

**Political Science W3922Y. Seminar: Previewing the 2008 Election.**

*Spring 2008. 11:00AM-11:00pm Tuesdays. Room 711, IAB*

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Office hours, 3-4pm, T, 430-5:30pmW, or by appointment

This research seminar examines topics relevant to understanding the upcoming (and partially ongoing) 2008 elections (presidential and congressional). The focus will be on the ongoing present-moment of the campaign and anticipating the future, while absorbing the lessons of the past. Much of the discussion will be on understanding voters and what makes them tick. The seminar will applying readings on voting and elections in the United States, and introduces students to doing research on electoral politics.

The course will involve 3 somewhat separate but concurrent tracks.

1. *Intensive reading on relevant topics involving electoral politics.*
2. *Learning about doing research on voting behavior, culminating in student research papers*
3. *Discussing politics of the immediate present, with an eye toward understanding current events and anticipating upcoming events.*

**Books:** Erikson and Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. updated  
Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde. 2007. *Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 Elections*.  
Fiorina, *Culture War?* 2005. Revised ed.  
Wattenberg. 2007. *Is Voting for Young People?*

*These books are available from Book Culture (formerly Labyrinth Bookstore) on 112<sup>th</sup> St.*

The readings are mainly drawn from the world of political science rather than political journalism. *In addition to the assigned texts, there will be occasional library assignments from selected political science journals and books as well as current reading matter from the internet.*

***Assignments and expectations:***

- Contribute intelligently to class discussions.
- Occasional minor research projects.
- Occasional assignment to lead class discussion on some topic.
- Major Research paper.

*No tests are anticipated.*

**Major Research paper.**

*One of the following:*

- a) Original analysis of voting behavior, using the 2004 Exit Polls or other data.
- b) A critical literature review on a topic relevant for this course.
- c) An original research topic, relevant to the 2008 election, to be cleared with the instructor.

A preliminary 3-page report, as a paper proposal, is due *March 25*. The final paper is due one week after the end of classes.

The final few meetings will be devoted to the presentation of student papers.

**Grades:** *Minor assignments.* Counts 25%.  
*Class participation.* Counts 25%.  
*Major research paper.* Counts 50%.

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*As part of our contemporary analysis, we will be following the polls. Excellent websites for current polls and analysis include*

[www.pollster.com](http://www.pollster.com)

[www.pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com)

[www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com)

[www.surveyusa.com](http://www.surveyusa.com)

*We will also follow the betting odds on the election at*

[www.Intrade.com](http://www.Intrade.com)

[www.iem.biz.uiowa.edu](http://www.iem.biz.uiowa.edu)

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**20<sup>th</sup> Century Elections Project:**

To augment our weekly discussions of 2008, we will develop expertise in past elections from the 1900s. Each student will be randomly assigned one (maybe more) elections from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The student will be responsible for researching this election for purposes of comparing to 2008. Relevant questions include:

- a. What was the nomination process like? Can we account for the candidates selected?
  - b. How was the campaign seen by observers during the campaign? Was the outcome obvious to contemporary observers?
  - c. What accounts for the winner's victory—both in terms of accounts at the time and the views of political historians.
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**Schedule:** (SUBJECT TO CHANGE AND AUGMENTATION)

\* indicates an assignment is due

Jan. 22. **Introduction.**

Jan. 29. **A look back at 2004 and 2006 and before.**

Read: Abramson, Ch.1,2,3,9,10,11.

Feb. 5. **Public Opinion in the American Democracy.**

*Th US electorate. Public Opinion Trends*

Read: Erikson, Chs. 3, 4,6. Fiorina, entire.

Feb. 6. **WEDNESDAY SESSION. Super-Tuesday Post-Mortem. Time, Place TBA.**

\*Feb. 12. **Special Presentation:** Andrew Gelman on Red States, Blue States.

Feb. 19 **Polls and other ways of Forecasting Elections**

*Polls and their Accuracy. Other forecasting methods.*

Read: Erikson, Chapter 2. Additional readings TBA.

\*Feb. 26. **Voting Participation.**

*Why is turnout so low? Consequences? Reform?*

Read: Wattenberg, entire. Abramson, Ch. 4.

March 4. **Voter Decisions in Presidential Elections.**

*Explaining Voter Decisions, Election Outcomes*

Read: Abramson, 6,7. Erikson, 7, 9. .

\*March 11 **Media and Campaigns. Campaign Dynamics**

*Is there media bias? Do Campaigns Matter?*

Read: Erikson 8.. Additional readings TBA.

March 18. *Spring break.*

\*March 25. **Party Identification and Realignment**

*What is party identification? Is Partisanship Declining? Realigning?*

Read: Abramson 8, 12.

April 1. *No Class.*

\*April 8. *Further topics.*

April 15. **Paper Presentations**

April 22. **Paper Presentations**

April 29. **Paper Presentations**

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*Short Projects in Detail:*

**Internet Assignment.** *Due Feb. 12.* Search the internet and find 5 websites with relevant information about election data, current or past. Document your visits to these sites by printing one page of each. Submit a list of all five websites. Offer a brief commentary, perhaps a brief paragraph (or two at most) per site, describing what you have found.

**Primary Election Analysis.** *Due Feb. 26.* Accessing available detailed polling data on the web (SurveyUSA being an excellent source for specific states), analyze the breakdowns of the vote in the Republican and Democratic primaries. Analyze where have the major candidates in each party drawn their major support. Maximum of 4 pages of text, 2 pages of supporting tables, figures, or graphs.

**Survey Data Analysis Project.** *Due March 11.* Analyze vote decisions by voters in the 2004 Exit Poll. *Maximum* length: 3 pages of text, 2 pages of supporting tables, figures, or graphs. **DETAILS TBA.**

**Proposal for the Major Research Paper.** *Due March 25.* Suggested length: 3 pages. Maximum length: 5 pages but can be as short as 2 pages. The proposal should describe the argument or research question you will examine and the evidence that you will be evaluating. It should include a bibliography and it should make direct reference to pertinent theoretical or empirical work

**Review of *The American Voter Revisited*.** *Due April 8.* Maximum length: 6 pages. A critical book review of a book still in preparation. By the authors Jacoby, Lewis-Beck, Norpoth, and Weisberg. The material will be available to you on line.

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**Major Research Paper.** Final written version, due May 6. Suggested length: 15-25 pages. The paper can be a data analysis using data such as the 2004 Exit Poll data, a critical literature review on a relevant topic, or an original research topic to be determined by you and your instructor. The paper cannot be exhaustive due to time constraints, but it should provide a clear, coherent, and convincing analysis.

Although final written papers are due May 6, students should be prepared to make brief class presentations about their work in progress during the final three class meetings.