

# **POLS V4311: American Parties and Elections**

## **Barnard College – Fall 2007**

Professor: [Raymond A. Smith](#)

Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:35-11:50

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1-2pm or by appointment

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This course will provide an examination of the role of political parties, voting, and the electoral process in the development and maintenance of American democracy. Part I of the course will consider the causes and consequences of the long-term two-party system found in the U.S. Part II will review the reasons for voting and non-voting in the U.S., as well as determinants of the vote. Part III will examine the electoral process in the U.S., making use of the unfolding 2008 presidential election as an extended case study. The course will draw examples from current events, so students are encouraged and expected to keep up with major developments in the news.

### **Course requirements:**

If at any time you have a problem with a deadline, a course requirement, or anything else which may affect your participation in the course, please speak to me as soon as possible. I will work with you to resolve any problems, but can't do so unless I know about them.

The following are the course requirements for undergraduate students. *Graduate students* will be required to complete an additional research paper; any graduate student in the class should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible in the semester.

**Exams:** There will be three bluebook, in-class exams, one at the end of the first two sections of the course and one cumulative exam during the final exam period. Each exam is worth 25% of the overall course grade. Exams will be based on course lectures and readings.

**Written Assignment & Debates:** Each student will be required to submit a written assignment not to exceed 8 pages (typed, double-spaced in 12-point font), worth 25% of the overall course grade. Papers are due at the start of the class on the day assigned; late papers are subject to a penalty of one grade per class. Each student will be randomly assigned to the “pro” or “con” side of one of the three debates, and will be required to complete the written assignment associated with that debate.

In the written assignment, students will present 3 to 5 distinct arguments taking either the “pro” or the “con” position on the assigned topic. As an intellectual exercise, this may require students to present and defend arguments that they do not necessarily themselves agree with. Written assignments will require research outside the course readings and lectures, and must include citations from at least one academic political science journal.

Sources from outside the course should be fully cited on a bibliography page using any clear and consistent format (the bibliography page does not count towards the page limit).

Papers should begin with a brief introduction framing the arguments to be presented in the paper and a brief conclusion summarizing the paper. Papers should not digress into background or general information about the topic, but focus on advancing 3 to 5 distinct arguments. Each argument should be introduced with a subheading identifying the argument to be made. The arguments should be distinct in that they reflect different dimensions of the topic rather than closely related dimensions. The paper need not specifically argue the opposing side; however, the strongest arguments usually identify and take into account likely objections from the other side. Your paper should forcefully argue your assigned side, but should still be reasonable and realistic.

## **Required readings:**

The following required books have been ordered at the Columbia bookstore. They have also been placed on reserve in the Barnard/Columbia library system.

- John Aldrich, *Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*
- William Flanagan and Nancy Zingale, *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*
- Morris Fiorina, *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America*
- Richard Niemi and Herbert Weisberg, *Controversies in Voting Behavior*
- L. Sandy Maisel and Kara Buckley, *Parties and Elections in America: The Electoral Process*

Readings are organized for each of the parts of the course below rather than weekly; all readings should be completed as early as possible during each of the three parts of the class.

In addition, you are encouraged to read the coverage of American politics and government in the *New York Times*, particularly the Sunday “Week in Review” section. The *New York Times* will be a useful source of information for your papers. From time to time, newspaper articles or other additional readings may be assigned.

# Course Calendar

*(This is the anticipated course calendar but may be subject to minor revisions.)*

## Course Introduction

**Week of September 3:** The Logic of Representative Democracy

## Part I: Political Parties

### Part I Readings:

- Flanigan and Zingale, Ch. 3, 4
- Maisel and Buckley, Ch. 1, 2, 12
- Aldrich, Ch. 1, 2 (skim 33-45); Part II Prologue; Part III Prologue, Ch. 6 (skim 180-193), 8 9
- Niemi and Weisberg, Ch. 17, 21, 14, 15 (*Recommended, not required*)

**Week of September 10:** The Roles and Purposes of Political Parties

**Week of September 17:** The American Two-Party System and the Persistence of Minor Parties

**Week of September 24:** Patterns of Realignment, Dealignment, and Divided Government

**Week of October 1:** Political Parties: Conclusions

*Debate #1 in class on Tuesday, October 2. Topic: "The US political system should be reformed to allow greater participation by minor political parties." (Group A: Pro; Group B: Con)*

*Exam #1 in class on Thursday, October 4.*

## Part II: Voters and Voting

### Part II Readings:

- Maisel, Ch. 3
- Flanigan and Zingale, Ch. 1, 2, 5, 6
- Fiorina: All (*Chapter appendices are optional*)
- Niemi and Weisberg, Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 (*Recommended, not required*)

**Week of October 8:** The Historical Expansion of the Electoral Franchise and Continuing Limitations on the Right to Vote

**Week of October 15:** The Downsian Voting Paradox and the Cost-Benefit Analysis of Voting

**Week of October 22:** The Problem of Voter Turnout and Differential Voting Rates

**Week of October 29:** Segments of the Electorate and their Voting Patterns

*Debate #2 in class on Thursday, November 1: Topic to be announced. (Pro: Group C; Con: Group D)*

**Week of November 5:** Voters and Voting: Conclusions

*No class on Tuesday, November 6 (Election Day)*

*Exam #2 in class on Thursday, November 8.*

### **Part III: The Electoral Process**

#### **Part III Readings:**

- Flanigan and Zingale, Ch. 7, 8
- Maisel, Ch. 8, 9, 4, 5, 10, 12
- Niemi & Weisberg, Ch. 6, 8, 9 (*Recommended, not required*)

**Week of November 12:** Phases of a Presidential Election and the Workings of the Electoral College

**Week of November 19:** The Role of Campaigns

*No class on Thursday, November 22 (Thanksgiving Day)*

**Week of November 26:** The Influence of Media and Organized Interests

**Week of December 3:** Course Conclusion: American Parties and Elections

*Debate #3 in class on Tuesday, December 4. Topic to be announced (Group E: Pro; Group F: Con)*

*Time, date, and location of final exam to be announced*