

## **Election Administration**

Spring, 2021

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Political Science and Public Affairs

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Course Delivery: 6-8:50 PM Mondays  
Synchronous online  
<https://wcu.zoom.us/j/88121529611>  
Office Hours: Anytime by appointment (Zoom)



“There is probably no other phase of public administration in the United States, which is so badly managed as the conduct of elections.” – Joseph Harris 1934

“Public administration has not devoted attention to election administration with anything like the priority it has given to other areas of public policy” –Charles Wise, 2001.

### **What Is This Course About?**

This is a course about how we administer elections in the United States. As distinct from a Political Science class, we will not talk about the characteristics of individual candidates, how voters choose between candidates, political advertising, polarization, or the other myriad of issues that define campaigns and elections. Our focus will primarily be on election administration in North Carolina, but we will also use comparisons to other states to come to a better understanding of how we stack up to other states and areas where we might improve.

In a normal year, I would spend this paragraph making a case for the importance of election administration, why it matters, and why you should care. Unless you were sleeping in a cave (and a cave without 5G), then you know that the ways in which we conducted our elections were under a microscope in 2020. Terms like ballot curing entered the popular lexicon, and normal people suddenly had an opinion on the importance of vote-by-mail, and whether votes were counted fairly and accurately. Simply put: 2020 demonstrated that election administration matters, and you probably wouldn't be in this class if you weren't aware of that fact.

While I hope you're taking this class because of its importance and interest, this is course in an MPA program and as such, it should also have practical utility for your career (e.g. it should help you be more marketable). And, good news: this course does! Election administration is a burgeoning field and there is a realistic possibility of you finding a rewarding career in election administration. As such, we will spend some time this semester discussing and brainstorming ways to continue your professional training in the field and market yourself as an election administrator.

Even if you don't end up pursuing a career in election administration, election administration can provide a wonderful lab for understanding broader issues in public administration. Bureaucratic discretion, efficiency v. effectiveness, performance measurement, the importance of public sector values, data-informed decision-making—all of these issues have practical application in the world of election administration.

## **What Am I Going to Learn and be Able to do by the End of the Semester?**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Plan, direct, lead, and evaluate elections, from voter registration to recounts to electoral integrity to managing intergovernmental relationships among a nation's local, state/provincial, and federal governments.
- Apply Election Law accurately and appropriately to officials, voters, and situations at the federal, state, and local level.
- Know the structure of American federalism and the intergovernmental system, including theory, historical developments, major themes emerging issues, and the distinct phases and hurdles of the policy process. Be able to apply this knowledge to the implementation of new election laws and to the development and execution of electoral policies.
- Identify policy and management problems in election administration that are well-served by data collection and analysis.
- Articulate how election administration fits into the broader structure of county governments.
- Articulate how broader issues in public administration are borne out in election administration
- Plan a career in election administration

## **Do I have to buy any books?**

No. All of our reading will be available on Blackboard. While the syllabus lists the readings that will be read before class, we will have additional shorter readings (including memos from the NC State Board of Elections) that I will distribute in class. I also reserve the right to add additional readings with at least once week's notice.

## **How Will I Be Assessed?**

Every week other than the first week and the final exam week, we will have a guided reading response and an application assignment. Each is worth 10 points per week

We will have a take-home final exam that is due during the final exam period. It is worth 100 points.

Your research assignment this semester will be a 6-page paper (one page of which will be an executive summary) that will outline one way to improve election administration in North Carolina. We will discuss this more in class (and there will be a rubric on Blackboard), but in brief, you will (1) review the state of the issue in North Carolina, (2) discuss the problems with the status quo, (3) articulate your solution, (4) talk about how (practically) to implement your solution. Be sure to talk about budget implications.

For this class to work properly, all of us need to be in class, on-time, with our cameras turned out, our coffee nearby (ok, maybe that's just me), and ready to discuss in a civil and productive manner. As a result, 40 points of your final grade will rest on participation. I will post a (rough) rubric for participation on Blackboard.

In sum:

Guided reading response:  $13 \times 10 = 130$

Application Assignment:  $14 \times 10 = 140$

Improving Election Administration in North Carolina: 100 points.

Final Exam= 100 points

Participation=30 points

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Total=500 Points

### **How Are We Going to Conduct Class?**

We will meet synchronously (all together) on Zoom Monday nights at 6:00 PM. Please log in on time with your camera on. I'll make sure we have breaks spread throughout our time together.

## **Tentative Calendar (I reserve the right to alter this schedule with one week's notice)**

### **Week 1: January 25**

Topic: Election Administration as Public Administration

### **Week 2: February 1**

Topic: The structure and the timeline of Election Administration

Guest Speaker: Carrie Levine, Senior Reporter, Public Integrity

Application Assignment 1 Due

Guiding Reading 1 Due

Reading Due:

- Hale, Kathleen, and Mitchell Brown. 2019. "the Federal System and Politics: How the US Intergovernmental Architecture Shapes the Ways We Vote." In *How We Vote: Innovation in American Elections*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Levine, Carrie, Pratheek Rebal, and Matt Visilogambros. 2020. "First Came the Floods. Then Came the Polling Place Changes." Center for Public Integrity <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/ballotboxbarriers/first-came-the-floods-then-came-the-polling-place-changes/>

### **Week 3: February 8**

Topic: The people of election administration: Election Officials, Boards, and Poll Workers

Guest Speaker: Damon Circosta, Chair, North Carolina State Board of Elections, Executive Director of the AJ Fletcher Foundation, & Adjunct Professor at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University

Guiding Reading 2 Due

Application Assignment 2 Due

Reading Due:

- Adona, Natalie, Paul Gronke, Paul Manson, and Sarah Cole. 2019. *Stewards of Democracy: The Views of American Local Elected Officials*. Democracy Fund.
- Torrence, Rebecca. 2020. "What the State Elections Chair Worries About in the Middle of the Night." *Indy Week*. <https://indyweek.com/news/ninth-street-journal/what-the-etate-elections-chair-worries-about-in-the-middle-o/>

### **Week 4: February 15**

Topic: Election Administration in North Carolina Data & Resources

Assignment 3 Due

Reading Due:

- U.S. Election Assistance Commission. "Statewide Voter Registration Systems." <https://www.eac.gov/statewide-voter-registration-systems>

### **Week 5: February 22**

Topic: Candidate-Centered Election Administration

Guest Speaker: Mitchell Brown, Professor, Auburn University

Guiding Reading 3 Due

### *Application Assignment 4 Due*

#### *Reading Due:*

- Stearns, Anna. 2018. "Patch by Patch: North Carolina's Crazy Quilt of Campaign Finance Regulations." *Campbell Law Review*  
<https://scholarship.law.campbell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1662&context=clr>

### **Week 6: March 1**

Topic: Redistricting

*Guiding Reading 4 Due*

*Application Assignment 5 Due*

#### *Reading Due:*

- NCSL Redistricting Law 2020. Executive Summary and Chapter 4.

### **Week 7: March 8**

Topic: Site Selection

*Guided Reading 5 Due*

*Application Assignment 6 Due*

#### *Reading Due:*

- Vasilogambros, Matt, Tim Henderson, Carrie Levine, and Pratheek Rebala. "at a huge disadvantage: how this North Carolina county struggles to find polling places." *USA Today*.
- McInture, Colin, with Charles Stewart III and Steven Graves. "What Queuing Theory Says About Managing Polling Place Amid Covid-19." Stanford-MIT Project on a Healthy Election. <http://vote.caltech.edu/documents/206/WhatQueueingMeansPollingPlacesCOVID19.pdf> on a Healthy Democracy

### **Week 8: March 15**

Topic: Voter Eligibility & Voter Registration

*Guest Speaker:* Peter Litchenheld, Senior VP of Operations at Hart Intercivic

*Guided Reading 6 Due*

*Application Assignment 7 Due*

#### *Reading Due*

- Merivaki, Thessalia, and Daniel A. Smith. 2019. "Challenges in Voter Registration." In, Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale, and Bridgett A. King, eds. *The Future of Election Administration*, pp 59-82. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-030-14947-5\\_5](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-030-14947-5_5)

### **Week 9: March 22**

Topic: Convenience Voting

*Guided Reading 7 Due*

*Application Assignment 8 Due*

#### *Reading Due*

- Gronke, Paul. Early Voting After Bush v. Gore. 2014. In R. Michael Alvarez and Bernard Grofman, eds. *Election Administration in the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 10: March 29**

Topic: Ballot Design & Voting Technology

Guest Speaker: Corinne Duncan, Director, Buncombe County Board of Elections

Guided Reading 8 Due

Application Assignment 9 Due

Reading Due:

- Engstrom, Erik J., and Jason M. Roberts. 2021. *The Politics of Ballot Design: How States Shape American Democracy*. Chapter two and pages 108-119.

**Week 11: April 5 (No class meeting; assignments still due at normal time)**

Topic: Who Pays? Budgeting for Election Administration

Guided Reading 9 Due [Monday, April 5 at 11:59 deadline to accommodate Easter]

Application Assignment 10 Due [Monday, April 5 at 11:59 deadline to accommodate Easter]

Reading Due:

- Kropf, Martha, and JoEllen V. Pope. 2019. "Election Costs: A Study of North Carolina." In Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale, and Bridgett A. King, eds. *The Future of Election Administration*. Springer Pp 185-199.
- Logan, Dean C. 2019. "Special Election Costs: Filling Legislative and Congressional Vacancies." In Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale, and Bridgett A. King, eds. *The Future of Election Administration*. Springer Pp 301-316.

**Week 12: April 12**

Topic: Voting Rights & the VRA

Guided Reading 10 Due

Application Assignment 11 Due

Reading Due:

- Herron, Michael C., and Daniel A. Smith. 2019. "Race, Shelby County and the Voter Information Verification Act in North Carolina." *Florida State University Law Review*. <http://www.fsulawreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/v.43.2.Herron.pdf>

**Week 13: April 19**

Topic: Counting Ballots, Provisional Ballots, & Ballot Curing

Guest Speaker: Andy Jackson, Director of the Civitas Center for Public Integrity, John Locke Foundation

Guided Reading 11 Due

Application Assignment 12 Due

Reading Due:

- Healthy Elections.org 2020. "From Tabulation to Certification How Battleground States Count the Vote." [https://healthyelections.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Counting the Vote.pdf](https://healthyelections.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Counting%20the%20Vote.pdf)
- Guest Speaker Selected:

- <https://quillette.com/2019/04/19/inevitable-clash-of-politicians-and-bureaucrats/>
- <https://www.nccivitas.org/2020/stop-quoting-election-law-counting-ballots/>

#### **Week 14: April 26**

Topic: Reporting Results, Recounts, Canvas & The Clean-up

*Guided Reading 12 Due*

*Application Assignment 13 Due*

Reading Due:

- Schwab, Haley et al. "Recounts and Challenges in Battleground States."  
<https://healthyelections.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/RecountsAndChallenges.pdf>

#### **Week 15: May 3**

Topic: Improving Election Administration in America

*Guided Reading 13 Due*

*Application Assignment 14 Due*

Reading Due:

- Hasen, Richard L. 2005. "Beyond the Margin of Litigation: Reforming U.S. Electoral Administration to Avoid Electoral Meltdown." *Washington and Lee Law Review*.  
<https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1284&context=wlulr>

**Final Exam: May 10**