

PACs and Congress

General Course Information:

Pmgt 268
PACs and Congress
Thursdays 6:00-8:00 pm
Hall of States
Fall 2008

Instructor Information:

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Course Description:

This course is an intensive examination of political action committees (PACs) in the United States. It will look especially at business, association and labor PACs, but will also include discussion and consideration of ideological and leadership PACs. The course will be divided into two broad efforts.

First, it will examine PACs in the US in the context of wider arenas of campaign finance, elections and issue management. Included in this part of the course will be consideration of historical, philosophical and legal dimensions of PAC operation. We will also consider several recent controversies and developments that impact PAC management and operation.

Second, the course will prepare students to assume the management and operation of a PAC. Instruction will include a

comprehensive consideration of major PAC functions: member communications, solicitation, candidate selection, budget and strategic development and program implementation. In addition, we will examine the notion of competitor analysis from a PAC and political contribution perspective.

Course Objectives

The course is intended to elevate and professionalize the PAC management function in government relations operations. It has been developed in response to perceived needs in present-day PAC operations. Those needs include, but are not limited to:

- Strategic dimensions of PAC management and operation
- Member communications programs
- Solicitation programs
- Budgetary elements of PAC management
- Strategic alignment
- Decision-making
- Candidate selection

We will develop elements of PAC models throughout the course. These are intended to give the student a simplified way to manage daily operation of a political action committee.

Method of Instruction

The primary method of instruction will be lectures and class discussion. It is expected that students will participate throughout. Class participation is incorporated in the pedagogical plan and counts for 30% of your final grade. Guest lectures from experts in the field will be included in parts of the course dealing with specific PAC functions. Generally, the first half of each class session will focus on assigned readings. During the second half of

the class the instructor will cover topics and perspectives included in, but not limited to the reading.

Method of Evaluation

Tests

There will be a take-home mid-term exam covering the initial lectures dealing with historical, philosophical and legal dimensions of PACs. It will count for 30% of the final grade and require that the student have a solid working knowledge of the material covered in the first part of the course. There is no final exam.

Final Paper

Each student will be required to submit a final project on a topic to be determined and approved by the instructor. The final paper will be approximately 5,000 words and be fully documented including footnotes and bibliography. It will count for 40% of your final grade.

Class Participation

Class participation counts for 30% of your final grade. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each session. To that end, everyone in the class is expected to prepare two questions based on the readings for each week. They should be written ahead of time and submitted to the instructor via e-mail by noon of the class day. You will be called upon randomly to offer and perhaps explain the relevance and/or importance of the question. In order to prepare for this exercise, you should read carefully the Critical Thinking piece at the end of this syllabus.

Texts/Resources

Malbin, Michael. Ed. *The Election After Reform*.

Federal Election Commission. *FEC Guide for Corporations and Labor Organizations*. January, 2007. (Available on-line)

Other articles will be included in weekly readings for the class. You will be provided with links to these articles.

Assignments

September 4

Course Introduction:

Discussion of Course Requirements

Approaches, Work and Expectations/The PAC I.Q. Test

September 11

Regulating Political Money:

Background on the FEC and US Campaign Finance Law

READING:

Chapters 1-4 FEC Manual for Corporations and Labor Organizations

September 18

FEC and US Campaign Finance Law:

Class will convene in the Gelman Library for a session with Dr. David Ettinger, GW Librarian. He will review the Gelman Library's resources related to PACs and campaign finance.

READING:

Chapters 5-9 FEC Manual

September 25

FEC and US Campaign Finance Law

READING:

Chapter 10, 11, Appendices and BCRA Supplement
Cantor, CRS Report. "Campaign Finance: An Overview" April
2007

October 2

Working with the FEC: "Why they're your friend . . . really"

Guest Lecture – Maureen Benitz, Senior Analyst, FEC

READING:

Hall and Wayman, "Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the
Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees," APSR V. 84,
No. 3. (Sep., 1990), pp. 797-820

Stratmann, "Some Talk: Money in Politics. A (partial) review of
the literature," Public Choice (2005), 124, 135-156.

October 9

Fundamental PAC Functions. An Overview

READING:

Mitchell et al. "The Determinants of Domestic and Foreign Corporate Political Activity," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 4. (Nov., 1997), pp. 1096-1113.

October 16
Developing a Strategy

Courtney Watson, Raytheon

READING:

Stratmann, "Are Contributors Rational? Untangling Strategies of Political Action Committees," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 100, No. 3. (Jun., 1992), pp. 647-664.

Jackson and Engel "Don't Bite the PAC that Feeds You: Business PAC Punishment Over the China Vote," *American Politics Research*, <http://apr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/31/2/138>

October 23
The Budget Exercise

Students will formulate a PAC forecast budget based on a scenario developed by the instructor

READING:

Malbin, *The Elections After Reform*, Ch. 1-2.

October 30
Decision Making by PACs

READING:

David Hart “Why Do Some Firms Give? Why Do Some Give a Lot?: High-Tech PACs, 1977-1996.” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 4. (Nov., 2001). Pp. 1230-1249.

Malbin, *The Elections After Reform*, Ch. 3-4.

November 6

Class Exercise in Formulating Contribution Guidelines

The instructor will distribute a scenario and guidelines for you to develop a set of guideline

READING:

Malbin, *The Elections After Reform*, Ch. 5-6.

November 13

Ethics and Values in PAC Management and the Campaign Finance World

November 20

Communications and Solicitation Programs

READINGS

Malbin, *The Elections After Reform*, Ch. 9.

December 4

Testing and Measuring the Effectiveness of Your PAC

READINGS:

Keim and Zeithaml, “Corporate Political Strategy and Legislative Decision Making,”

December 9 MAKE-UP CLASS
Major Trends and Things to Watch

December 14 Final Papers Due

CRITICAL THINKING/CRITICAL WRITING

Questions to Keep You Focused

This class requires that students participate as writers, as presenters and as questioners. The skills you use to make your participation most effective involve more than just reading the material and listening to lecture information. They involve the use and application of your critical thinking skills. Below is a set of questions that are intended to guide your work in this class and might be applied to a variety of life-situations. They are intended to guide the study of topics you read and write about in this class and should be used as you prepare for your in-class presentations. These are basically generic and do not apply for every article you read or for every circumstance you encounter. However, with some adjustment and training, they will help you 1) search beneath the surface of most issues we address in the class, 2) get beyond the trite partisanship that characterizes much of what passes for political discourse in Washington, 3) examine in closer detail the intent and impact of things you read and 4) appreciate and understand alternative viewpoints.

1. What is the purpose, goal or main point of the article? Is there a main thesis or theme?

2. Is there a particular problem being addressed? Is the article descriptive, analytical, predictive, or prescriptive? Is it just an opinion piece?
3. Does the author describe a primary causal relationship? How about other relationships?
4. Can you identify dependent and independent variables?
5. Is there a problem being presented and discussed in the article?
6. Does the writer suggest a particular resolution? Do they prove their argument? Do they discuss a research design?
7. Are there biases inherent in the design or in assumptions that underlie the design or the way data is presented?
8. What are the new terms introduced by the author? Do the terms make sense? Can you identify any bias in the selection of terms?
9. Is there a political or ideological point of view being expressed?
10. How might the same question be asked in other ways and produce the same results? Different results?

The idea behind these and a multitude of other questions about your reading and other class work is that you think about what you are presented and train yourself to ask questions digging deep into the material.