

Voting, Elections & Public Opinion Spring 2007

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Political Science 3180-001
Hinckley Caucus Room OSH 225
Tuesday and Thursday
7:30- 8:50 a.m.

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Purpose:

This course is designed to study the Electoral Process and Public Opinion in America today. We seek to understand the behavior of individual citizens as well as the institutions and processes associated with parties, campaigns, and elections. In this course, we will focus on American Democracy, political culture and ideology, public opinion and how it is formed and measured, how political campaigns are conducted and financed, as well as study Congressional laws and Supreme Court decisions. In addition, we will examine political polling, and conduct a practical exercise during the semester. Hopefully, through this course, we will encourage greater participation in American politics and improve our election system.

Text:

Your instructor strongly suggests that each student purchases the required texts:

1. Brooker. *Public Opinion in the 21st Century*. (Herein known as “Brooker”)
2. Dudley, Robert and Alan Gitelson. *American Elections: The Rules Matter*. (Herein known as “Dudley”)
3. Asher, Herbert. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. (Herein known as “Asher”)

Grading:

Course grades will be based on the following:

1. Midterm Examination: 25%
2. Research Paper: 20%
3. Public Opinion/Polling Project: 10%
4. Comprehensive Final Examination: 40%
5. Attendance: 5%

Requirements:

All students are required to attend class and complete the assigned reading. You will need to have a reasonable knowledge of current events concerning the state, nation, and international community. In addition, you must keep up with current events both nationally and statewide concerning the impact of the 2006 Midterm Elections and the upcoming 2008 Elections. Current events will be briefly covered at the beginning of each class session. Thus, you are strongly encouraged to read the newspaper (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, *The Deseret News*, and *The New York Times*), watch weekly news shows (*Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, *Hardball*, etc.) and prepare to access the impact of elections.

When appropriate, various speakers will be invited to speak to the class. **Please be in attendance.** Questions taken from their presentations will be on the midterm and final exams.

Papers and Assignments:

You will be required to write a ten-page research paper. The paper will be due on April 12 and further information about the research paper will be provided during the semester.

Further information about the public opinion/polling project will also be given during the course of the semester.

Exams:

The date for the Midterm Examination will tentatively be on February 22nd. The final will be held on Tuesday May 2nd from 8:00 to 10:00 am.

Course Topics:

- I. Democracy
- II. Public Opinion and Effecting Public Policy
- III. Measuring Public Opinion (Practical Exercise)
- IV. Elections
- V. Congressional Elections 2006
- VI. Presidential Elections 2008
- VII. The Effects of the Media, National and Local
- VIII. Voting Behavior and Voting Management
- IX. Campaign Finance, National and Local
- X. Case Study: Redistricting in Utah, focusing on the 4th Congressional District

Course Outline:

- I. Democracy [Brooker Chapter 1 & Lecture Materials]**
 - a. A Decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind (Lecture)
 - b. Who is the Electorate? (Lecture)
 - c. Decentralized Organization of the American Electorate.
- II. Public Opinion and Effecting Public Policy [Brooker Chapter 8]**
 - a. Public Opinion Today (Lecture)
 - b. Issues that influenced the 2006 Midterm Election and will influence the 2008 Election [Iraq, Immigration, Gun Control, Same-Sex Marriage, Education, and Stem Cell Research]. (Lecture)
 - c. Guest Speaker
- III. Measuring Public Opinion [Practical Exercise, Brooker Chapters 2 & 3, Handouts].**
 - a. Measuring Public Opinion (Lecture)
 - b. Handouts regarding sample design, questionnaire development, data collection, and data analysis. (Lecture)
 - c. Practical exercise.
 - d. Guest Speaker
- IV. Elections [Dudley Chapter 2 & 4 and Handouts]**
 - a. The Nomination Process: Getting on the Ballot
 - b. Utah Nomination System (Lecture and Handout)
 - c. Salt Lake Election 2007 (Lecture)
 - d. Congress accepts electoral vote (Lecture)
 - e. Casting and Counting Ballots, Early Voting and Voting Machines
 - f. Guest Speaker
- V. Congressional Elections 2006 [Handouts]**
 - a. Results of the U.S. Senate, House, and Governorships. Do the results demonstrate a political shift? (Lecture)
 - b. Special Handouts

- VI. Presidential Elections with a Special Focus on 2008 [Dudley Chapter 6]**
 - a. Understanding Presidential Elections (Lecture)
 - b. Special Case Study: The Electoral College (Lecture)
 - c. Electoral College Voting
 - d. Alternative to the Electoral College (Lecture)
 - e. Special Handout
- VII. The Effects of the Media, National and Local [Brooker Chapter 6]**
 - a. The Mass Media and Public Opinion
 - b. New Media vs. Old Media
 - c. Role of Media Endorsements
 - d. Guest Speaker
- VIII. Voting Behavior and Voting Management, New Voting Procedures in Utah**
 - a. The Political Environment at the National and State level (Lecture)
 - b. Who Votes? Turnout and participation (Lecture)
 - c. Guest Speaker
- IX. Campaign Finance, National and Local [Handout and Dudley Chapter 3]**
 - a. Money Constituency
 - b. The Cost of Campaigning (Lecture)
 - c. History of Campaign Finance and Supreme Court Decisions (Handout)
 - d. State Campaign Finance (Lecture)
 - e. Campaign Finance loopholes and 527 Organizations (Lecture)
 - f. Soft vs. Hard Money (McCain-Feingold)
 - g. Guest Speaker
- X. Case Study: Redistricting in Utah; Focusing on the 4th Congressional District (If Time Permits)**