

POSC 315 – Regulation of Elections and Political Finance

Course Description

Introduction

Interest in the outcome of our 2016 Presidential election and its aftermath has brought into sharp focus the laws that govern elections in this country.

This course examines the evolution of laws that determine, among other things:

- who gets to vote, and in which elections, an evolving issue that has been far less settled than you might think;
- when you do get to cast a vote, how much your vote counts;
- who is eligible to run for office;
- how political campaigns are financed;
- the ways in which campaigns can spend money;
- how long elected officials are permitted to hold office;
- the circumstances under which voters can bypass their elected officials and vote directly on proposed laws.

In other words, this course is about the exercise of political power and who has a say in how our country is run.

The Keys to an Enjoyable and Successful Semester

If you are not familiar with my approach to teaching political science, please make careful note of the following.

First, this class will make sense to you only if you are familiar with recent and current events in American politics. You will be expected to monitor government and political news nationally and in California and to discuss relevant developments in class.

Second, make sure to complete the reading assignments. My lectures will not parrot what's in the book. On the other hand, do not get lost in the reading. You are expected to master the obvious, not the obscure.

Third, show up for class. This course relies heavily on in-class discussion and practical exercises, supplemented by guest lecturers. If you don't show up for virtually every class, it will be tough for you to get a decent grade.

Fourth, pay attention, engage intellectually and be prepared to think things through. You will be expected to learn some basic information, but, more importantly, you will be expected to apply that information in an appropriate way.

Required Reading

There is one book for this course:

Election Law:

Cases and Material

Daniel Hays Lowenstein, Richard L. Hasen, Daniel P. Tokaji and Nicholas Stephanopolous

Carolina Academic Press (Sixth Edition) (2017)

Additionally, as already noted, you should keep up with political news in Washington, D.C., California and around the country. A useful way to stay current with political news in California is to log onto www.rtumble.com, a daily compilation of newspaper stories about California politics.

Course Requirements and Grading

The components of your grade will be:

- Class Participation (attendance and involvement) 10%
- Midterm 30%
- Short Assignments including Research for Final Paper 10%
- Semester Project/Final Paper (20-25 pages)..... 40%
- In-Class Final 10%

The centerpiece of the course is the semester project/final paper. It will be due at the beginning of the last class. Because you may deliver a brief presentation of your paper during that class, there will be no extensions of the deadline except in the case of documented medical emergency. The penalty for missing this deadline will be one full letter grade for each 24 hours that the paper is late.

The in-class final will be a series of team presentations.

A midterm based on the first several weeks of reading and lectures will represent 30% of the grade. The midterm will consist of short answers, not-so-short answers and short essays designed primarily to make sure that you have a solid grasp of the basics of the subject matter before beginning in-depth work on your semester project.

To reiterate, attendance and participation are critical, not just for 10% of your grade, but because knowledge of material from the class and guest lectures will be necessary for both the midterm and the final paper. You will be permitted two unexcused absences. After that, each unexcused absence will cost you two points off your cumulative point total for the semester.

Office Hours

My office on campus is VKC 318. I live in Los Angeles and practice law with a large global law firm, I have a demanding practice and often travel. The only days that you will find me on campus are Wednesdays, to teach. Office hours will be Wednesdays before class, from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. To ensure that I will be there, please schedule your meeting with me ahead of time.

My law office is downtown, at Wilshire and Figueroa, and many students have found it convenient to meet there. That affords much more scheduling flexibility, as well as the opportunity to meet some of the people with whom I work.

The most efficient way to reach me is through my law firm e-mail at darry.sragow@dentons.com. The next best option is to call my office. That number is 213-892-2925. You can also call or text me on my mobile phone. That number is 310-968-7725.

Students With Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is 213.740.0776.

A Little Background

This is my nineteenth year teaching one undergraduate political science course every semester. At USC, in addition to this course, I have taught POSC 270, Introduction to Environmental Law and Politics; POSC 325, State Politics; POSC 335, Political Parties, Campaigns and Elections; POSC 347, Environmental Law; and POSC 425, Legislative Process. From 1999 through 2003, for eight semesters, I taught a course similar to POSC 335 at Berkeley.

A number of my former students are now playing major, visible roles in the political world. If you are thinking about a career in politics, government, public policy or the law, this course will be immensely helpful. If you are thinking about a career in some other field altogether, or if you aren't thinking at all about a career, this course will be informative and, hopefully, interesting and enjoyable.

A little online research will give you a sense of my professional background. Suffice it to say that I have devoted much of my life to the formulation of public policy in Washington, D.C. and California.

I am delighted to be teaching this course and hope it will provide you with a genuine understanding of how, why and with what consequences Americans govern ourselves.