

# POLS 230: Elections, Political Parties and Interest Groups

Fall 2014

Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:45

Classroom: Oldfather 308

Offices hours: MTWR, 10:30 to 11:00 or by appointment

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## Required texts

Burbank, et al: *Parties, Interest Groups, and Political Parties*

Herrnson, et al: *Interest Groups Unleashed*

(other readings as assigned)

## Overview and Purpose

Bulletin Description: Roles of political parties and interest groups in government and politics, focusing on their efforts of elections and lobbying.

This course examines the changing impact of political parties and interest groups on American politics. While we will look at the direct lobbying efforts of parties (or more often, factions within parties) and interested groups, our primary focus will be on the work of parties in elections and the evolution of interest group influence on elections in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United v. FEC* decision.

Among the questions we will seek to answer are:

- How have political parties evolved in the American democratic system?
- How do parties function today?
- What are the fundamental rules under which American political parties and interest groups operate?
- How are parties and interest groups financed and how do they finance elections?
- What are the relationships between parties, interest groups and election campaigns?
- How do interest groups impact public policy through grassroots (or Astroturf) lobbying?
- How do parties and interest groups harness the energy of political movements like tea party movement?
- How did *Citizens United v. FEC* change the political playing field?

## Course Requirements

All students are expected to do the assigned reading and work, attend class, and participate. Exams and quizzes will be based on both the readings and lectures, and the themes of those assignments will be a major part of our in-class discussions. Therefore attendance and class participation are vital.

There will be a total of 1000 points for the course. Grades will be made up of class participation, a short writing assignment, two quizzes, a midterm exam, and a final exam. They will be weighted as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 100 points
- Two Quizzes: 200 points (100 points each)
- Midterm Exam: 200 points
- Election Project Essay: 200 points
- Final Exam: 300 points

The points for each assignment will be added together and the decimal point shifted one to the left to get the final grade. For example, a total of 756 points for all assignments represents a final grade of 75.6; a C.

### **Participation**

The bulk of the participation grade will be for attendance. Every student starts the semester with 100 participation points, but loses 7 points for each unexcused absence. An attendance sheet will be passed around at the beginning of class. If you come to class late, it is your responsibility to sign in at the end of class. Participation in class discussions will be periodically noted and points added to your participation grade. Since participation will be noted periodically, the only way to assure that your participation will be credited will be to participate consistently. Any participation points over 100 will be rolled over to your final exam. That is the only extra credit that will be given in the course.

### **Quizzes and Exams**

The quizzes will be a mixture of multiple-choice, true-false and short answer (5-10 sentence) questions. Each quiz will cover the prior section's materials (in other words, not comprehensive). The midterm exam will be comprehensive of the material covered up to that point, as will the final exam. However, both exams will slightly emphasize the material not covered by prior testing (that is the material covered in the few weeks before the exam).

The quizzes will be at-home, online, open-book, open-note. They will be open for 36 hours on Blackboard. The precise dates of the quizzes will be announced at least a week in advance.

The exams will be in-class, online, closed-book, closed-note. You should bring your fully-charged laptop computer or other device to class on the day of the exam. If you bring a tablet to take the exam, you are recommended to bring a keyboard attachment to facilitate typing. If you experience difficulties or cannot gain access to a laptop, please let the instructor know before the date of the exam.

The goal of the exams and quizzes is to gauge the level of understanding the student has of the material covered. They are designed to encourage proper study skills, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning.

### **Election Project Essay**

The election project essay will be a maximum of five concise, well-written pages, in 10-point Times New Roman font with unmodified margins, single spaced except between paragraphs. An additional page or two will be allowed for notes and a bibliography (no Wikipedia, APA style preferred). There is no need for a cover page; place paper title and student information in the header. The ideal paper starts as an eight-page first draft and is trimmed down to five by cutting fluff.

You are to perform at least 10 hours of volunteer work for a party organization or interest group for the November 4 election, note what you do and observe how the organization works, and write about that experience. You should conduct research on grassroots campaigning using books and/or articles. You should then work several hours on at least two different tasks (phone banking, neighborhood canvassing, working voting places, giving rides to polls, etc.). The writing must be the original work of the student except for properly credited quotes. The best papers will have solid theoretical base from research, will include observation and interviews with other participants, and a strong auto-ethnographic description of your own work. An auto-ethnographic description means that you do not just write what you did but also provide context for what you did (describing the organization, what they are doing in the election, how the work you did fits in with their larger efforts, etc.).

Attendance will not be checked on November 4, so students can freely participate in election-related work that day. For those students not doing work on that day, we will see the Frontline video "Obama's Deal", followed by a discussion of the issues raised in the video. The content of the video will be included in the final exam, so be sure to watch it on your own if you do not come to class that day.

The essay will be graded holistically: There is no "counting off" of mistakes, although persistent or distractingly glaring errors will affect the score. Instead, the essay will be judged on the student's ability to research, analyze and auto-ethnographically describe election-related work. The best papers identify a question or thesis and use research and description to develop a logical conclusion. This is the same way writing is graded in the GRE and judged in the work world, so you should become accustomed to it.

If you have any questions about the essay, your instructor will be happy to provide guidance and assistance. It is due any time before 5:00 PM on Friday, November 21.

### Grade Scale

The grade scale for this course will be:

A = 94-100	B- = 80-83	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-93	C+ = 77-79	D = 64-66
B+ = 87-89	C = 74-76	D- = 60-63
B = 84-86	C- = 70-73	F = 0-59

As noted previously, the points for each assignment will be added together and the decimal point shifted one to the left to get the final grade. For example, a total of 756 points for all assignments represents a final grade of 75.6: a C.

### Class Policies

**Make-up assignments:** Should you miss a quiz or the exam, you can schedule a make-up exam with the instructor if you can provide evidence that you missed the class for a valid reason. This would include a doctor's note/bill or a cast on a newly broken arm. Non-valid reasons include, but are not limited to, what you did the night before and how it kept you from waking up the next day.

**Incompletes and Withdrawals:** Students will only be given an "I" (incomplete) for valid reasons, such as verified military deployment or illness, and only if the student has made substantial satisfactory progress in the course. To withdraw from a course, follow UNL procedures; your instructor will not do it for you.

**Laptops and other electronic devices:** Please put away all electronic devices at the beginning of class except those being used for the class. Turn your phone off or put it on silent (not vibrate) mode. The inappropriate use of electronic devices is distracting to you and rude to the instructor and other students.

We will start with allowing the use of laptops, but the instructor reserves the right to later ban their use except for those students with a documented disability. Even when laptops are used exclusively to take class notes, they virtually eliminate eye contact and limit students' mental engagement with the material. You are a student, not a stenographer.

**Disability Policy:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

**Academic Honesty:** Plagiarism and cheating, as defined by the UNL Student Code of Conduct, are not allowed. The in-class punishment schedule for such acts may include a zero for the assignment and failure of the entire course. Major violations will also be reported to the student’s department chairperson or head and to the Judicial Office.

**Respect:** Please show respect for the opinions of your fellow students. Students should feel free to express their views without fear of condemnation or harassment inside or outside the classroom. Likewise, students should not seek to use the free and open exchange of ideas as a license to provoke or denigrate others. Clearly, there is a balancing act involved, but it can be achieved if students engage each other and the instructor in a spirit of goodwill.

### Schedule

Week	Subject	Reading
Aug 26, 28	Introduction	Burbank, Chapter 1 Herrnson, Preface (pp. x-xiii)
Sep 2, 4	The Political Landscape	Burbank, Chapters 4 and 5
Sep 9, 11	Parties in America	Burbank, Chapter 2 Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't
Sep 16, 18	How Parties Work	Burbank, Chapter 3 (additional reading TBA)
Sep 23, 25	Financing Campaigns	Burbank, Chapter 6 How Our Political Parties Beat Campaign Finance Reform Strengthening the political party system
Sep 30, Oct 2	Parties and Campaigns	Burbank, Chapter 7 Why Can't We All Get Along?
Oct 7, 9	Review/Midterm	
Oct 14, 16	Modern Interest Group Campaigns	Burbank, Chapter 9 Herrnson, Introduction, Chapter 1 Herrnson Appendix, pp. 243-274
Oct 23	Why Interest Groups?	Burbank, Chapter 8

(Tuesday, October 21 is Fall Break.)

Oct 28, 30	Businesses and unions	Herrnson, Chapters 2 and 6
Nov 4, 6	The medical industry Post-Obamacare	Video: Obama's Deal Herrnson, Chapter 3
Nov 11, 13	Corporations and environmentalists	Herrnson, Chapters 5 and 7
Nov 18, 21	Military industry and Crossroads	Herrnson, Chapters 4 and 8
Nov 25	How Interest Groups Lobby	Burbank, Chapter 10 (Thursday, November 27 is Thanksgiving.)
Dec 2, 4	National groups and Netroots	Herrnson, Chapters 9 and 10
Dec 9, 11	Conclusion/Review	Burbank, Conclusion, pp. 230-233 Herrnson, Chapter 11

Dec 19, 7:30am Final exam

Per UNL policy, any change in the exam time must be unanimous with students having the ability to anonymously veto a proposed change.