

POSC 315 – Regulation of Elections and Political Finance

Course Description

SPECIAL NOTE: ADAPTING THIS CLASS TO THE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

This semester marks the 21st year that I have been teaching undergraduate political science as an adjunct. Over that time, the structure of those courses has evolved but remained largely the same, relying on extensive discussion in class, a fact-centered midterm, a term paper on a topic of each student's choice and, at the end, in-class team presentations.

About halfway through the first class I was teaching remotely after spring break last semester, I realized that replicating online what has proven highly successful in the classroom simply doesn't work in a remote teaching situation. What popped into my head was Marshall McLuhan's observation that "the medium is the message," meaning that the form of a message (in this case, in person in a classroom, as compared with everyone watching individually on a computer screen) determines the ways in which that message will be perceived.

Consequently, this syllabus for the fall of 2020 reflects a reconfiguration of the syllabus for this course that worked very well for many years, but under circumstances no longer extant. It is my hope that you will find your experience this semester as fulfilling as it would have been in person.

Introduction

This semester we will be learning about the laws that govern elections in this country during what is arguably the most unusual presidential campaign in recent American history.

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;
- the sources of the money that pays for political campaigns;
- 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 who gets to run our country.

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.

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, attend class. This course relies heavily on material presented in class and guest lectures. 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 Stephanopoulos
Carolina Academic Press (Sixth Edition)*

Additionally, as already noted, you should keep up with events in Washington, D.C. and California by following political news reports. One way to keep pace with political news in California is to log onto www.r tumble.com, a daily compilation of newspaper stories about California politics.

Course Requirements and Grading

As explained above, the course requirements are simple: Do the reading, show up, pay attention and complete all written assignments on time.

The components of your grade will be:

- Class Participation (attendance and involvement) 10%
- Midterm 30%
- Short Assignments, including research for final paper 20%
- Semester Project/Final Paper (typically 10-15 pages)..... 40%

The centerpiece of the course is the semester project/final paper. It will be due at the beginning of the last class. The penalty for missing this deadline will be one full letter grade for each 24 hours that the paper is late.

To reiterate, attendance is 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.

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.

Office Hours

I will be happy to schedule meetings by phone. 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 twenty-first year teaching at least 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 world of politics and public policy. 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 valuable understanding of the electoral process in America today.

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Reading and Written Assignments

INTRODUCTION

Week 1	August 20	Introductory Readings Text, Chapter 1, pp. 3–28
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THE POLITICAL CONSUMER

Week 2	August 27	The Right to Vote Text, Chapter 2, pp. 29-82
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Week 3	September 3	Representation and Districting Text, Chapter 3, pp. 83-140
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Week 4	September 10	Partisan Gerrymandering and Political Competition Text, Chapter 4, pp. 141-214
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Week 5	September 17	Minority Vote Dilution Text, Chapter 5, pp. 215-374
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THE POLITICAL MARKETER

Week 6	September 24	Election Administration and Remedies Text, Chapter 6, pp. 375-472 Midterm Review
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Week 7	October 1	MIDTERM
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Week 8	October 8	Campaigns Text, Chapter 10, pp. 673-758
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Week 9	October 15	Major Political Parties Text, Chapter 8, pp. 545-622 Third Parties and Independent Candidates Text, Chapter 9, pp. 623-672
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RUNNING FOR AND HOLDING OFFICE

Week 10	October 22	Ballot Propositions Text, Chapter 7, pp. 473-544
Week 11	October 29	The Buckley Framework Text, Chapter 12, pp. 807-880 Disclosure Text, Chapter 16, pp. 1099-1146
Week 12	November 5	Spending Limits Text, Chapter 13, pp. 881-950
Week 13	November 12	Contribution Limits Text, Chapter 14, pp 951-1036
Week 14	November 19	Public Financing Text, Chapter 15, pp. 1037-1098 FINAL PAPER DUE