

POLSCI 318 - Legislative Politics
Spring 2021
Online Instruction

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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;
- Articulate the key features of congressional elections, including redistricting, incumbency advantage, and the relationship with presidential elections;
- Articulate 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;
- Articulate the differences between the House and the Senate;
- Analyze and articulate how a bill becomes law; and
- Generalize congressional political action under the inter-branch environment.

Course Requirements

Online Instruction

Since the class is conducted online, attendance/participation is a difficult aspect of the course to assess. Further, several people are taking this class online because their schedules do not

allow for regular, consistent class attendance. Therefore, there is a great deal of leeway built into the completion of required coursework. However, it is up to you to pay attention to due dates and requirements. Finally, **you must have stable internet access for this class.** I will not at any point in the semester hear complaints regarding late assignments due to not having internet access. The level of technological knowledge for participating in this class is minimal.

In order to access content on Canvas, **you must complete a quiz dealing with the content of this syllabus.** You cannot access the first lecture on "Social Scientific Methods" until you finish the quiz. The quiz can be attempted an unlimited number of times, cannot hurt your grade, and must be completed with a 100%. 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. In addition, your completion of the syllabus quiz is a contract that both of us agree to the guidelines set forth in this class.

I expect that class reading will be done **prior to accessing the lectures**, and that students will ask questions if they are not understanding something. The lectures can be accessed immediately after you finish the quiz on the same topic. If at any point during the semester it is clear that students are not reading prior to attempting the quizzes, I will mandate that each student hand in on Canvas one page of typed, single-spaced notes on the readings. The page of notes will accompany the quizzes in terms of determining the overall quiz grade.

A note about conduct: It is understandable that the class is not face-to-face, thus there is a certain level of anonymity. On rare occasions, this anonymity is accompanied by a lack of formality or professional conduct. Please take note to not be disrespectful to other students. Further, I expect that emails to me will be accompanied by a professional header, consist of a professional tone, and include formal writing (as though it were a business email). If the emails are not drafted in this manner, I will simply not respond to them. If they are written in a professional manner, you can expect a response in two business days or less.

If you need technical support, you can contact Canvas support through the help tab on Canvas. Additional help or inquiries regarding success in the class should be directed at the Student Support Services center.

Sequential Tasks of the Online Course

The course is designed so that tasks must be completed sequentially. What sequentially means is that you must complete the preceding task before Canvas will allow you to access the following task. In particular, you must take the quiz on a topic before you can access the lectures. Likewise, you must access the lectures slides before you can access the next topic's quiz. For example, you must complete the Syllabus Quiz before you can access the Social Scientific Methods Lecture. Further, once you complete the Social Scientific Methods Lecture you can access the Modern Trends/Representation quiz.

Due Dates

There are dates in the syllabus schedule that indicate when specific sets of tasks should be completed. However, there are no guidelines regarding moving at your own pace quicker than the schedule implies. Therefore, as you move sequentially, you are allowed to work ahead. This flexibility is built into the schedule so that you can work, as much as possible given the time frame, at your own pace.

Note: If you miss a deadline that means that you did not complete the task(s). Therefore, due to the sequential nature of the course you will not be able to advance. It is important that you do not miss deadlines so that you do not fail.

Participation = 4%

You will be required to complete one particular task at the beginning of the semester in order to receive participation points. You must introduce yourself on Canvas in the Discussion section of Canvas titled “Introductions.” I would like everyone to introduce themselves in a paragraph or two before the end of the second week of the semester (due date on Canvas). Your specific response is not graded, and you will simply receive points for completing the task.

Online Reflections (10 x 2 = 20%)

In the discussion section of our online course, you will need to post a thoughtful reflection response to the readings or lecture 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 due dates are listed in the syllabus and on Canvas.

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.

Active Learning: Interaction and Feedback

The online reflection forums are intended to provide a forum for students to process course material and apply course concepts in an interactive format if they so choose. This interaction will allow for “student - student” and “student - instructor” interactions, whereby students are expected to reflect on material. Each student is expected to write a reflection post should be the equivalent of one single-spaced typed page. Further, as your Instructor, I may take an active role in clarifying confusion and providing additional information that serves to advance student understanding in a given content area.

Active Learning: Student Engagement

The lectures will use contemporary examples of political phenomena to illustrate course concepts. These concepts, often contentious, are designed to challenge student understandings of given issues and explore new ways of analyzing institutional performance, political arguments, and political history. Therefore, students are expected to keep up with contemporary news in order to familiarize themselves with the presented issues. Present in the lectures are discussion questions that provide the opportunity to examine and assess their own understandings of new material. Although students are not expected to submit written responses to these discussion questions, this self-directed learning enables students to more fully interact with other members of class during review sessions, and clarifies points of confusion on which to seek further clarification. Again, these exercises are intended to guide students to increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning.

I have provided you with three different modes of engaging with the lecture material. First, I have posted for each topic comprehensive lecture slides. These lecture slides have more material on them when compared to a normal in-person lecture. Second, I provide you with a lecture video in which I lecture in a similar manner as I would in an in-person course. For example, I clarify difficult topics/concepts and I give additional examples beyond the lecture slides. Finally, if you are a student that is not in favor of sitting down and watching lecture videos. I have provided Podcast audio files that you can download and listen to on your computer or phone. Alternatively, you could simply play that audio files through the Canvas app that is supported on most smart phones. Being able to engage with the material while driving or walking to other classes might make it easier to stay actively engaged in the course material.

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 can be accessed on Canvas after you complete the preceding module.

You are allowed to take each quiz three times, and I will count the highest quiz grade out of the three. The quizzes are open-note, open-book format. The time limit for quiz completion is one hour. Finally, there are no make up quizzes, since there is already considerable flexibility built into the schedule.

Argumentative Essays (2 x 13% = 26%)

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 Canvas. **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 13% of your grade. There are no excuses, and your grade will not be re-evaluated. If you make an appointment or contact me prior, 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 = 30% (Exam 1 = 20%; Exam 2 = 10%)

There will be two examinations during the course of the semester, listed in the course schedule. Exam 1 is worth 20% and Exam 2 is worth 10% 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 Exam 1:

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 Canvas before the start of the in-class exam.** Failure to turn in the exam on time will result in an automatic 0%.

Note: Exam 2 does not follow this format. More details will be provided the last three weeks of the semester.

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 Canvas 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.

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%

Grading Scale

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

Class Schedule

NOTE: Reading for a particular module should be done prior to attempting the graded assignments. **The professor reserves the right to alter the schedule or the requirements in the schedule as the see necessary to facilitate learning.**

Part I - Introduction & Political Science Research

Week 1: Feb. 1 - Feb. 5

Syllabus

Student introductions

Topic: *Introduction: Social Scientific Methods*

Part II - Congressional Structure and Members' Behavior

Week 2: Feb. 8 - Feb. 12

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.

Due February 12th (10pm on Canvas) - Student Introduction

Week 3: Feb. 15 - Feb. 19

Topic: Constitutional and Historical Context

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

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

Due February 19th (10pm on Canvas) - Quizzes 1-2, Reflections 1-2

Week 4: Feb. 22 - Feb. 26

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. 1 - Mar. 5

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.

Due March 5th (10pm on Canvas) - Quizzes 3-4, Reflections 3-4, and Essay 1

Essay 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. 8 - Mar. 12

Topic: Parties and Leaders

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

Week 7: Mar. 15 - Mar. 19

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.

Due March 19th (10pm on Canvas) - Quizzes 5-6 and Reflections 5-6

Spring Break: Mar. 22 - Mar. 26

Due March 29th (10pm on Canvas) - EXAM I

Part III - Inner Workings of Congress

Week 8: Mar. 29 - Apr. 2

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.

Due April 2nd (10pm on Canvas) Essay II

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 9: Apr. 5 - Apr. 9

Topic: Rules and Procedures - Senate

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

Due April 9th (10pm on Canvas) - Quizzes 7-8 and Reflections 7-8

Week 10: Apr. 12 - Apr. 16

Topic: Voting

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

Part IV - Influences, Constraints, and Bargaining

Week 11: Apr. 19 - Apr. 23

Topic: Interbranch Politics and Interest Groups

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

Due Apr. 23rd (10pm on Canvas) - Quizzes 9-10 and Reflections 9-10

Week 12: Apr. 26 - Apr. 30

Topic: Convening a Legislative Body - Instructions will be posted on Canvas

Week 13: May 3 - May 7

Topic: Convening a Legislative Body - Instructions will be posted on Canvas

Due May 14th (10pm on Canvas) - EXAM II