Proposed New Undergraduate Class: Minority Representation in American Politics

Course Description

This course is an exploration of whether and how racial and ethnic minorities are able to organize effectively and press their demands through the American political system. Specifically, we will focus on the political behavior of minority citizens, the relative strength and effect of these groups at the polls and in political office, the theory and practice of group formation as it applies to minority groups, the responsiveness of elected officials, and the legal and constitutional obstacles and instruments that provide context and shape these phenomena. We will begin with a focus on African-American disfranchisement and their struggle to achieve voting rights and representation in the political process and then explore the particular issues facing other racial and ethnic minority groups in American politics.

Texts

Reading assignments for the class will mostly come from the following books. Additional readings may be used for some topics as listed in the course schedule.


Grades

You will have four short (5 typed pages) research assignments due during the semester, which will be described in detail later. The assignments will relate to the topics discussed and will involve research beyond materials presented in class. You will also be expected to participate in class discussion, sometimes presenting your own research from the assignments to the class as a whole. There will also be an in class midterm and non-cumulative final exam. Grades on late assignments will be reduced 5% per day. Make-up exams will not be available for students who fail to notify me in advance of missing an examination, nor for students without an acceptable explanation and, if necessary, documentation.

Grades will be computed on the following basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Assignments</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Tentative Course Schedule

**Topic 1: Defining Terms**

We will address the following questions: What is a minority and are minority groups politically relevant in American Politics? What is meant by minority representation?

Readings: McClain, Chapters 1, 2, 3

Additional reading:


**Topic 2: The US political institutional structure and minority representation**

We will discuss the basic institutional structure of the American political system – i.e. the use of winner-take-all elections in a federal system with a separation of powers between executive and legislature – and the implications of the institutional system on the ability of minority groups to achieve representation.

McClain, Chapter 4

Additional readings:


**Topic 3: African-American Disfranchisement in Historical Perspective Part 1**

We will analyze the success and failure of the First Reconstruction (i.e. the period after the Civil War when African-Americans voted in large numbers and elected representatives) and the success of the effort to disfranchise African-Americans by the turn of the century. We will compare this period to the Second Reconstruction (i.e. the period after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965).

Grofman, 1992, chapter 1

Valely, entire book

**Additional Readings:**


**Topic 4: African-American Disfranchisement in Historical Perspective Part II**

We will discuss the civil and voting rights movements of the 20th century with a particular discussion of the theory of collective action and social movements as it relates to minority groups.

Grofman, 1992, chapter 1

McClain, Chapter 2.

Chong, entire book.

**Additional Readings:**


Topic 5: Vote-Dilution and Under-representation (the Voting Rights Act Expanded)

We will examine the legal history, which led to the expansion of the voting rights act to cases of vote dilution.

Grofman, 1992, chapters 2-4

Additional Readings:


Topic 6: The Principal Solution: Majority Minority Districts

We will discuss the origin of the use of majority minority districts and the effects of such districts.

Guinier, Chapters 3-5.

Grofman, 1992, Chapter 5.


Additional Readings:


Topic 7: Minority Representation and Other Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups

We will consider the history of disfranchisement and issues of representation of other racial and ethnic minorities in American politics with particular emphasis on Latinos, Asian-Americans, and American Indians.

Garcia, entire book.

Wilkins, entire book.

Nakanishi, entire book.

Additional Readings:


Topic 8: Inter-group Coalitions and Conflicts

We will analyze the sources of conflict and cooperation between racial and ethnic minorities and the growing diversity in the meaning of identity in terms of minorities in American politics

McClain, Chapters 5 and 6

Additional Reading:

Jennings, James, editor, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America, Praeger.

Topic 9: Minority Representation and September 11th
We will conclude with a discussion of the issues of minority representation in American politics during periods of war and conflict with countries of origin and the current status of Arab-Americans and the effects of the war on terrorism.

Daniels, entire book.

Additional Readings:
