Introduction:

In a nation where there are hundreds of separate state and local election contests every year, presidential elections are unique; they are the only truly national elections. They differ from other American elections and from elections in other democracies in significant ways.

This course will deal with the structure, history and significance of presidential elections. The first week will be devoted to the modern nomination system and its evolution. The second week will be devoted to the presidential general election and the impact of elections on governance.

Readings for the course will draw upon history, political science and contemporary news and analysis. The course will also make extensive use of video archives. Because this course is being offered during an election year, a portion of each class will be devoted to the events of the week and students will be expected to read a national newspaper every day in addition to the course reading.

International students are encouraged to take the course. Dr. Kamarck will provide extensive office hours for all students including the international students.

Course Work:

There will be 2 assignments in this course.

1) The first assignment will involve a trip to New Hampshire to attend one or more events leading up to the New Hampshire primary (assuming it is held on January 12 or 19.) Students will be expected to return from this trip and hand in a short power point presentation putting what they have seen in the context of our first week of work on the presidential nomination process.

2) Students will be required to write a final essay of 8 to 10 double spaced pages on a topic of interest to them. The essay should
contain information from history and political science as well as how these relate to the 2016 presidential race.

Evaluation:

Power Point – 25%
Final Paper – 75%

SUMMARY OF CLASSES

Monday January 4, 2016 – The Pre-Reform Era Presidential Nominating Process

There are two unique features of the American Presidential election process: primaries and the Electoral College. We will deal with the Electoral College in the second week. But in this first week we will focus on the nomination system. Very few democracies in the world besides the United States use primaries to nominate major party candidates for the top office in the country. But the primary system is a relatively new phenomenon in American history. This class will focus on the evolution of the American nominating system from congressional caucus to conventions to primaries and will use the 1960 nomination race as an example of a race in the pre-reform era where presidential primaries were used strategically and sparingly.

Tuesday January 5, 2016 – The Modern Nominating Process – Caucuses, Primaries and Sequence as Strategy

The modern presidential nomination system is a complex series of presidential primaries and caucuses. These contests allocate delegates to the presidential nominating system under a system of rules that are determined by each political party. This class will examine the rules of the game in the presidential nominating process and examine the structure of the 2016 system as it is about to unfold.

Wednesday January 6, 2016 – Are Conventions Still Important?

It seems that every four years commentators bemoan the fact that the nominating conventions are obsolete. And yet one does not have to go back to the pre-reform era in presidential nominating politics to find examples of conventions that were exciting because they were relevant. In this class we will look at three such conventions: the Democratic Convention of 1972, the Republican convention of 1976 and the Democratic Convention of 1980. We will also cover the selection of the Vice President in this class since it is usually made just prior to the convention and dominates convention news. Conventional wisdom has it that the selection of a vice presidential running mate can hurt, but not help, a ticket. Different theories come into play when a candidate is choosing a running mate.

Thursday January 7, 2016 - Who Votes?
One of the most well known facts of U.S. Presidential elections is our low rate of voter turnout in comparison to national elections in other democracies. This class will explore voter turnout in American history and suggest some explanations for the turnout variations. But if turnout in presidential elections is disappointingly low – turnout in presidential primaries is even lower. Thus we will also review turnout data from modern presidential primaries and caucuses and at the demographics of primary voters versus general election voters.

**Friday January 8, 2016 – The decline and fall of the federal financing system**

Money has been called the “mother's milk of politics” – with good reason. In the 21st century the public financing regime put in place after the Watergate scandals of the 1970s collapsed. It has been replaced by something resembling the wild wild west. This class will review the legal regimes surrounding political money including critical court cases and it will review the data on the relationship between money and victories in primaries and in the general election.

**Monday January 11, 2016 -- The Electoral College**

The Electoral College was enshrined in the United States Constitution by the Founding Fathers. It defines American Presidential politics and thus we begin with what it is and how it works. This class will look at the origins of the Electoral College, its evolution over time and how it works today. There have been three elections in American history where the Electoral College and the popular vote have differed. This class will review those elections with particular focus on the presidential election of 2000.

**Tuesday January 12, 2016 – The Big Tent: American Party Coalitions in General Elections**

American party coalitions are constantly evolving. This class will look at the history of the Republican and Democratic Parties and at the changing components of their coalitions. For Democrats we will look at the transformation of the south into a conservative stronghold and the impact of Millenials and the “Obama Coalition.” For the Republicans we will pay attention to inclusion of Christian Evangelical voters in the Republican Coalition, the transition of the South into the Republican coalition and the emergence of the Tea Party faction of the Republican coalition. In addition, this class will cover third party candidates and how they impact presidential elections.

**Wednesday January 13, 2016 - Stability and Re-alignment in American Presidential elections.**

One of the most stable predictors of voting behavior is party identification. This class will review the relationship between party identification and the vote in modern presidential elections. It will also introduce students to the concept of party re-alignment, its importance in understanding presidential politics and the evolving knowledge about independent voters and who they are.
Thursday January 14, 2016 – Presidential Debates & Politics and Emotion

Voting in presidential elections is a complex process in which the candidates try to engage the voters on an emotional level. This class will explore a sample of the research in this area and attempt to understand the emotional undercurrents of elections. In particular we will look at presidential debates over the years in an attempt to understand the multiple levels on which these sometimes critical events operate.

Friday January 15, 2016 – What does it all mean for government?

What is the meaning of an election? Is there such a thing as a mandate? How do newly elected Presidents interpret the election and what does it mean for their governing priorities?

READINGS:

JANUARY 4 - The Pre-Reform Era Presidential Nominating Process


JANUARY 5 - The Modern Nominating Process – Caucuses, Primaries and Sequence as Strategy

Excerpts from: The Invisible Primary by Arthur T. Hadley

Excerpts from One Car Caravan: On the Road with the 2004 Democrats before America Tunes In, by Walter Shapiro.


OPTIONAL: “Constitutional and Statutory Restrictions on Political Parties in the

JANUARY 6

The Class will be divided into four groups and each group will be expected to read one of the following:


All students will be expected to read:


JANUARY 7 – Who votes?


Chapter 1, “The Nature of the Puzzle,” in The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class,


JANUARY 8 - The decline and fall of the federal financing system


Other Readings to come.

JANUARY 11 – The Electoral College


OPTIONAL: Bush et al. v Gore et al. 531U.S. 98.

JANUARY 12 - The Big Tent: American Party Coalitions in General Elections

Readings to come.

JANUARY 13 - Stability and Re-alignment in American Presidential elections


JANUARY 14 - Presidential Debates & Politics and Emotion


JANUARY 15 - What does it all mean for government?
