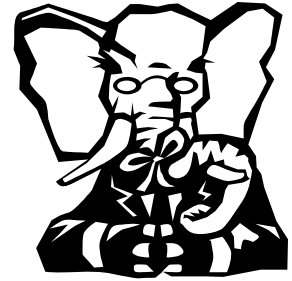




## 2008 PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE PROJECT American Politics & Government (SL 261)



This class will hold a series of mock presidential debates to give you a ‘hands-on’ feel for the election process. The debates will each be 50 minutes long (during the regular class period) and are tentatively scheduled in the Kahn Room of the Hulman Union for:

Debate #1: Economic Policy

Tuesday, October 7

Debate #2: Social Policy

Tuesday, October 14

Debate # 3: Foreign and Defense Policy

Tuesday, October 21 (location TBD)

Debate #4: Open Forum Debate

Tuesday, October 28

*ELECTION DAY*

*Tuesday, November 4*

The exact format and rules for the debates will be handed out later.

This is predominantly a group assignment and you will be graded as a group. Therefore, just like a real political campaign, you will sink or swim with your colleagues. That being said, EVERYONE is expected to be an active participant in this project and your contribution will be reviewed both by the professor and by your fellow group members. Those who do not contribute their fair share of the work will be punished mercilessly.

**CAMPAIGN TEAMS GROUP WORK (15% of overall course grade):** Your goal in this exercise is to understand and *accurately represent* the policy positions of your respective candidates. You may alter the presentation of your candidate’s policies (*why* it is a good policy), but not the substance (*what* is the policy). This assignment entails three phases:

- ✓ Research the respective policies of the campaign and prepare “Policy Position Papers”. (Due October 3 (Friday before the first debate). Your Policy Position Papers should elaborate your candidate’s policies in the broad issue areas specified below,
- ✓ Prepare for and participate in the debates (See schedule above).

The McCain and Obama campaigns need to focus their attention on the following issue areas:

- *Economic Policy:* Fiscal policy (taxation and spending), monetary policy, and trade policy, etc.
- *Social Policy:* Education, health care, social welfare, social security, environmental issues, gay marriage, abortion, etc.
- *Foreign and Defense Policy:* General national defense issues, the war in Iraq, the War on Terror, relations with our allies, US activity in the UN and other multilateral forums etc.
- *Leadership:* Why your candidate would make the best Commander-in-Chief, what is his vision for the country, why he is best suited to accomplish his goals, etc.

The “Open Forum” debate will cover all of the substantive issues as well as dealing with questions of leadership. There is a good deal of overlap on these subjects (i.e., changing social security obviously has implications for taxing and spending). You want to divide up the work, but you need to coordinate your positions with each other.

**CAMPAIGN INDIVIDUAL PAPERS (Due Monday, November 3 – 5% of overall course grade):**

For your final paper you switch from role-playing to objective analysis. Your job is to critique the final month of the campaign of you candidate. That means that you need to pay close attention to the campaign starting in the beginning of October (of course, you’d be doing this anyway!) How well did the McCain/Obama campaign do in getting its message across? Did they control the discussion, or were they more reacting to the other side? Did outside events intervene to shape the campaign (i.e., foreign policy crises)? How well did you candidate do in the actual presidential debate? Did your campaign seem to have a good organization with effective operation on the ground in the key states? What about their respective VPs? *In short, did McCain/Obama run an effective campaign?* Your paper should be typed, double spaced, and between 3-5 pages.

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**MEDIA GROUP ASSIGNMENT (10% of course grade):** Your role is to ask the questions during the debate. In order to do this effectively, you need to research the respective positions of the various candidates. You should divide responsibility for reviewing the issue areas as broken down for the campaigns above. This assignment entails the following:

- ✓ Research the issues and prepare a series of “Draft Questions” for each of the debates. These questions will be due ONE WEEK PRIOR to each debate (so, September 30<sup>th</sup> for October 7<sup>th</sup>, October 7<sup>th</sup> for October 14<sup>th</sup>, etc.)
- ✓ You should have *at least* 15 questions directed at either or both candidates for each debate.
- ✓ You initial questions will be given to the campaigns in advance. You will be allowed to probe with follow-up questions that they will not receive in advance.
- ✓ Prepare for and participate in the debate(s) for which you are responsible. You may all participate in each debate or divide the debates among yourselves.

**MEDIA INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT: (Due Monday, November 3 – 5% of overall course grade):** For your individual paper, I would like you to critique the media coverage of the 2008 campaign. As you cannot cover everything, I want you to pick one online news source (New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, etc.), follow their presidential election coverage in the last month of the campaign, and critique it. Was their reporting ‘fair and balanced’ or was their reporting *consistently* biased?<sup>1</sup> Were both candidates covered equally? Were all of the main issues examined? Were their significant issues that did not receive sufficient coverage? Did the media effectively provide voters with the information that they needed to choose a candidate? *Overall, how would you rate this paper’s/network’s coverage of the campaign?* In making your argument, I want you to refer to specific articles with proper citations. You should therefore keep copies of and/or notes on the articles as you *read them*. Your paper should be typed, double-spaced, and between 5-7 pages.

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<sup>1</sup> I’m only concerned with news articles, not editorials or commentary pieces. We expect those to have a bias.