

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Engagement and Elections

A Problem-Solving and Service-Learning Course

Political Science 244 Tuesdays: 2:00p.m.-5:00p.m. Fall Semester 2012

Instructors: Professor John Dilulio with Mr. Joseph P. Tierney, Mr. Chuck Brutsche, and Mr. A.J. Schiera, joined by Ms. Maura Bernt (Course Administrator) and the Penn Leads the Vote (PLTV) Student Steering Committee: Mr. Russell Abdo, Ms. Abby Case, Ms. Abby Tran, and Mr. David Weiss¹

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND MISSION

Can a representative democracy not only survive but thrive if most adult citizens are politically inattentive, vote rarely, do not participate in politics in other ways, and engage only episodically in volunteer, charitable, philanthropic, or other community-serving activities?

America, it seems, is testing that proposition. Most adult Americans neither vote regularly, nor volunteer routinely, nor practice other forms of political participation or civic engagement. For instance, more than 80 million people did not vote for president in November 2008. In midterm congressional elections, most state and local races, and party primaries, most Americans are nonvoters. Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 vote at much lower rates than Americans age 65 and older. For example, on Election Day 2010, senior citizens ages 65 to 74 had about three times the “voting weight” of young citizens ages 18 to 24:

- The 26.7 million citizens ages 18 to 24 were 13% of the voting-age population but cast only 5.6 million votes, or 6% of all votes cast.
- The 20.6 million citizens ages 65-74 were 10 percent of the voting-age population but cast 12.7 million votes, or 14% of all votes cast.
- The population % to electoral participation % ratio for young citizens was thus .47 (6 divided by 13) and the same ratio for senior citizens was 1.4 (14 divided by 10): 1.4 divided by .47 equals 2.98.

Compared to previous generations, are today’s young adult Americans politically “disengaged” or just “different”? What works to “get out the vote”? Does “social pressure” affect political participation? What motivates civic engagement? Measured not only by voter turnout but by organized interest group activity and the like, how unequal is “political voice” in America today? By what, if any, measures is the mass public “polarized,” and how do partisan or other divisions stimulate or stymie political participation and civic engagement? How, if at all, do differences in electoral and civic engagement like the “generation gap” in voter turnout determine who gets elected, which issues get on the public policy agenda, and what programs get substantial public funding?

This problem-solving service-learning course is designed to do three things:

- (1) Explore the latest and best empirical research, and the multiple and competing normative ideas and theories, concerning past and present patterns of political participation and civic engagement in the United States, with a special focus on political participation and civic engagement among young adults.

¹ On Monday, Sept. 10, each enrolled student will receive via email contact information for all instructors, the course administrator, and the PLTV student-leaders including email, office location, office hours, and brief bios.

- (2) Engage all students in a problem-solving and service-learning project, namely, the fifth incarnation of **Penn Leads the Vote (PLTV)**, the nonpartisan, campus-based voter mobilization effort that began in 2004, was inspired by certain political science studies regarding “get out the vote” or GOTV tactics, and has recorded remarkable results (i.e., more than doubling turnout in both presidential and off-year elections).
- (3) Assist each student in studying and discussing pertinent research and in writing on-topic papers, concluding with a paper in which each student describes and defends his or her “one best idea” for increasing political participation and civic engagement among adults ages 18 to 29.

“Am I Up for the PLTV Project?—Should I Take This Course?”: How to Affirm Participation in PSCI 244

Regarding **#2 above**, this course features lectures and recitations, but it is indeed a problem-solving and service-learning course. As is now recognized far and wide, the PLTV story is the story of a multi-faceted, student-led effort (adding or moving on-campus polling locations, registering thousands of students, learning and applying state and local election laws, negotiating with both university leaders and city officials, creating a voter databank, training poll workers and poll watchers, and more).

But the PLTV-GOTV story’s next chapter, complete with new wrinkles, research, and innovations, is to be written this fall in conjunction with this course—and maybe in concert **with you!** So: Take this course **ONLY** if you are up for engaging in the problem-solving and service-learning PLTV-GOTV project, which runs from the first week of class through Election Day. One problem-solving and service-learning course that the primary instructor taught a few years ago involved all students in an 8-day, 16-hour-a-day, off-site project in post-Katrina New Orleans that consumed spring break week. The outside-class-time demands of the project for the present course are not that heavy, but they are not insubstantial, and project participation is 25% of the final course grade (see page 3 below):

- Between the first week of class and Election Day, you can expect to spend a grand total of about 30-35 hours on the project**, working outside of class time in concert with other students in the course, the instructors, and the PLTV student-leaders.
- Also, while we will make every effort to accommodate your preferences regarding which mix of PLTV assignments you do, not every student will covet doing each and every assigned PLTV-related task—but doing all assigned project tasks is as integral to the course as attending every scheduled discussion, meeting every featured guest, and submitting every paper (on time!)
- So that you can get as precise a sense of what might be required of you if you opt to stay enrolled in this course, you need to read carefully the ***PLTV 2012 Project Manual***.
- During the week of August 20**, co-instructor **Mr. Joseph Tierney** will be sending the ***PLTV 2012 Project Manual*** along with this syllabus to all students then on the registration list for the course. Mr. Tierney will furnish instructions regarding reading the manual, answering any questions you might have about the project after reading the manual, **and how to affirm one’s participation in PSCI 244**. Students are to read and respond **before the first day of class**.

REQUIRED BOOKS

The following five books are available for purchase at the Penn Bookstore, but students are free to obtain them from whatever sources they choose (just be sure to get the editions indicated):

- **Martin Wattenberg, *IS VOTING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?* 3rd ed. (Pearson, 2012)
- **Donald Green and Alan Gerber, *GET OUT THE VOTE* 2nd ed. (Brookings Institution, 2008)
- **David Campbell, *WHY WE VOTE* (Princeton University Press, 2006)
- **Alan Abramowitz, *THE POLARIZED PUBLIC?* (Pearson, 2013)
- **Kay Lehman Schlozman et al, *THE UNHEAVENLY CHORUS* (Princeton University Press, 2012)

LECTURE/SEMINAR/RECITATION

The course meets in a single three-hour block so as to give us maximum flexibility with respect to time needed each week for project-related lectures or guest lectures, for seminar-style discussions, for recitation exercises (including 3 to 4 student task group work), and so forth.

GRADING PROTOCOLS

The course is graded on a curve that reflects the special demands and workload: a point total slightly above the median point total receives a grade of A-. There are four graded components and 1,000 possible points:

- Participation (50%/500 points, divided evenly between project participation and participation in classroom discussions including task group work). Doing all project-related work in a punctual, competent, and team-spirited fashion earns 250 points. Keeping up with the reading and contributing actively, regularly, and well to classroom discussions and task group assignments earns a maximum of 250 points.
- Papers (35%/350 points, three papers, the first two papers are each worth 10%/100 points, the last paper is worth 15%/150 points)
- Final Examination (15%/150 points, a multiple-choice examination testing basic knowledge of key concepts, facts, findings, and theories from lectures and readings). Date/time/place TBD by the registrar.

In each part and phase of this course, students are expected and required to follow the rules of the College that govern attendance, civility, and academic integrity. All work, including all papers, must be completed on time. As noted below, except in the case of documented (before or after the fact) medical or other emergencies, failure to attend class, perform project assignments, or submit papers on deadline will be penalized and could result in either an incomplete or a failing grade.

All students must participate in all parts of the course. For example, a student who had an otherwise perfect score (85%/850 points) but opted to skip the final examination (worth 15%/150 points) would receive, not the letter grade that another student who completed all graded course components and received the same total number of points (85%/850 points), but a failing grade. Such things happen rarely, but they do happen. It is best to avoid any and all such tangles by knowing and following these protocols. Also, should you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism or the like, consult the rules of the College and talk to your recitation leader or the instructor *before* writing your first paper.

September 11

Democracy's Free Riders versus Its Freedom Riders: Who participates, who doesn't--and why care?

**PLTV-GOTV 2012 Materials (to be distributed via email prior to first class meeting)

**Scholzman et al, preface and chapters 1, 2, and 4

September 18

Disengaged versus Different I: Is Voting for Young People?

**Wattenberg, preface, introduction, and chapters 1-4

September 25

Disengaged versus Different II: Is Compulsory Voting for Young People—and If Not, What Is?

**Wattenberg, chapters 5-9

**Scholzman et al, chapters 7 and 8

***FIRST PAPER DUE* Summarize, analyze, and assess Wattenberg's case for compulsory voting as a means of closing the generation gap in political participation (800-1,000 words). Submit the paper to your recitation leader in class.

October 2

Get Out the Vote I: Does "Door-to-Door Canvassing" Work (Sort Of)?

**Green and Gerber, chapters 1-6 and Appendices A-C

**Scholzman et al, chapter 6

October 9

Get Out the Vote II: Does "Social Pressure" Matter Most?

**Green and Gerber chapters 7-10

**Alan Gerber et al, "Social Pressure and Voter Turnout," *American Political Science Review*, 102, 2008: pp. 33-48 (link to be provided).

October 16

The "Dual Motivations Theory of Public Engagement": Does it Ring True to You?

**Campbell, chapters 1-5

October 23 **Fall Break** No class, but PSCI 244 students are invited to meet the Hon. Marc H. Morial

October 30

PLTV-GOTV 2012: Final Class-Wide Pre-Election Day Project Planning Session

November 6

ELECTION DAY 2012: GOTV!

November 13

Beyond Elections and Voting: What's the "Calculus of Civic Engagement"?

**Campbell, chapters 5-8

SECOND PAPER DUE Summarize, analyze, and assess Campbell's "theory of dual motivations" and how well you think it captures the experiences of people you know best (including, if you wish, you!) (800-1,000 words) Submit the paper to your recitation leader in class.

November 20

Engagement and Inequality I: Organized Interest Activity

**Schlozman et al, chapters 10-14

**Abromowitz, preface and chapter 1

November 27

Engagement and Inequality II: The Internet to the Rescue?

**Schlozman et al, chapters 15-16

**Abromowitz, chapters 2-4

December 4

Elections and Engagement: In a Polarized Public, What (if Anything) Can Be Done?

**Schlozman et al, chapters 17 and 18

**Abromowitz, chapters 5-7

Tuesday, December 11: FINAL PAPER DUE by 5:00 p.m. (via email to your recitation leader)

What is your "one best idea" for increasing political participation and civic engagement among adults ages 18 to 29? How, if at all, does your idea address the concerns about "inequality" emphasized by Schlozman and her co-authors? What, if anything, might it do not only to increase participation and engagement but to reduce polarization? What makes your idea both feasible and desirable, and how would you go about translating your idea into action? (1,000-1,500 words)

