American Political Parties  
PSC 316  
Fall 2010

Professor Richard Davis  
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Office Hours: Monday – 9-10:00 am; Wednesday – 4:30-5:30 pm  
754 SWKT, x2-7503

Course Description

American political parties are much like Mark Twain’s statement about himself in his old age: “Reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.” Parties have been killed off and brought back to life many times over the history of the nation, particularly in the last century. The literature on parties in the past 40 years or so reflects that, especially titles of books about American political parties: *The Party’s Over, The Party Has Just Begun*, and *The Party Goes On*.

Yet, political parties are important in American politics today. They play a role in organizing campaigns, choosing candidates, getting out the vote, assisting voters in choosing policy options, organizing government, and making policy. Other players in American politics such as candidates, groups, and the voters take parties seriously. Parties matter.

In this course, we will examine a number of facets about political parties including why we have a two party system, what the role is for third and minor parties, what the party organization is like, why people identify with a party, the role of parties in political participation, the nature of the party activist, the role of parties in nominations and general elections, the party’s relationship with the media, the importance of campaign finance, and the party’s role in government. Finally, we will discuss trends affecting political parties and speculate on where they are going.

Requirements

Two Midterm Exams - 40 percent  
Final Exam - 20 percent  
Research paper - 20 percent  
Campaign Research Report- 10 percent  
Campaign Involvement - 10 percent

Research Paper
You will be expected to write a research paper on a topic related to American political parties, campaigns, and elections. You may choose the topic. However, I need a two page prospectus describing your paper’s thesis and how you will test the thesis. That prospectus is due (in hard copy) by September 23 by 5 pm. The paper (which should be at least 15 pages in length) is due December 9 by 5 p.m.

The paper should prove a thesis. The thesis will be of your choosing and the process of choosing is critical to the development of analytical skills. Make sure the thesis is narrow enough to address in a paper of this length.

Some examples of theses:

*Political parties are better organized today than they were 30 years ago.*

*Independent voters are better informed and more engaged politically than partisan voters*

If you decide to change the topic, alert me no later than November 5. Following that date, your chosen topic will be the topic of your paper. Do your research early in order to assure that you are not caught at the end with an unmanageable paper. This paper must be unique to this class, unless approved by the instructor in advance.

Some hints about grading:

1. The minimum page length is mandatory. I will not even read a paper of less than 15 pages. It will be returned with a grade of zero.

2. Please thoroughly proofread your written work. Spell checkers and grammatical programs make this task easy. There is no excuse for these mistakes. If there are more than three mistakes of this character on a page, I will reduce the grade by one half letter grade (for example, A to A-) for each page.

3. Any information used from other sources must be fully cited, not just direct quotations. The paper should draw on at least 25 relevant academic sources. These should primarily consist of secondary sources (books and scholarly articles). A few can include primary sources (such as films, interviews, public opinion surveys, speeches, Congressional reports, etc.). Popular sources such as newsmagazines and newspapers should be used only when no better source is available (for example to cite some very recent event). Do not use Internet sites unless they are known, reliable sources. Do not use encyclopedias (especially Wikipedia), either online or hard copy. Put films into a separate section from academic sources in your bibliography. Also, I will not grade a draft without citations and a citation page (or endnotes or footnotes). Such a draft automatically receives a failing grade.

4. Make sure your paper includes a one-sentence thesis statement, a definition of terms used in the thesis that may be unclear to the reader, an overview describing how the paper
is organized, and a method section discussing your research methodology. Avoid the use of first person except when discussing your methodology.

**Campaign Analysis Report**

You will be expected to write a ten page analysis on a congressional or statewide (governor or senator) candidate of your choosing. The report will consist of an examination of why a candidate won or lost. The candidate should be one where access to information about the campaign is easy. I do not want you to contact campaign staff and get their assessment of the campaign. You must rely on public sources – news articles, political descriptions of the district, candidate websites, etc. Include in your analysis treatment of the strengths and weaknesses of the particular candidate, campaign finance, party ID in the constituency, voting history, the nature of the competition, media coverage, etc. Also, make sure you choose a competitive race (i.e. the presence of an opponent and preferably an active opponent.) Two students cannot take the same candidate, so send me an e-mail with your candidate preference to make sure you get the candidate you wish. You will be expected to make a five minute oral presentation of your report later in the semester. The course documents section on blackboard has a listing of good sources of information on political and demographic background of districts/states.

**Campaign Involvement**

You will be expected to volunteer for a partisan electoral campaign or a party organization locally. This should be within Utah County unless you wish to do it in your hometown. Also, if it is a candidate campaign, it must be a competitive race. That means there must be two major parties and both are waging active campaigns. You must work for only one candidate or party. Once you have started with one, you need to continue with that candidate or party organization.

**This campaign involvement must not be with the same candidate you are writing a campaign analysis report on.**

You will be expected to work for at least 20 hours on behalf of the campaign and write a five page report describing your experiences and relating some lessons you learned from the involvement. Your campaign report will be due on November 13. Your report needs to include a table detailing what you did for each of the 20 hours.

By September 8, you need to have contacted a candidate or party and secured a volunteer position and submit a one paragraph description of who you will be working for and who the contact person with the campaign you arranged this volunteer opportunity with. It could be the candidate, a campaign manager, or a volunteer coordinator. Please submit that to Professor Chris Karpowitz at chris_karpowitz@byu.edu.
Required Texts


Reading and Discussion Topics

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<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>September 6</td>
<td>Definitions; History of Parties</td>
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<td>September 13</td>
<td>Two Party System; Third and Minor Parties</td>
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<td>Party Organizations; Party Activists</td>
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<td>September 27</td>
<td>Party Identification; Party Coalitions</td>
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<td>October 4</td>
<td>Voting and Participation</td>
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<td>MIDTERM EXAM</td>
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<td>October 18</td>
<td>Presidential Nominations</td>
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<td>October 25</td>
<td>Parties in General Elections</td>
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<td>November 1</td>
<td>Campaign Finance</td>
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<td>Media</td>
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<td>November 15</td>
<td>Campaign Reports</td>
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<td>Campaign Reports</td>
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<td>November 22</td>
<td>Party in the Legislature</td>
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<td>Party in the Executive; Judiciary</td>
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<td>December 6</td>
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Final Examination - Friday, December 17 – 8-10 am

Plagiarism/Other Work

While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See [http://www.byu.edu/honorcode](http://www.byu.edu/honorcode) for specific examples of
intentional, inadvertent plagiarism, and fabrication, falsification. Work for other courses will not be accepted for assignments in this course.

Sexual Harassment

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 2-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 2-2847.

People with Disabilities

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (378-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 2-5895, D-282 ASB.