

**Political Science 227**  
**Voting Behavior and Elections**  
**Fall 2008**

Time: MWF 9:00-9:50 AM in 367 BSB

Instructor: Gregory Holyk, Ph.D.

Office: 1170A BSB

Office Hours: M 10:00-12:00 PM or by appointment

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Prerequisite: POLS101 (Introduction to American Government)

### **Course Description and Objectives**

You picked a great time to take a course on voting behavior and elections. The 2008 presidential election provides us with a unique opportunity to follow the campaign throughout the course while we examine and discuss theories of voting and elections. The primaries (especially on the Democratic side) have already shown that this election will be very interesting to follow. Classes will be a mixture of past and present, including discussions of the readings and how they relate to the current election.

This course will cover a wide range of topics under the heading of voting behavior and elections. These topics include: American government, voting, political behavior, democracy, and polling and public opinion. The main objective in covering these topics will be to obtain an understanding of the process of the American electoral system and how average citizens think about, and participate in, the process.

Course objectives: (1) To provide students with an understanding of the structure, function, and principles of electoral politics in the United States; (2) To foster an increased interest in, and engagement with, the actions of the U.S. government; (3) To apply the theories and information gleaned from the course to the 2008 presidential campaign; (4) To place contemporary developments in government in historic context; (5) To enhance critical thinking skills.

### **Expectations/Requirements/Course Guidelines**

You are expected to be adequately prepared for class discussions, and this includes, first and foremost, doing the required readings. Your success in this class, and the overall success of the discussions, is dependent on your preparation. Of course, like most professors, I love to hear myself talk, but I would much rather discuss the material with your equal participation. This is the most important part of your university experience. You will be expected to challenge the material and the professor. If I find that class discussion is waning, I will instead ask for 1-2 page reaction papers at the end of every class.

## **Evaluation**

Grades will be determined as follows:

Midterm exam (30%) (Multiple choice/essay)

Final exam (30%) (Multiple choice/essay)

Campaign Journal/presentation (30%)

Participation/attendance (10%)

## **Grading**

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scoring scheme.

A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	below 60%

Note: If an emergency arises during the course that makes fulfillment of class requirements difficult, please discuss the situation with me as early as possible, so we can discuss how to resolve the problem and maintain your good standing. If you come to see me right away we can work something out, but if you wait too long there will be nothing I can do for you. Also, if you need special assistance, please inform me at the beginning of the class.

## **Exams**

The midterm and final exams will include both multiple choice (~30) and essay questions (choice of 2 of 4 options). The exams are not cumulative and will only include the material covered up to the point of the exam. Questions will be drawn from both the readings and material from the lectures that are not covered in the readings, so it is essential to attend class regularly. I will hold a review session outside of class before each exam to make sure that you are as prepared as possible and there are no surprises regarding content and format. Review session dates will be scheduled at a later time.

## **Weekly Presentations and Participation**

Each student is responsible for giving 1 presentation on campaign events in the course. We will dedicate time each day (~10 min.) to discussing the campaign and 1 student presentation. If you wish, you may partner up with one other person for the presentation, as long as both people contribute equally to the presentation. The presentation will consist of a summary and reactions to one of the news stories from your campaign journal, in addition to three discussion questions pertaining to each issue/candidate. The reactions and questions should be turned in to the instructor at the end of the class. Your presentations will contribute to the grade for the project. A sign up sheet will be provided on the first Friday of the semester.

Your participation grade is dependent on both attendance and actual participation in class. You must be an active participant in class discussion in class in order to receive the full participation grade. This course will not consist of pure lecturing; students are expected to help create a healthy atmosphere of discussion and debate. If a student is on the borderline between grades at the end of the semester, participation will enter into the final decision.

## Campaign Journal

This assignment requires you to follow the 2008 presidential election campaign using local, national, and international media. Collect 1 newspaper article, blog entry, web site report, or magazine article (i.e., Time, The Economist), each week. Write a brief summary (two to three sentences) and your reaction (about one paragraph) to the stories/evolution of the campaign. The campaign journal must consist of at least 1 entry from each of the following sources:

- Newspaper article
- Blog entry
- Web site report
- Magazine article
- Official campaign site/material

Be sure to incorporate course material into your discussion; **this is not simply an opinion piece.** In addition to including at least one of each of the sources above, you should also at least once address each of these topics (other topics you find interesting are encouraged and welcome):

- Iraq/Iran/war
- Terrorism/national security
- Economy/jobs/taxes
- Immigration
- Health care
- Moral issues (gay marriage, abortion, etc.)
- Personal traits of the candidates

You need not focus on one candidate in particular, though you may find this useful. Type your reactions; these should be kept either in a three-ring binder or pasted into a spiral notebook. In addition to handing in the final product in the second last week of the semester, you will be required to hand in your journal twice during the semester. I will not grade the project at this point, but if you do not have the journal complete to that point you will receive an F on the project. In the final report, students must also include a 5-page personal response to the assignment and the information gathered over the course of the semester; topics to address might be: the quality of the news, whether or not you feel yourself to be a better informed voter, whether you detected bias in the coverage, main themes that emerged across the campaign, etc.

The project is due in class on November 26<sup>th</sup>.

## **Late Work**

There will be no make-exams offered; if you miss an exam, the grade is a “0”. The only exceptions are medical emergencies and deaths in the family, both of which require documented evidence of the situation. If you know in advance that you absolutely have to miss an exam, notify me at least one week in advance and you will be able to take the test before the scheduled test date, but not after. Your campaign journal is due December 5<sup>th</sup>, and will be collected in class. Given the length of time you have to work on this project there will be no need for extensions. Students will lose one letter grade for each day that the assignment is late.

## **Academic Honesty**

Students should follow the University regulations regarding academic integrity, which are laid out in the Student Handbook. Students are strongly advised to read and familiarize themselves with these regulations. If students violate standards of academic honesty they will receive a failing grade in the class and may face expulsion from the University. Just to warn you, I actually do check for plagiarism in assignments – you will be caught if you plagiarize.

1. Cheating: Use or attempted use of any unauthorized assistance in taking an exam, quiz, or other assignment
2. Encouraging Academic Dishonesty: Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to persuade and/or influence another to violate the University’s rules, policies, and regulations governing academic integrity.
3. Fabrication: Deliberate falsification or design of any material or excerpt in an academic assignment or exercise.
4. Plagiarism: Appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author and representation of them as one’s original work. This includes (1) paraphrasing another’s ideas or conclusions without acknowledgment; (2) lifting entire paragraphs, chapters, etc. from another’s work, and; (3) submission of as one’s own work, any work prepared by another person or agency.

## **Required Texts**

1. Flanigan, William H., & Nancy H. Zingale. 2006 (11<sup>th</sup> ed.). *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. (~\$32)
2. Niemi, Richard G., & Herbert F. Weisberg. 2001 (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). *Controversies in Voting Behavior*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. (~\$50)
3. Fiorina, Morris P. 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Longman. (~\$15)

## **Course Schedule and Readings**

### **Week 1**

Aug. 25 – Introductions and syllabus

Aug. 27 – Political culture and American democracy (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 1)

Aug. 29 – Presentation schedule determined (Niemi & Weisberg, Introduction)

### **Week 2: Turnout and Political Participation**

Sept. 1 – Labor Day, no classes

Sept. 3 – Turnout (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 2; Niemi & Weisberg, I-2 and I-3)

Sept. 5 – Political participation (Niemi & Weisberg, I-4 and I-5)

### **Week 3: Partisanship 1**

Sept. 8 – Party loyalty and party identification (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 3)

Sept. 10 – Partisan evaluation (Niemi & Weisberg, V-17 and V-20)

Sept. 12 – Partisan evaluation cont'd (no reading)

### **Week 4: Partisanship 2**

Sept. 15 – Partisans and partisan change (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 4)

Sept. 17 – Partisan stability over time (Niemi & Weisberg, V-18 and V-19)

Sept. 19 – Partisan stability over time cont'd (no reading)

### **Week 5: Public Opinion**

Sept. 22 – Public opinion and voting (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 6)

Sept. 24 – The “rationality” of the public (Niemi & Weisberg, II-9)

Sept. 26 – The “rationality” of the public cont'd (no reading) **1<sup>st</sup> CAMPAIGN JOURNAL DUE**

### **Week 6: Mass Media**

Sept. 29 – Political communication (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 7)

Oct. 1 – Political communication cont'd (no reading)

Oct. 3 – Political communication cont'd (no reading)

### **Week 7: Political Information**

Oct. 6 – Information effects on voting (Niemi & Weisberg, II-6 and II-7)

Oct. 8 – Information effects on voting cont'd (Niemi & Weisberg, II-8)

Oct. 10 – Information effects on voting cont'd (no reading)

### **Week 8: Midterm**

Oct. 13 – Review for midterm exam

Oct. 15 – Midterm exam

Oct. 17 – In-class movie: “Wag the Dog” Part I

### **Week 9: Movie**

Oct. 20 – In-class movie: “Wag the Dog” Part II

Oct. 22 – Midterm and movie discussion

Oct. 24 – Why we hate the media (according to a journalist) (Fallows article, provided in class)

**Week 10: Voting I**

Oct. 27 – Vote determinants (Niemi & Weisberg, III-10 and III-11)

Oct. 29 – Vote determinants cont'd (Niemi & Weisberg, III-12 and III-13)

Oct. 31 – Vote determinants cont'd (no reading) **2<sup>nd</sup> CAMPAIGN JOURNAL DUE**

**Week 11: Voting II**

Nov. 3 – Vote choice (Flanigan & Zingale, Ch 8)

Nov. 5 – Post-election discussion (no reading)

Nov. 7 – Vote choice and post-election discussion cont'd (no reading)

**Week 12: Party System Change**

Nov. 10 – Party coalitions (Niemi & Weisberg, VI-21 and VI-22)

Nov. 12 – Party change (Niemi & Weisberg, VI-23)

Nov. 14 – Party change cont'd (no reading)

**Week 13: Divided America?**

Nov. 17 – Culture, ideology, and voting (Fiorina, Ch 1-2)

Nov. 19 – Red and blue states (Fiorina, Ch 3-4)

Nov. 21 – Culture and ideology cont'd (no reading)

**Week 14: Specific Contemporary Voter Issues**

Nov. 24 – Abortion and homosexuality (Fiorina, Ch 5-6)

Nov. 26 – Movement in electoral divisions (Fiorina, Ch 7-8) **CAMPAIGN JOURNAL DUE**

Nov. 28 – Thanksgiving (gobble gobble!), no classes

**Week 15: The Future**

Dec. 1 – What do we know now? (Fiorina, Ch 9-10)

Dec. 3 – Wrap-up and connections (no reading)

Dec. 5 – Review session for final exam.

**Week 16: Final Exams (Dec. 8-12)**

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!**