ch 14.

Assignment (Due October 31) Find information on or a discussion of the Nebraska legislature. Be prepared to join in a discussion of this nonpartisan legislature and how it differs from a partisan legislature. For example, Do candidates actually run on party labels? How do candidates get on the ballot? Do parties support candidates? Do parties play a role in the organization and operation of the legislature? Turn in no more than 5 pages printed from your sources or write up one page.

Counting and Casting Ballots. November 2 (Thursday).
Streb Ch 8, Dudley Ch 5.

Assignment (Due November 2) Find a discussion of the pros and cons of electronic voting, voting by mail or any other voting technology. Turn in no more than 5 pages.

Congressional General Elections—The Incumbency Advantage in Elections.

November 7 (Tues) and November 9 (Thurs)

Morton Ch 9 and 11 pp 426-447; Streb Chap 3. *CQ Weekly Reports* (available under databases through library portal): Read any two articles related to how incumbents serve constituency interests. Older articles you might choose from include: “Incumbency,” Feb. 8, 1997; “Setting Up a Congressional Shop Back Home” March 2, 1985; “CQ ROUNDTABLE: Hill’s Growth Industry: Constituent Service”, June 25, 1994; “Byrd:

Different Expectations?”. June 9, 2001; “Pork: A Time-Honored Tradition Lives On,” Oct. 24, 1987. There are many new relevant articles in CQ Weekly Reports. Scan recent issues to find one or use the search engine. Aug. 14, 2006 for example had an article on the honey lobby.

Assignment (Due November 9) Find a incumbent member of the US. House or Senate who received less than 55% of the vote in the general election in 2006. How can you explain the closeness of this race or the defeat of the incumbent if he or she lost. Here you may write up no more than one page or print off one page from an electronic source.

The Electoral College. November 14 (Tues)
Dudley Chap. 6; Morton Chapter 13.

Assignment (Due Nov. 14) Read several short pieces on the Electoral College (pro and con). Here I would suggest that you search the net or ask a reference librarian for help using Lexus/Nexus etc. Many major journals of political commentary contained editorials. (See, for example, an editorial in The New Republic, November, 2000 or Kathryn Lopez, “Hillary is Wrong,” in the National Review Online, November, 2000.) Write no more than one page (double-spaced) summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of the Electoral College. (Be sure you know how the Electoral College works first.)

Mass Media/Internet in Elections. November 16 (Thur) and November 21 (Tues).
Morton, Ch 8; Streb Ch 6 & 7, Dudley Ch 4, pp99-106, Nelson Ch 5.

Assignment (Due November 16) Find an internet site that is or has been involved in supporting candidates for office. Print off a page from the site to turn in. Try to find out, but not turn in: Who runs the site? What issues does it advocate? What candidates does it support? How does it support them? Is it connected to either party or to an offline group?

General Elections—Presidential. November 28 (Tues) and November 30 (Thur)
Morton Ch 13 is still relevant here. Nelson, Chapters 1, 3, 4.

Assignment (Due November 30) Find one article online that discusses and analyzes the 2004 presidential general election. Choose a quality source. Try CQ Weekly Reports or National Journal or something of similar quality. Print off and turn in no more than 5 pages.

Representation. December 5 (Tues)
Morton Ch 9.

Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections. December 7 (Thursday)
Nelson Chap. 7 & 9.

Review for Final. December 12 (Tues)