GOVT 429 Department Seminar: Women and Politics
Spring 2010
Dr. Michele Swers
Thurs 1:15-3:05PM Reiss 283

Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 11:40-12:40PM or by Appointment, ICC 655
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Course Description: This course provides an overview of the major debates concerning women and politics. We begin by examining the historical evolution of women’s participation in American politics from the fight for suffrage through the modern feminist movement. In the next section of the class, we analyze the experience of women as voters, candidates, and officeholders. This part of the course deals with such questions as: What is the gender gap? Are voters biased against female candidates? Do female politicians have different issue priorities than male politicians? The course concludes by analyzing the impact of specific public policies on women. The policy areas we investigate include abortion, child care, education, and employment issues.

Course Goals: Students should: (1) understand the historical evolution of women’s political participation and the obstacles women faced in their efforts to achieve equal political rights; (2) critically evaluate conventional wisdom and media reports concerning women’s political behavior as voters, candidates, and officeholders; (3) analyze the influence of race, class, and gender considerations on the development of public policy; and (4) develop political research skills as well as written and oral analytical skills.

Required Readings:


All the required books are available for purchase at the bookstore. Additional readings will be placed on reserve and Blackboard.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to complete each set of readings prior to the week for which they are assigned. To facilitate class discussion, I ask students to bring the assigned
readings to class. I expect students to attend all class meetings and participate actively in
the discussion. Participation will be judged based on a demonstrated understanding of
the readings and an ability to critique the arguments and apply theories to contemporary
events.

Grading:
Weekly Reaction Papers: 50 %

Candidate Profile Papers and Presentation: 40% [Paper (7-10 pages) 30%, Presentation
10%]. Papers due Thursday March 18. Order of presentations will be assigned in class.

Participation: 10%

Weekly Reaction Papers: Students will write a 3-4 page paper. Topics are provided in
the syllabus under each week’s readings. The papers are meant to provide an analysis of
the arguments offered in the readings rather than a summary of ideas. The papers will
guide class discussion. Students must post their paper on Blackboard by 5:00PM on the
Wednesday before class meets and turn in a hard copy in class. Papers cannot be
submitted after the class meeting.

Candidate Profile Paper: Each student will be assigned a female candidate who is
running for the House, Senate, or Governor in 2010. Students will use academic readings
and newspaper reports on the candidate to develop a profile of the candidate and an
evaluation of her race in relation to the literature on women candidates. Students will
develop a 15-minute presentation evaluating their race for the class. Late profile papers
will be marked down ten points for each day late. Late presentations are not accepted.
Further information about the candidate profiles will be provided in class. The profile
papers are due Thursday March 18 at the beginning of class. Presentations will begin
the same day. The order of individual presentations will be assigned in class.

The grade ranges are defined as follows:
A= unusual excellence (A- 90-92; A 93-100)
B= work distinctly above average (B- 80-82; B 83-86; B+ 87-89)
C= work of average quality (C- 70-72; C 73-76; C+ 77-79)
D= below average work, the lowest passing mark (D 60-66; D+ 67-69)
F= Failure, No course Credit (59 and below)

I am not inclined to review grades and reserve the right to adjust grades down as
well as up.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1
Jan. 14 Introduction and Overview

Week 2
Jan. 21 The Women’s Suffrage Movement

Kraditor Ideas of the Women’s Suffrage Movement entire

Paper Topic: Kraditor notes that over time suffragists’ arguments for the vote evolved from arguments based on justice to claims based on expediency. Provide an example of how the suffragists utilized each type of argument. Select a contemporary political movement such as gay rights or immigration reform. Are the proponents of these movements more likely to achieve their goals by using arguments based on justice or expediency? Explain why?

Week 3
Jan. 28 The Women’s Suffrage Movement Continued

Video Presentation: Not for Ourselves Alone

Week 4
Feb. 4 The Modern Women’s Movement


Paper Topic: Explain why the ERA failed. Develop an argument explaining why the ERA should pass or why women do not need this protection.

Week 5
Feb. 11 The Backlash Against Feminism


Paper Topic: In what ways does the conflict between feminist and conservative women reflect the arguments between suffragists and anti-suffragists? What is the most compelling argument made by each side?

Week 6
Feb. 18 Gender Gap

Voting the Gender Gap Chapters 1 (Norrander), 8 (Huddy, Cassese, and Lizotte),

**Paper Topic:** What are the major sources of the gender gap in public opinion and demographically (which groups of women drive the gender gap)? Does the gender gap increase the political influence of women in the Democratic and Republican Party? Why or why not?

**THURSDAY FEB 18. CANDIDATE PROFILE ASSIGNMENTS DISTRIBUTED**

**Week 7**
**Feb. 25**
**Women as Candidates Part I**


**Paper Topic:** What is the most compelling explanation for why more women do not run for office? What policy reforms or program initiatives would you suggest to increase the number of women running?

**Week 8**
**March 4**
**Women as Candidates Part II**


**Paper Topic:** Is the media biased against women candidates? Does contemporary media coverage, help, hurt, or have no impact on women’s candidacies for legislative and executive office?

**Spring Break March 5-14**

**Week 9**
March 18 Presentation of Candidate Profiles

CANDIDATE PROFILE RESEARCH PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS
THURSDAY MARCH 18

Week 10
March 25 Women in Office


**Paper Topic:** Feminist theorists like Jane Mansbridge claim that the election of women will lead to better substantive representation of women’s interests. In what ways does the empirical evidence support and/or undermine these claims? Should voters interested in women’s issues vote for the female candidate in a party primary (ie Democratic man v. Democratic woman in a Democratic primary, Republican man v. Republican woman in a Republican primary)?

Week 11
April 1 Easter Break

Week 12
April 8 Abortion and Reproductive Issues


**Paper Topic:** Based on the evidence from the readings, over the next ten years, do you believe that public policy regulating abortion and reproductive health will become more or less restrictive? Explain why?

**Week 13**  
April 15  
*Education and Economic Opportunity*


From The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything 2009 eds. Heather Boushey and Ann O’Leary A Study by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress  
Heather Boushey “The New Breadwinners.”  
Brad Harrington and Jamie J. Ladge. “Got Talent? It Isn’t Hard to Find.”

**Paper Topic:** What are the most compelling explanations for the gender pay gap and the trend in women’s career patterns? What needs to change to close the pay gap?

**Week 14**  
April 22  
*Midwest Political Science Conference No Class*

**Week 15**  
April 29  
*Economic Opportunity and the Work Family Balance*


From The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything 2009 eds. Heather Boushey and Ann O’Leary A Study by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress  
Maria Echaveste. “Invisible yet Essential.” Immigrant women in America”

**Paper Topic:** What is the biggest obstacle faced by women in the workplace? What public policy reforms would you suggest to alleviate this problem?