

**VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

***CAPTURING THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION***

**PSCI 281**

**Fall 2007**

**Professors Harold Ford, Jr. and John G. Geer**

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**Office Hours: TBA**

**For the first time since 1952, the presidential nominations for both parties are “open.” That is, no representative of the current administration is running. That means lots of ambitious politicians have thrown their hats into the ring. This generates a much more unpredictable process filled with excitement and uncertainty. Further, the rules of the game have changed just from 4 years ago and the changes continue to unfold at this very moment. In general, states have sought to gain influence in the selection process by moving their primaries and caucuses earlier in the calendar. States like Michigan, Florida, and South Carolina have recently upset yet again the apple cart by trying to leapfrog other states. This “frontloading” means that February 5th now looms large because so many states will hold their primaries on that date. States like California use to wait until early June. But the early states like New Hampshire and Iowa also matter? But how much? Scholars and pundits disagree. The field also remains unsettled. Former Senator Fred Thompson has joined the race late and Al Gore and Newt Gingrich remain on the sideline, but are formidable candidates if they choose to run. To add even more interest in the process, it appears that all the major candidates will forego federal matching funds. That means fundraising is more important than normal and without the caps the federal government imposed on spending, we will see even more campaign advertising than normal as we approach the Iowa Caucuses.**

**In short, the battles for the Republican and Democratic presidential nominations are exciting and the outcomes are far from clear.**

**The purpose of this course is to learn about the complicated processes and identify strategies that would allow candidates to capture the presidential nomination. Towards that end, we will learn about the rules of the game, how**

**candidates, activists, journalists, and voters behave within those dynamic rules. That information will provide the launching pad for each of you to draw a battle plan to win your party's presidential nomination.**

**By co-teaching this course, we will be able to bring in insights from both the scholarly and political worlds. It is that intersection that should make the class both unique and interesting. To advance these objectives, we hope to have some conference calls from experts who can add even more information and insight into the process.**

**Given that there are 50 states with unique features, we are going to start the class by gathering information. You will each turn in a 2 page report on September 17th by 10 am (the day before class). We will assign you a state. You are to become an expert in the rules and political climate of that state. You should find out, for example, the recent presidential voting in the state, how many delegates at stake, when is the voting, who can vote in the primary or caucus, what are the major media markets (and likely cost), the influential politicians in the state, who has endorsed who, what are current polls saying, etc. You want to make sure these reports are both accurate and informative, since we will share them with the entire class (and we will assess them as well).**

**These documents will lay the foundation for understanding the rules of the game and how best to think about the process. Since the nominating process is still not set, we will literally be working on not yet dry canvass.**

**There will be a multiple choice examination on October 9<sup>th</sup> that will assess how much you know about the system. This test is simply a way to encourage each of you to be experts. It will be 25 questions long.**

**The major assignment for the course will be a detailed memorandum that maps your strategy to capture the nomination. This report will be about 20-25 pages long and will be written by committee. That is, we will generate 3 person teams representing specific candidates. You will decide how to raise money, where to travel, what themes to stress in speeches, and what kinds of ads to air. In fact, we will ask each team to produce 3 ads that will be part of this assignment, including at least one that is "negative." You will present your plan and ads to the class in 15 minutes at the end of the semester.**

**The grades for this class will be determined by the quality of your class participation (25%, this includes your short paper), the exam on 10/9 (15%), the**

presentation to the class (15%), and your 20-25 page paper (35%). We will let you form your own teams, if you can find willing partners. Otherwise, we will construct campaign teams. There will be 12 campaigns total and we will want to have every candidate represented.

**Professor Ford's Office Hours: T 3-3:30 pm**

**Professor Geer's Office Hours: T 12:30-3pm and by Appointment**

### *Lecture Schedule and Reading Assignments*

We will provide reading assignments prior to each session. This reading will often provide the basis for class discussion. We will usually assign articles and make copies available to you. Note that we may adjust topics depending on when various outside experts can speak with us.

**September 4th: Organizational Meeting**

**September 18th: Learning the Rules of the Game**

**October 9th: A Theory of Candidate Behavior (and exam)**

**October 16th: Learning about Voters, Contributors, and Journalists**

**November 27th: Preparing Presentations**

**December 4th: Making Class Presentations**

**December 11<sup>th</sup>: Making Class Presentations**

### **KEEPING UP WITH CURRENT EVENTS:**

Besides reading newspapers and magazines on line we recommend two websites to check daily to keep up on the recent developments in the presidential election:

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

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