

PSC215

Fall 2008

Dewey 1101, 12:30-13:45 T-Th

Professor L. Powell [lynda.powell@rochester.edu](mailto:lynda.powell@rochester.edu)

## **American Elections: Presidential, Congressional, and State**

This course examines primary and general elections focusing on presidential, Congressional and state legislative elections. We will study the institutions and rules that structure these contests, and examine how they shape the decisions of candidates, voters and activists. Finally we will look at the policy representation that emerges from these electoral processes.

### **Course Outline and Readings:**

The class will involve both lectures and discussion sections. Every other Thursday, students will meet in sections with TAs. 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

Fiorina, *Culture War*, Pearson.

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

In addition we will use clickers that are available at the bookstore.

Other readings will be available electronically.

### **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. You should turn in one copy and keep a copy for yourself for class discussion. Because there is flexibility built into the system, late work will not be accepted. In response to the current election season, some short readings will be added to the syllabus and some changes may occur in the schedule. If you should miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what the assignment and/or readings are for the next class period.

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 should only do **three** homework assignments. Term paper assignment: Choose a House

district in 2008, 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 are in the writing section, 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 20%.

### **Grading:**

Class Participation and Assignments	15%
Midterm October 16	40%
Final	45%

**Introduction.** September 2, Tuesday

**Partisanship—Voters and Electorates.** September 4 (Th).

Morton Ch 1, pp 1-9, Ch 2 -3; Dudley Ch. 1 pp 1—14. “Another Peek Inside the Brain of the Electorate.” *Washington Post* July 24, 2008.

Readings should be completed before the September 4<sup>th</sup> lecture.

Assignment: 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 9 (Tues). Dudley Ch.1 pp 14—28 Morton Ch 11 pp397-426 and Ch 15.

Assignment: 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](http://www.ncsl.org). (Use issue areas, redistricting and links)

**First TA Session. Sept 11 (Thur)**

**House and Senate Primary Elections.** September 16 (Tues).

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: Choose a House district in 2008, 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 18 (Th) and September 23 (Tues).

Morton Ch 12. Dudley Ch. 2 is also relevant here. “Handicapping the 2008 Nomination Races: An Early Winter Prospectus.” William G. Mayer and “Political Parties in Rough Weather” Cohen, Karol, Noel and Zaller both in *The Forum* January 8, 2008.

Assignment (Due Sept 23): For the 2008 presidential election describe the rules used in one state to choose delegates to a national convention and indicate the 2008 result.

**TA Session: September 25 (Thurs).**

**Money in Elections.** September 30 (Tues) and October 2 (Th).

Morton Ch 6-7; Dudley, Chapter 3, Chapter 4 pp 87-99. “A Collapse of the Campaign Finance Regime?” Thomas Mann, “From Bad to Worse: The Unraveling of the Campaign Finance System.” Raymond La Raja and “Rethinking the Campaign Finance Agenda.” Michael Malbin all in *The Forum*, April 9, 2008.

Assignment (Due Oct 2) Choose a member of the House or Senate. Locate information that indicates how much money this individual raised and spent thus far in the 2008 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). Try online sources: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), and [www.fec.gov](http://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 2007-2008 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 7 (Tues)

Morton Ch 10. Look at the current presidential polls on [www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com).

Assignment (Find several polls online taken about the same time that focus on one of the 2008 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.

**TA Session: October 9 (Thurs).**

**Legislative General Elections—The Incumbency Advantage in Elections.** October 14 (Tues) and October 21 (Tues)

Morton Ch 9 and 11 pp 426-447; *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 October 21) 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.

**Midterm.** October 16 (Thur).

**TA Session: October 23 (Thurs).**

**The Electoral College.** October 28 (Tues)

Dudley Chap. 6; Morton Chapter 13.

Assignment (Due Oct. 28) 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.)

**General Elections—Presidential.** October 30 (Thur) and November 4 (Tues)  
Morton Ch 13 is still relevant here.

**TA Session: November 6 (Thurs).**

Assignment Find one article online that discusses the 2008 presidential general election outcome. Choose a quality source such as the *Washington Post*, *NYT*, *CNN*, *Harris Interactive* and so forth. Print off and turn in no more than 5 pages.

**Counting and Casting Ballots.** November 11 (Tuesday).  
Dudley Ch 5.

Assignment 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.

**Minor Parties and Independent Candidates.** November 13 (Thursday).  
Morton Ch 14.

Assignment 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 in no more than 5 pages printed from your sources or write up one page.

**Mass Media/Internet in Elections.** November 18 (Tues) and November 25 (Tues)  
Morton, Ch 8; Dudley Ch 4, pp99-106,

Assignment (Due November 25) 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?

**Culture War & Ideological Polarization.** December 2 (Tues).  
Morton Ch 5. Fiorina—read all chapters.

**TA Session: December 4 (Thurs).**

Assignment 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.

**Representation.** December 9 (Tues)  
Morton Ch 9.

**Institutional and Systemic Effects of Elections and review for final.** December 11  
(Thursday)