

Congressional Campaigns and Elections

An Examination of the Midterm 06 Races

PSc219.LH
Legislative Affairs Masters Program
Fall 2006

Instructor:

Dr. John J. Kornacki
Adjunct Associate Professor
The Graduate School of Political Management
805 21st Street N.W., Suite 401
The George Washington University
202-994-2000 (my cell phone is the better way to reach me direct 703-431-1462)
kornacki@gwu.edu

Office hours:

Usually before or after class by appointment.

Class time and location

Thursday evenings 6:00-8:00pm,
First Class: January 23, 2006; Final Class: May 1, 2006 with make-up classes as assigned.
444 North Capitol
Hall of the States Building (see guard desk for room assignment)

Overview and Objective

This course is designed to provide an understanding of the nature and function of political parties in the U.S. as well as providing a comprehensive look into the processes and organization of this year's congressional campaigns. Because this class is part of a legislative affairs curriculum, emphasis will be placed on party activity and leadership issues in Congress and on upcoming congressional elections. We will be looking into the party strategies in the 2006 midterm elections for discussion subjects, assignments and test material.

This is a graduate seminar. Active discussion and student-driven topics are expected and valued. Party officials, campaign specialists and some journalists may join in the classroom discussion from time to time.

Texts:

The Politics of Congressional Elections, 6th edition, by Gary C. Jacobson.

References used by the instructor during the course are listed below. Some of the handouts provided for particular topics are taken from them for class use only. (See instructor if you wish

to borrow a book).

Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process, by L. Sandy Maisel;

The Battle for Congress: Consultants, Candidates and Voters, edited by James Thurber

Crowded Airwaves: Campaigns Advertising in Elections, edited by James Thurber, Candice Nelson and Dave Dulio;

Campaign Warriors: Political Consultants in Elections, edited by James Thurber and Candice Nelson

Pursuing Majorities: Congressional Campaigns in American Politics, by Robin Kolodny

Leading Congress: New Styles, New Strategies, edited by John Kornacki

National Survey of Professional Campaign Consultants: Who are they and what do they believe?
American University

Grading, Student Responsibilities and Class Format

Grading is based on four factors:

- Class participation, 15%
- Two essay assignments, 20%
- Mid-term examination, 25%
- Final research project with oral presentation, 40%

Some students may have responsibilities that intrude on class time. It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor in advance of a planned absence and to make up any work that is missed. Absence from more than two classes may result in an incomplete grade.

Since this course is a graduate seminar, discussion is enlivened by the thoughtful contributions of all participants. Students shortchange themselves by not being prepared or opting out of the valuable discussion time that a seminar offers. As noted above, your participation or lack of it will affect your grade.

The text is meant to complement and supplement previous coursework in political science. In some cases a congressional elections text, like the Jacobson book, might fit into a senior undergraduate curriculum for a political science major. Since students in this program may not have had any political science classes, the text has the advantage of reviewing some of the fundamentals needed for a graduate seminar on this topic. Additional handouts and readings will be assigned throughout the semester. Some assignments may include readings from the reference list.

The beginning of each class period will be devoted to a review of current political party issues particularly those with a bearing on the 2006 election. Students are asked clip articles, download Web information or copy other materials relevant to the upcoming election. Discussion leaders will volunteer or be assigned for specific class topics depending on mood of the instructor.

Research Project: Election Analysis

The election analysis project will require the application of class subjects and concepts to the midterm congressional races for 2006. As everyone knows, the races are already underway and many expect a change of party control in at least one chamber of Congress. The final project will be your forecast and post-election analysis of a competitive House race of your choice. The class assignments and midterm will be linked to the project. The final paper should be about 20 pages, double-spaced, with a one paragraph single-spaced executive summary. Each student will make an oral presentation summarizing the paper. Think of it this way: I am a DCCC or RNCC official and you are senior analyst of mine. I want to understand the politics and the strategies of winning the majority in the House (or keeping the majority. I want you to tell me how this race will go and (after the election) why it went the way it did using the best information available which of course, you will cite in your paper.

Clarity of expression, factual integrity and effective communication skills are valuable to any political professional and this type of graduate study offers the opportunity to hone these skills in front of your peers. Crafting and articulating a research project like this requires understanding of the politics of an area of the country, the legislative process and campaign strategy. A clear objective of this course is to provide you the challenge of testing your strategic political thinking and judgment in front of your peers.

If you wish to have your paper returned to you with the instructor's comments, please include a self-addressed, stamped large envelope when you hand in your final paper (two copies) on the last day of class.

Statement on Scholarly Ethics

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, as in all courses, students are expected to be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, recycled assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

Report any violations you witness to your instructor. You may also consult director of the legislative affairs program or the associate dean of the school.

Schedule with Assignments (06b.1)

1. September 7

Introductions

Discussion of course expectations, assignments and format

Historical look at parties and elections, Part I

Reading Assignment:

Jacobson, Chapters 1 and 2

2. September 14

Historical look at parties and elections, Part II

Congressional districts, apportionment and gerrymandering

Reading assignment:

Jacobson, Chapter 3

3. September 21

Incumbency

Money factor

Small paper #1 assigned

Reading assignment:

Jacobson, Chapter 4

Handout 1

4. September 28

Political participation

Party control

Campaign organizations

Small paper #1 due

Reading assignment:

Handouts 2 and 3

5. October 5

Strategy

Message

Voting behavior, Part I

Reading assignment
Jacobson, Chapter 5

6. October 12

Turnout
Partisanship
Voting behavior, Part II

Reading assignment:
Jacobson, Chapter 6
Handout 4

7. October 19

National politics and trends over time
Midterm examination assigned

Reading assignment:
Maisel, Chapter 8
Handout #4

8. October 26

State and local elections
Presidential elections, Part I
Midterm due

Reading assignment:
Jacobson, Chapter 7
Handout 5

9. November 2 (no class: Dr. K out of town)

10. November 9

Post election analysis

Assignment: Small Paper #2

11. November 16

2007 and beyond

Reading assignment:
Handout 6

12. November 23 (Thanksgiving)

13. November 30

Grassroots organizations

Assignment:
Prepare oral presentations and final research papers

14. December 7

Congressional campaigns and elections summary
Class evaluations

Oral presentations, Part I

15. December 14

Oral presentations, Part II

Research papers due (remember to hand in 2 copies with a self-addressed and stamped document-size envelope if you wish a copy returned to you with comments).