

NJ Clean Elections Academic Study Group

Academics from various institutions of higher education whose work includes a focus on New Jersey politics are collaborating to provide information to the Clean Elections Commission, undertaken independently from the Commission, for the Commission's use in evaluating the Pilot Project conducted in the fall of 2005.

Specifically, the Group is engaged in the following:

- 1- Conducted surveys to assess voter attitudes and knowledge about Clean Elections and its goals as stated in the Law. Peter Woolley of the Fairleigh-Dickinson Public Mind Poll and Tim Vercellotti of the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling collaborated in conducting two statewide polls, one in early September and another late October, as well as a poll in each of the Clean Election districts – District 6 and 13. Funding was provided by the NJ Chamber of Commerce and the Fund for New Jersey.
- 2- Followed the campaigns in the two Clean Elections districts and in several other districts with similar characteristics to provide a contrast. The focus is on newspaper coverage of the races. Working with students at their respected institutions, the following have been involved: Mary Segers, Political Science at Rutgers-Newark; Joe Marbach, Political Science at Seton Hall University, David Rebovich, Political Science at Rider University, and Ingrid Reed at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers-New Brunswick.
- 3- Monitored television coverage of New Jersey political campaigns and possible coverage of Clean Elections. Matt Hale, a co-director of the Annenberg/U. of Wisconsin 2002 and 2004 study of political campaign coverage on television news programs and now on the faculty of the Seton Hall University department of public administration, organized a study of the 30 minute nightly news programs shown 30 days before the election on 12 outlets – 8 network affiliates (four in Philadelphia and four in New York), 2 cable systems, Channel 9 and New Jersey Network. Funding has been provided by the Taub Foundation.

The purposes set out in New Jersey law creating the Clean Elections Pilot Project are to:

- Address the fact that residents of the State believe large contributions to campaigns have undue influence, and
- That the political process is dominated by those who can afford to spend large amounts of money on campaigns, and
- The result is an erosion of public confidence in the democratic process.
- Also, that the pilot project would provide equal resources to candidates, reverse the escalating cost and free candidates from the chore of raising money, (based on the laws currently in effect in Maine and Arizona), as well as strengthen public confidence in the democratic process.

The charge to the Clean Elections Commission is to:

- examine the positive and negative aspects of the experience
- review and recommend criteria for selecting districts and setting the seed money and qualifying contribution amounts
- establishing support for primary races in 2007
- consider feasibility of applying to all races
- identify means to finance clean elections and other matters.