

POSC 312**American Political Culture and Values**

Fall Term 2000

Sayl 253 TTh 2:30-4:15

Professor John Sullivan

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This class is a research seminar. We will work with students from Professor Barbara Allen's classes to conduct research on the 2000 election campaign. Students will work on three related aspects of a larger project designed to evaluate the role of broader cultural values and of mass media in elections.

First, we will assess video clips of news coverage of the campaign as well as paid political advertisements. The focus will be on the nature of the coverage (positive, negative, neutral); the use of various psychological mechanisms to shape reactions to the coverage (agenda setting, framing and priming); and the cultural themes and values that undergird the substance of the message conveyed (e.g., individualism, freedom, equality, community). We will work with Dr. Dean Alger, a well-known national expert on election campaigns and mass media, who is the Minnesota Project Coordinator of the *Alliance for Better Campaigns*. Your coding results on the nature of the coverage are due Tuesday, September 26. The coding results for media psychological mechanisms and cultural themes and values are due Tuesday, November 7. Students will work in teams of three to conduct evaluations of candidates' advertisements and news coverage.

Second, we will conduct focus groups of citizens. The focus groups will be designed to assess how ordinary citizens (not journalists or consultants) categorize campaign coverage and advertisements as negative, comparative, issue-oriented, positive, etc.; to identify and observe the ordinary language understandings that citizens possess and articulate when discussing the role of the media in campaigns; to evaluate whether different media techniques affect and influence these citizens' views of the candidates and the election; and to explore the how ordinary citizens understand and express the role of political-cultural themes and values in this election. We will work with Kelly Smith, an account planner at Fallon, and Dan Stevens, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, to conduct focus groups. Students will work in teams of five or six to conduct and analyze focus groups. Each team will conduct one focus group of 8-12 citizens. Focus group organizational plans and interview outlines are due Tuesday, October 10. The focus groups will be held between October 12-19, and the synopsis of results is due on Tuesday, October 31.

Third, we will conduct a series of intensive interviews on topics in American political culture and values with citizens of Northfield. These interviews will include both structured and open-ended discussions, and they will focus on citizens' views of the candidates and campaigns during the 2000 Presidential and U.S. Senate campaigns. We will work with Dr. Thomas Skovholt, a counseling psychologist and University of Minnesota professor, to hone our interviewing skills and to develop active listening skills as a research tool. Students will work in teams of two, with each team interviewing one citizen 4-6 times. Each interview will last about an hour, and the interviews will be conducted between September 22-October 31, about one interview a week. Citizens have been randomly selected from the Northfield telephone book. We will send them a letter of introduction, then you will call them and ask if they are willing to help with our project.

Finally, as noted, we will work closely with Dan Stevens, a graduate student working on his Ph.D. in political science at the University of Minnesota. He is writing his dissertation on negative advertising, and he will help us

collect and analyze data about advertising, news stories, and citizens' reactions during the 2000 elections. Dan will be a resource person for all of you and will be available to assist us during the full term.

We will of course also read scholarly discourse and social science research on topics in American political culture, such as individualism, equality, freedom, citizenship, and so on. The readings, as well as videos and discussions, will provide fuel for the in-depth interviews and focus groups that we will conduct. It will also provide background information for you to situate the analysis you conduct and write up in your research paper and other reports.

The overall objective of this research seminar is to examine the relationship between scholarly and intellectual discourse and research on U.S. political culture, and the everyday political experience of ordinary citizens in the United States. It is also to probe the role of the mass media in election campaigns. Your role will be to serve as an observer--an observer of multiple modes of discourse--and to arrive at tentative conclusions about how various cultural and media themes were manifest during the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign and the Minnesota senatorial election. In some small sense, you are also being asked to evaluate the relationship (or lack thereof) between academic discourse on the one hand, and the subjective empirical realities of the people who allow you temporary access to their thoughts, experiences and understandings.

Much classroom time will be spent training you in the methods of analysis we will employ, and in organizing and clarifying ideas for the video coding, focus groups and interviews. We will discuss the assigned readings as they fit into this process. Please keep in mind that the readings are meant to stimulate your thinking about these topics and to guide you in talking to people about their own political values and about American political culture. It provides background material that should enrich your own understanding and enable you to interview people in an effective way about these topics. Because of the press of the practical concerns of our collective ongoing research project, there will be times when you will be required to do much of the reading without the benefit of classroom lectures or discussions.

There are four assigned texts, available at the bookstore: Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*; John W. Kingdon, *America the Unusual*; Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*; and Herbert J. Gans, *Middle American Individualism*. There is a copy of each of these on reserve in the library in the event you wish to save money and do your reading in the library. There are multiple copies of the other readings on reserve in the library. You are expected to read the assigned material for each class, in order to make sure we all are "on the same page" in your efforts to discuss and clarify ideas and prepare for your research interactions with citizens.

Grades will be based on your personal participation in class and in the research fieldwork (20%); on your written research assignments (30%); and on your research paper of approximately 20 pages (50%). The research paper is due Tuesday, November 14. It should incorporate as much as possible the information and knowledge you have developed from the coding protocols, focus groups, and in depth interviews, as well as assigned readings, videos, and class discussions. Details of the research projects and required paper will be presented in class. Because of nature of the research project assigned for this seminar, class attendance is mandatory. There will be several times during the term when we will meet in the evenings, as noted on the syllabus, and attendance at most such meetings is also mandatory.

Schedule

Tuesday September 12: Introduction

Guest: Professor Barbara Allen and Dan Stevens

Thursday September 14: Coding & Content Analysis of Videos

Read: Marion R. Just, Ann N. Crigler, Dean E. Alger, Timothy E. Cook, Montague Kern, and Darrell M. West, *Crosstalk: Citizens, Candidates, and the Media in a Presidential Campaign*, chs. 1-2, pp. 3-61.

Guest: Dr. Dean Alger and the "Alliance for Better Campaigns" Project

Tuesday September 19: American Exceptionalism

Read: 1. Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, introduction and chs. 1-3, pp. 13-109. 2. John W. Kingdon, *America the Unusual*, chs. 1-3, pp. 1-56.

Thursday September 21: Interviewing and Active Listening Skills

Joint evening class from 5-6:45; no regularly scheduled class.

Read: 1. Dohaghy, "Asking and Answering Questions," pp. 97-112. 2. Adler and Towne, "Listening vs. Hearing," pp. 222-252. 3. Jennifer L. Hochschild, *What's Fair*, "Why There is No Socialism in the United States," ch. 1, pp. 1-26.

Guest: Professor Thomas Skovholt, Counseling Psychologist, University of Minnesota, "Active Listening Skills"

Tuesday, September 26: American Exceptionalism and Individualism

Read: 1. John W. Kingdon, *America the Unusual*, chs. 4-5, pp. 57-100. 2. Herbert J. Gans, *Middle American Individualism*, chs. 1-2, pp. 1-42. 3. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart*, ch. 6, pp. 142-163.

Due: Content Analysis Exercise I ("Alliance for Better Campaigns")

Begin: Your in-depth interviews should have begun by now.

Thursday September 28: Citizenship and Social and Political Capital

Read: 1. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community," chs. 2-3, 13 pp. 31-64, 216-246. 2. Pamela Johnston Conover, Ivor M. Crewe, and Donald D. Searing, "The Nature of Citizenship in the United States and Great Britain: Empirical Comments on Theoretical Themes," *Journal of Politics*, August 1991, pp. 800-832.

Tuesday October 3: Focus Group Methods

Joint evening class from 5-6:45; no regularly scheduled class.

Read: 1. Richard A. Krueger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, chs. 4-6, pp. 53-125 or David W. Stewart and Prem N. Shamdasani, *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*, chs. 2-5, pp. 33-101.

Guest: Kelly Smith, Account Planner, Fallon Agency or Dan Stevens, Graduate Student, University of Minnesota. Introduction to focus groups in media research.

Thursday October 5: Self Interest vs. The Common Good

Read: 1. David O. Sears & Carolyn L. Funk, "Self-Interest in Americans Political Opinions," in Jane J. Mansbridge (ed.), *Beyond Self-Interest*, ch. 9, pp. 147-170. 2. Tom R. Tyler, Kenneth A. Rasiinski, and Eugene Griffin, "Alternative Images of the Citizen: Implications for Public Policy," *American Psychologist* Sept. 1986, pp. 970-978.

Tuesday October 10: Apathy & Anti-Politics in the United States

Read: 1. Gans, chs. 3-4, pp. 43-97; Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*, chs. 1-4, pp. 1-130.

Focus group protocols and organizational plan due.

Thursday October 12: Political Trust

Read: 1. Gary Orren, "Fall From Grace: The Public's Loss of Faith in Government," in Joseph Nye, Philip Zelikow, and David King, *Why People Don't Trust Government*, ch. 3, pp. 77-107. 2. David C. King, "The Polarization of American Parties and Mistrust of Government," in Joseph Nye, Philip Zelikow, and David King, *Why People Don't Trust Government*, ch.6, pp. 155-178.

Start focus groups. Conduct within a week or so of this date.

Tuesday October 17: More on Political Avoidance

Read: Eliasoph, chs. 5-9 and appendices, pp. 131-279.

Optional party, joint evening session, topic: "Elections and the New Media" View "Primary", a video of the 1960 primary. "War Room" on optional reserve for leisure viewing.

Thursday October 19: Political Community

Read: Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart*, chs. 7-8, pp. 167-218.

Tuesday October 24: The Real Habits of the Heart

Read: Tocqueville, *Democracy*, Vol. 2 Book 1, chs. 1-2, pp. 2-13; ch. 5, pp. 21-29; ch. 8 pp. 34-35; Book 2, chs. 1-8, pp. 99-132; optional Book 2 chs. 11-13 pp. 133-147.

Guest: Professor Barbara Allen

Due: Rough draft of first half of your research paper (graded). Write up the first three interviews conducted.

Thursday October 26: Citizenship, Community and Connectedness

Read: 1. Gans, chs. 5-6, pp. 98-156. 2. Lipset, chs. 7-8, pp. 211-292

Tuesday October 31: Attitudes Toward Government

Read: 1. Linda L. Bennett and Stephen Earl Bennett, *Living with Leviathan: Americans Coming to Terms with Big Government*, chs. 2 & 4, pp. 20-50, 79-108. 2. Stanley Feldman & John Zaller, "The Political Culture of Ambivalence: Ideological Responses to the Welfare State," *American Journal of Political Science*, 1992, pp. 268-307. 3. Stanley Feldman & Marco Steenbergen, "Alternative Bases of Support for Social Welfare: Egalitarianism vs. Humanitarianism," mimeo.

5-7 page focus group synopsis due

Thursday November 2: **Hand in content analysis parts II and III**

Tuesday November 7: Election Day

Dean Alger hosts election night party in Twin Cities.

Thursday November 9: Last day of classes

Tuesday November 14: **Research paper due**