

**POLSCI 390 - Legislative Politics**  
MWF 11-11:53

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## **Course Overview**

This course is an introduction to the politics of the U.S. Congress. Even though we will sometimes deal with facts and figures, the main focus is to examine the workings of the U.S. Congress in a scientific way. The topics that we will intensively discuss include: 1) congressional elections; 2) goals and strategies of congressional members; 3) parties and leaders; 4) rules of the legislative game; 5) committees; 6) floor and voting; 7) inter-branch politics; and 8) scientific research on congressional politics.

The course prerequisite is POLS100. There is not a specific year “standing” requirement for this particular class. Overall, a basic understanding of the American political system is needed.

### **Course Objectives:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to

- Describe how U.S. Congress has developed over time;
- Understand the key nature of congressional elections, including redistricting, incumbency advantage, and the relationship with presidential elections;
- Understand how goals and strategies of individual members affect congressional organizations;
- Describe why political parties and congressional committees are crucial in congressional politics in the United States;
- Compare the differences between the House and the Senate;
- Analyze how a bill becomes law; and
- Generalize congressional politics under the inter-branch environment.

## **Course Requirements**

### **Attendance/Participation (10%)**

Attendance in class is necessary in order to fully comprehend the material and develop the critical thinking skills that accompany class discussion. I will pass around a sheet everyday

that you must sign to register your attendance in class. If I don't see your face (or, for that matter, if you come to class but I notice you sleeping, text messaging in class, carrying on a conversation or otherwise not paying attention and/or being disruptive) I will mark you absent. If you are more than 10 minutes late to class, I will mark you absent; it is disrespectful to me and your classmates. Moreover, must you be absent for any reason, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered in class and to get notes from another student.

In order to receive any attendance/participation points, **you must complete a quiz dealing with the content of this syllabus**. The quiz can be attempted an unlimited number of times, cannot hurt your grade, and must be completed with a 100%. No content on D2L will unlock until the quiz is completed. The point of the quiz is to ensure that you understand the guidelines and requirements for the class so that there is no possibility for complaints later.

I will allow three unexcused absences (**three full weeks!**). **After three absences, your grade will decrease five percentage points for every class you miss (up to 10%)**. If you are not in class, you cannot participate. In addition, I will assign everyone a participation grade at the end of the semester. If you do not regularly speak in class you will lose points off of this grade. Further, if a class is held online, I expect you to participate in order to receive points (more on this later).

I expect that class reading will be done **prior to class**, and that students will come to class prepared with notes on the readings so that they can engage in discussion. If at any point during the semester it is clear that students are not reading prior to class, I will mandate that each student hand in at the start of class one page of typed, single-spaced notes on the readings. If this situation arises, **the page of notes will count for the 2% of the daily attendance/participation grade (up to 10%)**.

### **Quizzes (10 x 2 = 20%)**

There will be 10 quizzes in this class worth an overall 20%. The quizzes are intended to ensure that you are reading the material, and that your level of comprehension is as at a point where you do well on the exams. The quizzes are to be accessed on D2L the week before we start most topics. The quiz will open after our Wednesday class at 11:53pm and will close by Sunday night at 10:00pm.

You are allowed to take each quiz three times, and I will count the highest quiz grade out of the three. Further, at the end of the semester I will drop the two lowest quiz grades. The quizzes are open-note, open-book format. The time limit for quiz completion is one hour. Finally, there are no make up quizzes. You have over four days to complete the quiz. Therefore, I will not allow anyone to make them up.

## **Online Reflections (10 x 2 = 20%)**

There will be no in-person class sessions on Fridays throughout the semester (with the exception of Week 1). Instead, there will be online reflection posts that are due when the course session would end (i.e. Fridays at 11:53). In the discussion section of our online course, you will need to post a thoughtful reflection response to the readings, lecture, or class discussion from the week. The intent of the reflection post is to allow you to digest the week's topic and thoroughly think about the weekly topic in relation to other areas of study we have touched on in the course.

The reflection post should be the equivalent of one single-spaced typed page. You are required to post a reflection for Weeks 2-7 and Weeks 9-12. The reflections are graded so that you either get full credit or no credit. However, the grading format does not mean that the reflection is meant to be an activity that is not taken seriously. Instead, if it is clear that minimal effort was put into the post, or that you did not reflect enough on the topic, the reflection will receive a zero. Further, if there are more than three grammatical errors, the post will receive a zero.

## **Argumentative Essays (2 x 10% = 20%)**

There will be two short, argumentative papers assigned throughout this semester. The objectives in this paper are to present a thesis and thoroughly defend your argument through the presentation of evidence. The important aspect to note about this type of assignment is to be aware of how your argument could possibly be undermined. If it is possible to break your argument with a one or two sentence statement you have not succeeded in the task, and thus will not receive a satisfactory grade on the assignment.

The essays are graded based mostly on the strength of your argument. However, grammar, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and overall organization are taken into account when assigning your essay grade. An "Argumentative Essay Guideline" is posted on D2L. **You should follow the guideline to the letter!** A failure to follow the essay guideline will result in an automatic 0% on the essay, which is a loss of 10% of your grade. There are no excuses, and your grade will not be re-evaluated. If you make an appointment or come to office hours, I will be more than willing to read your essay and give you comments before you hand it in. **There are no excuses for not doing well on these essays.**

## **Exams (2 X 15% = 30%)**

There will be two examinations during the course of the semester, listed in the course schedule. Each exam is worth 25% of your overall grade. Since a strong argument has arisen regarding the usefulness of multiple choice exams, and some people argue that they are "bad test takers," I offer two options for the exams. Each student will have the choice between two different exams for the midterm and final, listed below:

**Exam Choice 1:** In-class, multiple choice exam - The exam will consist of multiple choice

questions worth 2 points each. The opportunity to answer bonus questions will be available.

**Exam Choice 2:** Take-home, essay exam - The exam will consist of three essay questions, and you must choose **two** to answer. Each essay question should be answered in  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -3 typed, double-spaced pages (You may not write less than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or more than 3 pages. If the essay is shorter or longer than the instructions, you will receive a 0%). The essay questions will be handed-out the class before the in-class exam. **The exam answers must be turned in on D2L before the start of the in-class exam.** Failure to turn in the exam on time will result in an automatic 0%.

## Late Work

Late work is not accepted. All of the assignment due dates, criteria for completion, and full explanation are provided well ahead of time. In addition, all of the assignments can be turned in electronically on D2L without physically being in class. Therefore, there is no excuse for late work. Finally, there are two options for the exam, and one of the options does not require you to be in class. Therefore, makeup exams will not be allowed except for extreme circumstances.

## Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A	= 92% - 100%
A-	= 90% - 91%
B+	= 88% - 89%
B	= 82% - 87%
B-	= 80% - 81%
C+	= 78% - 79%
C	= 72% - 77%
C-	= 70% - 71%
D+	= 68% - 69%
D	= 62% - 67%
D-	= 60% - 61%
F	= below 60%

NOTE: In cases in which a student is on the borderline between grades (e.g., 91.5), I will always round up to the higher grade, provided that you have attended class regularly and engaged in regular and active participation in class.

If you have any questions about grading policy in general, or any questions about any particular grade you received, please come see me in my office. I will be more than happy to discuss your grade with you and find ways in which your work can be improved and your grade raised.

## Academic Dishonesty

**I take plagiarism extremely seriously.** Let it be noted for the record that cheating in any form will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating on an examination will be punished according to University guidelines. In addition, if a paper is handed in without any citations, improper citations, or plagiarized material the paper will receive a zero, and you will be referred to the university for disciplinary action. I will assume that you either copied the material or did not complete the assignment as was required. Please consult the section on student academic dishonesty in the Student Guidebook for a listing of the practices that may be considered cheating.

**It is the University's policy to provide, on a flexible and individual basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services for a letter of verification to provide to their instructors. Disability Services is located in WYLL D175 and can be reached at 595-2372 or [dss@uwp.edu](mailto:dss@uwp.edu)**

## Class Schedule

NOTE: Reading for a particular day should be done before attending class on that particular day. I have been known to randomly call on students and ask them questions from the reading. Therefore, it is in your interest to be prepared in order to receive attendance points. In addition, the schedule is subject to change based on the flow of class discussion.

### Part I - Introduction & Political Science Research

#### Week 1: Feb. 4 - Feb. 8

Syllabus

Student introductions

Topic: *Introduction: Social Scientific Methods*

### Part II - Congressional Structure and Members' Behavior

#### Week 2: Feb. 11 - Feb. 15

Topic: Modern Trends/Representation

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 1

Fenno, Richard F. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American political Science Review* 71: 883-917.

#### Week 3: Feb. 18 - Feb. 22

Topic: Constitutional and Historical Context

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 2

U.S. Constitution, Articles I, II, III, and Amendments

#### Week 4: Feb. 25 - Mar. 1

Topic: Congressional Elections

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 3

Mayhew, David R. 1975. "Ch.1 The Electoral Incentive." *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. 13-77.

#### Week 5: Mar. 4 - Mar. 8

Topic: Members and Goals

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 4

Lee, Francis E. 2000. "Senate Representation and Coalition Building in Distributive Politics." *American Political Science Review* 94: 59-72.

#### Essay I Due - Mar. 4 (11:00am on D2L)

**Research Question:** What is the most important motivating goal for members of Congress? How does this goal inform their behavior? What strategies do members incorporate in order to achieve these goals? Most importantly, should this be a member's dominant goal?

**Week 6: Mar. 11 - Mar. 15**

Topic: Parties and Leaders

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 5

**Week 7: Mar. 18 - Mar. 22**

Topic: Standing Committees

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 6

Maltzman, Forrest and Steven S. Smith. 1994. "Principals, Goals, Dimensionality, and Congressional Committees." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 19: 457-476.

**Spring Break: Mar. 25 - Mar. 22**

**Week 8: Apr. 1 - Apr. 5**

Study Day: April 1st will be a study day for the midterm exam.

**EXAM I - April 3**

**Part III - Inner Workings of Congress**

**Week 9: Apr. 8 - Apr. 12**

Topic: Rules and Procedures - House of Representatives

Read: Oleszek et al (2015): Ch. 3-5

Binder, Sarah A. 1996. "The Partisan Basis of Procedural Choice: Allocating Parliamentary Rights in the House, 1789-1990." *American Political Science Review* 90: 8-20.

**Essay II Due - Apr. 8 (11:00am on D2L)**

**Research Question:** How can the procedural rules in the House of Representatives be utilized in order to maintain majority party control? What tools does the majority party have at their disposal for ensuring passages of legislation that they most desire? Give specific examples.

**Week 10: Apr. 15 - Apr. 19**

Topic: Rules and Procedures - Senate

Read: Oleszek et al (2015): Ch. 6-8

**Week 11: Apr. 22 - Apr. 26**

Topic: Voting

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 8

**Part IV - Influences, Constraints, and Bargaining**

**Week 12: Apr. 29 - May 3**

Topic: Interbranch Politics and Interest Groups

Read: Smith et al (2013): Ch. 9-11

**Week 13: May 4 - May 10**

Topic: Convening a Legislative Body

**EXAM I - May 10 & May 13**