

# CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

Political Science 3613

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“Of course it’s political. I made a political campaign pledge on the political campaign trail to a politically interested group about a politically sensitive subject. It’s good politics to fulfill a campaign pledge, and I fulfilled it ... the first chance I got.”

— *Former U.S. Congressman George Gekas defending himself from charges that he acts like a politician.*

This seminar focuses on congressional elections, drawing on examples from current election campaigns. Congressional elections will be examined from several perspectives, including those of candidates, party officials, interest group leaders, journalists, and scholars. The class will cover the backgrounds of congressional candidates; the decision to run for office; campaign finance, strategy, and communications; and the activities of political parties, interest groups, and the mass media. We also will examine the factors that separate winners from losers. Other subjects include the impact of elections on governance and election reform.

The seminar will draw on the expertise of prominent political consultants and academics. Some classes may be scheduled outside of the normal classroom.

## *Course Requirements*

Students will become learn the literature on congressional elections. Each student also will become an expert on a single election. Weekly seminar meetings will include discussions of the assigned topics, including the reading assignments and relevant information pertaining to the election each student is studying. Students will write three short case study reports (6-10 pages) and a final paper on their election. The first report will analyze the congressional district, the primary candidates’ backgrounds, and the outcomes of the nomination contests. The second report will focus on campaign finance and the activities of political parties and interest groups. Campaign strategies and communications are the subject of the third report. The final case study paper (approximately 25 double-spaced pages) will pull together information from the previous reports and interpret the general election outcome.

Students will not be expected to consult textbooks other than those assigned. They will learn about their campaigns by visiting candidates’ websites, searching the Internet, and reading newspaper and blog postings. Most will interview journalists, candidates, campaign aides, or others involved in elections.

Students also will write a short paper (3-5 pages) predicting the number of House seats that will change hands as a result of the election.

Detailed information on the research assignments will be posted on XXWEBSITE and will be reviewed in class. The professor will meet with students individually and in small groups to assist them with their projects.

### *Grades and Assignments*

Research reports: 5% each (15% total)

Election prediction paper: 10%

Final paper: 60%

Class presentations, simulations, discussion, and miscellaneous assignments: 15%

### *Required Textbooks*

William Flanigan, et al. Political Behavior of the American Electorate, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. with supplement, CQ Press, 2010

Peter Francia, et al., The Financiers of Congressional Elections, Columbia University Press, 2003

Paul Herrnson, Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., CQ Press, 2012

Paul Herrnson, et al., Interest Groups Unleashed, CQ Press, 2012

Darrell West, Patrick Kennedy: The Rise to Power, Prentice Hall, 2001

### *Optional Textbooks*

Randall Atkins and David Dulio, eds., Cases in Congressional Campaigns: Riding the Wave, Routledge 2011.

Gary Jacobson, The Politics of Congressional Elections, any edition

Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick Kenney, The Spectacle of U.S. Senate Campaigns, Princeton, 1999

Textbooks are available at the Book Co-op and online book outlets. Other readings are posted on HuskyCT.

Students are expected to complete their assignments prior to each class meeting. In addition, they are expected to follow the events connected with the upcoming elections as they unfold. Students should read a major newspaper and consult CQ Weekly, National Journal, The Cook Political Report, The Rothenberg Political Report, Politico, or online political coverage associated with major newspapers on a regular basis.

### *Weekly Assignments*

XXDATES TO BE FILLED IN ONCE SELECTED (TUES, WEDS, OR THURS)

1. Introduction

2. Overview of the Strategic Environment and Case Study Research  
 Herrnson, Congressional Elections, Introduction and ch. 1  
 One of the following: “Mama Grizzlies” Fight to be the Voice of South Dakota  
 or Colorado’s Third District: John Salazar, Just Another Democrat (XXBOTH ON  
 WEBSITE)  
 Research Paper Assignments for Congressional Elections (ON WEBSITE)
3. Congressional Candidates and Campaign Organizations  
 Herrnson, Congressional Elections, chs. 2, 3  
 West, Patrick Kennedy: The Rise to Power, entire book  
 \* Select elections for case study research
4. Political Parties  
 Herrnson, Congressional Elections, ch. 4  
 Herrnson, “The Roles of Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, and Party  
 Allies in Elections,” Journal of Politics, vol. 71 (2009): 1207-1224 (XXON WEBSITE)  
 \* First short research report due
5. Interest Groups  
 Herrnson et al., Interest Groups Unleashed, entire book.  
 R. Sam Garrett, “Seriously Funny: Understanding Campaign Finance Policy Through  
 the Colbert Super PAC,” Saint Louis University Law Journal 56: 711-723 (XXON  
 WEBSITE)  
 \* Political party simulations  
 \* Review research projects during office hours
6. Campaign Fundraising  
 Francia et al., The Financiers of Congressional Elections, entire book  
 Herrnson, Congressional Elections, ch. 6  
 \* Interest group simulations
7. Campaign Strategy and Communications  
 Herrnson, Congressional Elections, chs. 7, 8, 9
8. Campaign Strategy and Communications (continued)  
 Meet in XXlarge room, reconvene in normal classroom  
 \* Briefing by a political consultant
9. Review Research Projects  
 \* Second short research report to be emailed by 5pm

10. Voting Behavior  
Flanigan and Zingale, Political Behavior of the American Electorate, entire book  
\* Election predictions paper due in class
11. Election Post-Mortem  
\* Meet in XXlarge room, reconvene in normal classroom
12. Elections, Governance, and Reform  
Herrnson, Congressional Elections, chs. 10, 11  
\* Third short research report due
13. Review Research Projects
14. Research Presentations
15. Research Presentations  
\* Final research paper, and ALL press clippings, internet sources, and interview notes for short reports and final papers due in class. An electronic copy of final paper is also to be submitted via email.