

FALL 2009

**PSC 214 THE POLITICS OF CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS**

**T, R: 3:30 - 4:50 10 CAPEN**

Prof. Franco Mattei ([mattei@buffalo.edu](mailto:mattei@buffalo.edu))

Office: 516 Park Hall Phone: 645-8451

Office hours: M, W: 8:00 - 10:00 and by appointment

The course is designed as an introduction to the basic rules, the key actors, the outcomes, and the implications of U.S. House and Senate elections. The main topics of the course are: the legal and institutional context in which congressional elections take place - with particular attention to redistricting and the electoral system; the resources, strategies, and tactics used by candidates in their campaigns for office; the considerations affecting a voter's choice (e.g., partisanship, ideology, qualifications of the candidates, performance in office of candidates running for reelection); the influence of election outcomes on representation and the content of policies.

**Readings**

\* *Textbook* (available for purchase at the bookstores):

Jacobson, Gary C. 2009. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. New York: Longman 7<sup>th</sup> edition. [J]

\* *Additional readings* (available at *UBLearns*: PSC214): see Course Outline below.

\* Announcements about readings and material not yet in the syllabus will be made in class.

\* *Useful Sources*:

In general, students can access several academic journals by going to:

<http://www.jstor.org>.

Weekly reports about politics, Congress, and elections can be found in:

*Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (available online under our library system:

<http://library.cqpress.com/index.php>, then click on *CQ Weekly*.)

*National Journal* (<http://www.nationaljournal.com/njmagazine>)

Information about the Congress, its structure, organization, action, and composition, can be found at the official websites of the:

House of Representatives (<http://www.house.gov>)

Senate (<http://www.senate.gov>)

Information about campaign finance laws and data (contributions, expenditures by candidates, parties and political action committees) can be found at:

Federal Election Commission (<http://www.fec.gov>)

Information about members of Congress, their states and congressional districts, can be found at:

The Almanac of American Politics (<http://www.nationaljournal.com/almanac>)

CQ Politics (<http://www.cqpolitics.com>)

Information about polling data and trends can be found at:

The Polling Report (<http://www.pollingreport.com>)

Real Clear Politics (<http://www.realclearpolitics.com>)

## **Course Grade**

The overall course grade will be based on:

- a) class attendance and active participation [5%]
- b) midterm exam [45%]
- c) final exam [50%]

a) Class participation. Each student is expected to attend classes regularly and to complete the readings as assigned. Informed participation will be noted and counted in a student's favor.

b and c) In-class exams. The midterm and final exams are designed to test the student's understanding of the required readings and materials discussed in class. The midterm exam will take place on October 22 and will cover class lectures and readings assigned up to that date. The final exam is scheduled during the December 14-21 period. This exam will be comprehensive, covering material presented and discussed throughout the course. However, most of the questions will focus on class lectures and readings assigned after the midterm exam. Both exams will be composed of "objective" (true/false choice, followed by a brief explanation of either choice) and short identification (description and analysis of concepts and empirical evidence) questions.

## **Lateness and Extensions**

Students must be aware that no make-ups or extensions will be granted. Only documented emergencies brought to the instructor's attention *before* the scheduled exams will be considered on an individual basis. Thus, it is a student's responsibility to inform *as early as possible* the instructor of any significant problem so that alternative arrangements can be made.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

Week 1 (September 1, 3)

### ***Course Introduction***

- Main Issues in Congressional Election Research
- Change in the 1990s: the Republican Ascendancy
- The Democrats' Return to Power: the 2006 and 2008 Elections
- Presidents and Congressional Campaigns
- Partisan Polarization in the Electorate and in Congress
- Unified and Divided Government in American Politics

Readings:

**J:** ch. 1

Additional Readings and Materials:

*2008 Election Results* (UBLearns)

*Party Unity Scores in Congress: 1956 - 2008 - Table* (UBLearns)

*Election Results: Partisan Consistency, 1952 - 2008 - Table* (UBLearns)

*Congressional Representation and the South - Table* (UBLearns)

Week 2 and 3 (September 8, 10; September 15, 17)

***Congressional Elections: The Context***

- The Constitution
- Reapportionment and Redistricting
- Partisan and Racial Gerrymandering
- “Majority-minority” Districts and Representation
- Political Consequences of Redistricting
- Partisanship and Re-redistricting after the 2000 Census
- Redistricting Reforms

Readings:

**J:** ch. 2.

Additional Readings and Materials:

*Congressional Apportionment - Census 2000 Brief* (UBLearns)

*States Gaining/Losing Seats - 2012 Projections* (UBLearns)

Week 4 and 5 (September 22, 24; September 29, October 1)

***Congressional Elections: The Candidates, I***

- Recruitment and Self-selection
- Incumbency Advantage
- House and Senate Differences

Readings:

**J:** ch. 3

Additional Readings and Materials:

Mayhew. *Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *Campaign Spending Effects In US Senate Elections* (UBLearns)

Week 6 - 7 (October 6, 8; October 13, 15)

***Congressional Elections: The Candidates, II***

- Challengers: House and Senate Differences
- Campaign Finance
- Campaign Messages

Readings:

**J:** ch. 4

Additional Readings and Materials:

Fenno. *U.S. House Members in their Constituencies. An Exploration* (UBLearns)

*Table - The Cost of Winning an Election, 1986 - 2006* (UBLearns)

*Table - The Cost of Winning an Election, 2008* (UBLearns)

*Table - House Campaign Expenditures, 1974 - 2006* (UBLearns)

Week 8 (October 20)

***Congressional Elections: The Voters, I***

- Turnout
- Drop-off and Roll-off
- Midterm and Presidential Election Years

Readings:

**J:** pp. 113-117

Additional Readings and Materials:

*Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2006* (UBLearns)

*Table - Registered vs. Likely Voters: Gallup data* (UBLearns)

**\*\*\* Midterm In-Class Exam - October 22 \*\*\***

Week 9 (October 27, 29)

***Congressional Elections: The Voters, II***

- Candidate Choice: Models of Voting Behavior

- Comparing House and Senate Elections

Readings:

**J:** pp. 117-153; 242-258.

Week 10, 11 (November 3, 5; November 10, 12)

***Congressional Elections: National Referenda or Local Events?***

- Presidents' Popularity, the Economy and Congressional Elections

- Midterm Elections and the President's Party: "Check" and "Penalty"

- Local Interpretations of Congressional Elections: Candidates, Campaigns and Constituencies

- The Linkage between National and Local Influences on Congressional Outcomes

Readings: **J:** ch. 6

Week 12, 13 (November 17, 19; November 24)

***Recent Congressional Elections: Campaigns and Outcomes in the 1990s***

Readings and Materials:

Jacobson and Dimock. *Checking Out: The Effects of Bank Overdrafts on the 1992 House Elections* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *The 1994 Elections in Perspective* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *Impeachment Politics in the 1998 Congressional Elections* (UBLearns)

Week 14, 15 (December 1, 3; December 8, 10)

***Recent Congressional Elections: Campaigns and Outcomes in this decade***

Readings and Materials:

Jacobson. *A House and Senate Divided: The Clinton Legacy and the Congressional Elections of 2000* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *Terror, Terrain, and Turnout: Explaining the 2002 Midterm Elections* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *Polarized Politics and the 2004 Congressional and Presidential Elections* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *Referendum: The 2006 Midterm Congressional Elections* (UBLearns)

Jacobson. *Referendum II: The Bush Legacy in the 2008 Congressional Elections* (UBLearns)

**\*\*\* Final In-Class Exam - TBD \*\*\***