

WWS 594  
THE WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
SPRING 2007  
HALF-SEMESTER

EDWARDS

WINNING ELECTIONS: STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATION

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Critics of American politics suggest that it is a dirty business, peopled by corrupt politicians pursuing narrow self-interest; that important decisions -- who will be allowed to run, for example -- are made by a powerful elite; that the door to political power is closed to all except the very rich or those who will sell their political souls to wealthy special interests.

But while money plays an important part in American political campaigns, so do volunteers, so do issues, so does character, so does hard work, so does organization. While it may be easier to win public office -- or anything else -- from a starting point of fame, or wealth, or some other special advantage, the truth is that many people win important positions in government -- at the local level, in the states, and in federal office -- merely by virtue of passionate belief, hard work, and commitment.

It is the purpose of this course to demonstrate that the political system is not a mystery, and to show you how you can be an effective candidate yourself, or how you can be a campaign manager, fundraiser, volunteer coordinator, or press secretary,

either for a candidate or a referendum campaign for a cause you believe in.

We will study every aspect of a campaign for political office -- the decision to run, understanding your constituency, choosing a campaign staff, raising campaign funds, the role of the candidate, selecting the right issues, getting supporters to the polls.

The course will mix lecture, class discussion, hands-on exercises, simulations, and debates.

Students will be required to participate actively in class discussions and to complete several written assignments.

## **THE INSTRUCTOR**

Mickey Edwards was a member of Congress for 16 years and conducted campaign courses for congressional candidates.

SESSION ONE. February 7.

### **1. A QUESTION OF VALUES**

A man was starving in Capri;  
He moved his eyes and looked at me;  
I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,  
And knew his hunger as my own.

    -- Edna St. Vincent Millay  
(from the poem "Renaissance")

. . . the tragedy of life is not death; the tragedy is  
to die with commitments undefined and convictions undeclared  
and service unfilled . . .

-- Vachel Lindsay

Upon this marble bust that is not I  
Lay the round, formal wreath that is not fame;  
But in the forum of my silenced cry  
Root ye the living tree whose sap is flame.  
I that was proud and valiant, am no more; --  
Save as a dream that wanders wide and late,  
Save as a wind that rattles the stout door,  
Troubling the ashes in the sheltered grate.  
The stone will perish; I shall be twice dust.  
Only my standard on a taken hill  
Can cheat the mildew and the red-brown rust  
And make immortal my adventurous will.  
Even now the silk is tugging at the staff.  
Take up the song; forget the epitaph.

-- Edna St. Vincent Millay

(at the dedication of a statue in the U.S. Capitol honoring suffragettes Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton)

"Politics is the way a free people govern themselves."  
-- Bernard Crick ("In Defence of Politics")

Why run? Why subject yourself to this? Politics as a conflict of values. Politics as a means of "doing something about it". Politics as passion.

*Written assignment in class: Be prepared to write 3-4 pages examining why you want to be involved in politics.*

## **2. UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONSTITUENCY**

Demographics. Knowing everything you can about the voting public.

*For the next class period, provide a brief (2-3 page) description of yourself: hometown, education, political involvement, interests, political perspectives.*

*Also, for the next class, provide a detailed demographic analysis of your home congressional district -- population centers, median age, median income, racial mix, principal employers, education levels, electoral history (incumbent, incumbent's party, how the district votes in presidential elections, the incumbent's margin of victory in the last two elections, his or her strengths or weaknesses, etc.). Be as specific as possible (for example, in considering employers or industries, specify wheat, rice, corn, etc., rather than "agriculture").*

SESSION TWO. February 14.

## **THE ISSUES.**

A consideration of the issues you would emphasize in a race against the incumbent in your district. Take full cognizance of the nature of the district, the incumbent, the important issues in the district, your incumbent's record, and your own personal beliefs.

Framing the Issues.

Targeting your message.

What issues to emphasize in your advertising, in your speeches, in your mailings and on your web page.

SESSION THREE. February 21.

## **ORGANIZATION.**

The Campaign calendar. Planning backwards. Building momentum.

Creating a campaign organization. Campaign manager, fundraisers, precinct organizers, researchers, volunteers, etc.

Precinct organizers. Setting vote goals.

SESSION FOUR. February 28

## **MONEY.**

Raising it: PACs. Individual contributors. Fundraising events. Direct mail. Telemarketing. The internet.

And spending it: radio and television, billboards, door hangers, telephones, copiers, computers, desks, babysitters, gasoline.

SESSION FIVE. March 7.

## **COMMUNICATING.**

Finding the right message and saying it persuasively.

Campaign speeches. Debates.

Advertising. The Press. The Internet.

Negative campaigns. Your opponent has uncovered things about you that could destroy your campaign. What do you do? You

have discovered things about your opponent that could ensure your victory. What do you do?

SESSION SIX. March 14.

## **VICTORY.**

Getting them to the polls. It's okay to be behind in the polls the day before the election. It's even okay to be behind in the polls on the day of the election. What matters is getting your people to the voting booth.

Review.