ISSUES FOR THE 2006 ELECTION
Discussion Questions and Paper Assignment
American Politics and Government (SL 261) – Fall 2006

We will be taking an in-depth look at the key issues surrounding the 2006 midterm elections. This will be integrated into the course in two ways. First, these topics will form the basis for in-class discussions each week. Secondly, you will write papers on two of these topics (or an approved alternative). You will also have the option to revise and resubmit these papers for a (potentially) higher grade (see below).

The learning objectives of this assignment are multiple. In terms of American politics, you should emerge with a much better understanding of both what are the key issues in current American politics as well as a sense of how media presentation, public opinion, party organization and strategy, candidates and campaigns, etc. interact to produce both electoral outcomes and (potentially) policy changes. In terms of broader skills, this assignment will help you learn how to gather source material and decipher its utility; summarize complex arguments; hone your skills at presenting a reasoned, analytically sound, empirically valid, and well written essay; and, if you take advantage of the resubmission option, give you experience in incorporating criticism and revising written work.

ISSUES FOR THE 2006 ELECTION: The questions listed represent the key points of contention related to each issue. When gathering sources for in-class discussions, you should be looking for sources that help to answer these questions as these will help you get to the substance of the issue.

**Immigration (Week 1)**
Are levels of immigration into the US too high at present?
How does current immigration compare to historical levels?
Should (or could) the US attempt to seal off our borders to illegal immigrants?
What are the pros and cons of President Bush’s ‘guest worker’ proposal?
Are immigrants a burden to the country, either politically or economically?
Who benefits politically from the immigration issue – Democrats, Republicans, or neither?

**Iraq and the War on Terror (Week 2)**
Is the Iraq War a central front in the War on Terror or an unnecessary distraction?
Are we winning or losing the Iraq War?
Should we set a timetable for withdraw from Iraq?
Are we winning or losing the larger War on Terror?
Should US military and diplomatic policy be changed to better fight the War on Terror?
Has enough been done in terms of homeland security?
Are we safer now than we were four years ago?

**The Economy (Week 4)**
Is the US economy fundamentally healthy or are there weak spots?
How does the American economy compare with other major economies?
What is ‘globalization’ and is it something to be feared or embraced?
Is outsourcing a threat to the ‘American Dream’ of a middle class life?
Why is the US budget deficit so high?
Is the budget deficit a threat to American prosperity?
Should the federal government take active steps to lower the price of gas?
The Bush Factor (Week 5)
How do President Bush’s approval ratings compare historically?
Does presidential popularity always translate into Congressional success or failure?
How big a problem is Bush for the GOP?
Will Democrats be able to take advantage of Bush’s unpopularity?
To what extent will local races by determined by local rather than national issues?

Corruption and Congress (Week 6)
Will concerns about corruption largely affect the GOP or harm incumbents of both parties?
Will corruption be a significant issue in the 2006 election?
Have reforms of campaign finance laws (i.e., McCain-Feingold) made matters worse or better?
Is Congress a fundamentally corrupt institution?
How common are ethical violations among members of Congress?

Turnout and Party Mobilization (Week 7)
What fundamental advantages and disadvantages do the Democrats have going into the elections?
What fundamental advantages and disadvantages do the Republicans have going into the elections?
How important is “mobilizing the base” for the success of both parties?
How important is appealing to the “median voter” for both parties?
What is the optimal strategy for Democrats to win control of Congress?
What is the optimal strategy for Republicans to maintain control of Congress?

We also have one section in Week 8 (“Issues Potpourri”) open for any other issues related to the election that students would like to discuss.

DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENT: In addition to chapters from the Sabato book, the syllabus lists “Student Sources” for each issues discussion. In other words, you are to gather appropriate sources that will help us collectively to understand the issue. The questions listed for each issue above are a guide; you should attempt to gather sources that answer some or all of these questions. Beyond the obvious Google searches, sources can be found by consulting the news and election links listed on the course webpage. Another excellent source is the Academic Search Premier database on the Logan Library Website. This can be reached via the Research Center database dropdown menu on the Library’s main page. For each discussion, you are required to bring printed copies of three sources to class with the “Student Sources Worksheet”, which asks you to summarize the key points of those sources. No more than two of these sources can be websites.

PAPER ASSIGNMENT: You will be writing TWO papers based on the key issues surrounding the upcoming congressional elections. You may choose any two topics listed in the syllabus under “Issues for the Election” on which to write or, if you are interested in some other key issue (i.e., gay marriage, abortion), you may write on that with my prior approval (but the topic you pick must be significant in the upcoming election). Your papers may be turned in at any time, but your first paper is due no later than Monday, October 2 (at the start of class) and your second paper is due no later than Tuesday, October 10 (at the start of class). Anyone missing either of the paper due dates will receive a zero for that paper.

Your assignment is an argumentative essay, but it is also a research paper and you are expected to do outside research. At a minimum, your paper should have at least five separate sources and no more than two should be websites. Given that you are required to bring three sources to each discussion, this should not be difficult. Do keep in mind, however, that you do not get any bonus for simply doing the minimum. Your goal should be to provide references for any factual information needed to support your
argument. For example, if you claim that immigration is at an historical high, you need to present data (cited with an appropriate source) that shows just how high immigration was in earlier period of American history. It is also not just a question of providing any old reference that is loosely connected to the subject. Rather, you want to find a quality source, one with unimpeachable credibility and which truly supports the point you are trying to make.

**PAPER FORMAT:** Again, you are required write two essays. Regardless of which issues you choose your papers should be divided into the following sections and address the general questions listed for each.

- **Introductory Paragraph:** An opening paragraph that specifies the topic and previews what you are going to argue in the sections that follow.
- **The Issue:** What the key questions and debates surrounding this issue? What are the main policy proposals currently being debated? What are the arguments for and against these proposals?
- **My Position:** What is your stance on the issue? What do you think would be the best policy to pursue and why?
- **The Politics of __________:** How do you think this issue will play out politically? What is public opinion on this issue? How salient is it to the average voter? Will this issue directly impact the 2006 elections? If so, how? Which party will likely benefit?
- **Concluding Paragraph:** Summarizes the arguments discussed above and draws out the key point(s) for the reader.

Papers should be typed, double-spaced (with normal margins and fonts), include a cover page, and be stapled. (No paper clips or folders please!!) There is no required minimum or maximum length for these papers, but it is doubtful that you will be able to effectively address any of these issues in less than five pages. Equally, if you are getting up to ten or eleven pages you should perhaps think about tightening your arguments and deleting superfluous points. Your essay will be graded on the quality and depth of your research; your ability to present a reasoned, analytically sound, and empirically valid argument; and the clarity and coherence of your writing. A poorly written essay with multiple mistakes cannot make an intelligent and persuasive argument. Spelling and grammar thus are relevant to your grade.

**RESUBMISSION OPTION:** Additionally, your papers can be revised and resubmitted for regarding. However, you **must include the original paper with my comments** and you will only receive a higher grade if the revised version shows a **significant improvement** over the original. This includes not only correcting all minor errors in terms of spelling, grammar, citation formats, etc., but also improving the **substance** of your essay. This may require you to rewrite sections of your essay and/or seek additional sources for your arguments, among other things. In short, you are expected to address **all** the comments I made on your first draft. Papers may be resubmitted at any time, but are **due no later than Friday, November 3** (at the start of class).

Most importantly, **talk to me if you have any questions!!!** You are also very much encouraged to discuss your papers with me prior to turning them in. This almost always results in a higher grade.