

Syllabus for PLS 3370, Section 01

The Legislative Process

Fall 2015

MWF 11:15am-12:20pm, 154 Rike

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Course Description: Legislatures are instrumental to the function of representative democracy in the United States. At a very basic level, the size of our population and the resulting transaction costs make direct democracy untenable. Legislative bodies reduce these costs by selecting a few individuals who collectively deliberate and create laws on behalf of society. Today, Congress and legislatures are met with deep skepticism and concern. While many citizens believe their member of Congress does a good job representing their interests, they also believe the institutions themselves are broken, corrupt, inefficient, and perhaps, unnecessary. What causes people to have such disparate views? How do the institutions of Congress actually function and who has influence over legislation?

This course is about legislatures in the United States. We will explore several topics central to legislatures, including how they evolved, the rules that structure their operation, who serves, and what influences legislators' behavior once in office. We will also examine how legislatures interact with other political actors including parties, interest groups, and other branches of government. This course is designed to move beyond social commentary and take a broader look at the institutions of legislatures and the behavior of its members. We will explore not only the basic design and operation of state and national legislatures, but also critically evaluate their value and place in our government.

Learning Goals and Objectives: This is a course about legislatures at the state and national level. After completing this course, it is expected that students demonstrate four general competencies. First, students will understand the trade-offs that are made in representative government and will gain a greater appreciation for the environment in which legislators operate, the influence of outside forces and the realities of inter-branch relations. Second, students will understand competing explanations for policy gridlock and polarization. Third, students will show knowledge of the institutions, rules, and procedures of the U.S. Congress. Finally, students will grow in their ability to engage in thoughtful and critical commentary in written and spoken form concerning the U.S. Congress.

Methods for Learning and Teaching: This course will contain a mix of lecture, class discussion, and in-class exercises. It is vital for your own comprehension of the course material that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to participate in class exercises.

PLS 3220 is designated an “Integrated Writing” (IW) course, designed to meet WSU guidelines for developing effective writing skills. Students will be expected to produce writing that:

- Demonstrates their understanding of course content,
- Is appropriate for the audience and purpose of a particular writing task,
- Demonstrates the degree of mastery of disciplinary writing conventions appropriate to the course (including documentation conventions), and
- Shows competency in standard edited American English.

Effective writing counts toward the final course grade. Students will meet IW requirements in a number of ways. These include two current events essays that require the student connect the course material to the larger content, in-class response essays, exams with short answer and essay components, and daily responses to the reading.

Expectations

Attendance: Your attendance in class is always expected. Attending class will allow you to keep up with the rapid pace of a summer session course and will provide for meaningful discussion as a class. I will take attendance as a way to get to know you. You have up to 5 unexcused absences in this class (I will start taking attendance after the second week). Please contact me via e-mail if you are unable to attend class. We follow the University’s attendance policy regarding excused absences. See [Wright State’s Add/Drop Policy](#) and [Wright State’s Excused Absence Policy](#).

Preparation and Participation: I expect you to read the assigned material before class and be able to discuss what you read in class. You will fill out a [Google Form](#) on a daily basis that allows you to report what you learned and to ask clarifying questions. There are 31 reading assignments over the course of the semester, you must sufficiently complete 21 of these for full credit. Contributing to class discussion will make the course more interesting and will enhance your understanding of the material. Some of the articles I ask you to read are dense and statistically complex. In such cases, I will provide specific directions to help maximize comprehension.

Academic Honesty: All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Please consult the [Code of Student Conduct](#) for academic integrity.

Be Flexible: While the syllabus represents an agreement between us, I reserve the right to revise and modify it throughout the course if it is necessary to achieve our goals. Situations beyond either of our control can also emerge that require changes to the course. I will notify you of any changes made throughout the course.

Cell Phones and Laptops: Please be respectful of your fellow students and me by silencing your cell phone during class and limiting laptop use to only class-related activity.

Current Events: We will spend a few minutes each day discussing current political events both at the national and state levels and applying them to material we are learning in class.

E-mail Policy: I will work to respond to e-mails within 24 hours.

Readings

The following book is required for the course:

Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, and Frances E. Lee. 2014. *Congress and Its Members*, 14th ed. Washington DC: Sage CQ Press. ISBN: 978-1-60871-642-5.

There are also additional readings listed for most class meetings. Readings are drawn from academic journals and news sources. I will post every reading on Pilot. I will also include links to news articles since many will include links and interactive charts and graphs.

Assignments

I give you a number of assignments in order to allow you multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning. I will try to grade and return each assignment within a week.

In Class Response Papers (10% of final grade) These are short essays written in class (about 10-15 minutes). They will be based on the readings. I will provide leading questions the night before. The goal of this assignment is to both synthesize and critique the readings while also applying the concepts to current situations or problems. We will have 2 of these over the semester. (No more than a page)

Current Events Essays (15% of final grade) These assignments require you to take any article from a valid news source and comment on it citing the literature and research we have covered in the course. In these assignments you will have an opportunity to apply concepts

we are learning in class to the real-life political arena. We will have 2 of these over the semester. (No more than 2 single-spaced pages - Rubric on Pilot)

Midterm Exam (20% of final grade) The midterm exam material will be drawn from class discussions and the readings. The exam is intended to assess your knowledge of class content and your ability to apply relevant concepts. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Legislative Portfolio (15% of final grade) Details on this project are included at the end of the syllabus. You can work alone or with a partner. This gives you an opportunity to synthesize a number of concepts by evaluating one state's Congressional delegation. You will get 5% of the points for an in-class presentation, and the remaining 10% for the final project

Final Exam (20% of final grade) The final exam material will be drawn from class discussions and the readings from the second half of the course. The exam is intended to assess your knowledge of class content and your ability to apply relevant concepts. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Reading Questions (10% of final grade) There will be a [Google Form](#) posted on Pilot that asks a few basic questions about the readings. I will use these to prepare the course and to motivate you to complete the readings. There are 34 nights with readings over the course of the semester. You must complete 21 for full credit. These are due before class.

Attendance (10% of final grade) I will take attendance every day.

Grading

Below I list each assignment, the due date (also marked on course calendar), and the weight it receives in the final calculation of your grade:

Assignment	Due Date	% of Grade
Response Paper 1	September 18	5%
Current Events Essay 1	September 30	7.5%
Midterm Exam	October 23	30%
Current Events Essay 2	November 9	7.5%
Response Paper 2	November 16	5%
Legislative Portfolio Presentations	December 7-9	5%
Legislative Portfolio	December 11	10%
Final Exam	December 18	20%
Reading Questions	Daily	10%
Attendance	Daily	10%

Make-Up Grades: You are allowed to make up academic work only in the case of excused absences. These absences may include missing class for a University-sanctioned activity (with proper documentation), illness, religious observance, or family emergency. If you know in advance that you are going to miss class, please contact me before the absence to make arrangements for completing the work. If you are absent for an unexpected reason, please check in with me as soon as possible. You will have one week from the day of your return to class to make up a missed assignment.

Late Work Policy: Assignments turned in late will be penalized 5% per day.

Disability

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated. It is your responsibility to notify me during the first week of the semester if such accommodations are needed. If you have questions about this, contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) at 937-775-5680 or disability_services@wright.edu.

Course Schedule

We will attempt to follow this schedule as closely as possible, but we may take more time on some concepts and less time on others. All changes to the schedule will be announced in class or via e-mail. Required course readings are listed below. Note that all class readings are posted on Pilot. If you have trouble accessing an article, please do not hesitate to e-mail me. The abbreviation DOL refers to the Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee textbook.

NOTE: Readings are expected to be completed on the date they are posted. On days with multiple readings, readings are listed in the order that we will cover them. I expect you to read all of the textbook pages and newspapers assigned. For the academic articles, I will give specific directions on which sections to focus on.

Week 1

August 31 (M): Introduction to the class.

September 2 (W): Discussion on Representation

- Neuman, Scott. 2010. “[Why We Love To Hate Congress.](#)” *NPR* December 17, 2010.

September 4 (F): The Representative-Constituency Linkage

- Burke, Edmund. 1774. “[Speech to Electors at Bristol.](#)” from The Founders’ Constitution at The University of Chicago.
- DOL, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-12)
- Miller, Warren E. and Donald E. Stokes. 1963. “Constituency Influence in Congress.” *American Political Science Review* 57(1): 45-56.

Week 2

September 7 (M): Labor Day: No class

September 9 (W): The Design of Congress

- Article I of the U.S. Constitution
- Federalist No. 51
- DOL Chapter 2 (pp. 15-27)

September 11 (F): Institutional Evolution of Congress

- DOL Chapter 2 (pp. 28-39)
- Polsby, Nelson W. 1968. “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives.” *American Political Science Review* 62(1): 144-168.

Week 3

September 14 (M): Cracking and Packing: Districting in the House

- Draper, Robert. “[The League of Dangerous Mapmakers.](#)” *The Atlantic* September 19, 2012.
- DOL Chapter 3 (pp. 41-56)

***Schedule meeting to discuss legislative portfolio assignment.**

September 16 (W): Districting in the House (Cont'd.)

- Sides, John. “Gerrymandering is not what’s wrong with American Politics.” *The Washington Post* February 3, 2013.

September 18 (F): Legislative Process Research 1: Determining Causes of Incumbency Advantage

- Abramowitz, Alan I., Brad Alexander and Matthew Gunning. 2006. “Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections.” *Journal of Politics* 68(1): 75-88.

Response Paper #1 (in class)

Week 4

September 21 (M): Legislative Recruitment

- DOL Chapter 4 (pp. 56-63)

September 23 (W): The Electoral Game

- DOL Chapter 4 (pp. 65-82)

September 25 (F): No class.

Week 5

September 28 (M): Who Votes?

- DOL Chapter 4 (pp. 82-100)

September 30 (W): Where are the Voters?

- Wasserman, David. 2015. “Urban Resurgence is a Double-Edged Sword for Democrats.” *FiveThirtyEight* July 19, 2015.

Current Events Essay #1 due at 5:00 PM.

October 2 (F): The Legacy of Elections

- Sulkin, Tracy. 2005. "A Theory of Issue Uptake." Chapter 2 in *Issue Politics in Congress*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Week 6

October 5 (M): Hill Styles

- DOL Chapter 5 (pp. 103-120)

October 7 (W): Home Styles

- DOL Chapter 5 (pp. 120-129)
- Fenno, Richard F. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71(3): 883-917.

October 9 (F): Leaders and Parties in Congress: The House

- DOL Chapter 6 (pp. 131-144)

Week 7

October 12 (M): Leaders and Parties in Congress: The Senate

- DOL Chapter 6 (pp. 144-161)

October 14 (W): The Committee Structure

- DOL Chapter 7 (pp. 163-184)

October 16 (F): The Committee Structure

- DOL Chapter 7 (pp. 184-203)
- Drutman, Lee. “[Ways and Means, Financial Services, and Energy and Commerce Are Top House Fundraising Committees.](#)” from The Sunlight Foundation Blog.

Week 8

October 19 (M): Legislative Process Research 2: Dynamics of Party Change in Congress

- Karol, David. 2009. “Explaining Party Position Change: Theory and Method.” Chapters 1 and 2 in *Party Position Change in American Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

October 21 (W): Midterm Exam Review

October 23 (F): **Midterm Exam**

Week 9

October 26 (M): Rules and Procedures

- DOL Chapter 8 (pp. 205-224)
- Binder, Sarah. “Lincoln: Best film ever about... The House of Representatives!” from The Monkey Cage Blog, December 7, 2012.

October 28 (W): Rules and Procedures

- DOL Chapter 8 (pp. 224-243)

October 30 (F): Decision Making in Congress

- DOL Chapter 9 (pp. 245-272)
- Silver, Nate. 2011. “[How Liberal Is President Obama.](#)” from *The New York Times* FiveThirtyEight Blog, April 29, 2011.

Week 10

November 2 (M): Elections Preview

- Reading TBA

November 4 (W): Legislative Process Research 3: Constituency and Voting

- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan. 2002. "Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting." *American Political Science Review* 96(1): 127-140.

November 6 (F): Congress and the President

- DOL Chapter 10 (pp. 275-292)

Week 11

November 9 (M): Congress and the President

- DOL Chapter 10 (pp. 293-307)

Current Events Essay #2 due at 5:00 PM.

November 11 (W): Veterans Day - No class.

November 13 (F): Congress and the Bureaucracy

- DOL Chapter 11 (pp. 309-330)

Week 12

November 16 (M): Congress and the Bureaucracy

- DOL Chapter 11 (pp. 330-338)

Response Paper #2 (in class)

November 18 (W): Congress and Organized Interests

- DOL Chapter 13 (pp. 367-397)

November 20 (F): Congress and Domestic Policymaking

- DOL Chapter 14 (pp. 399-413)

Week 13

November 23 (M): Congress and Budgeting

- DOL Chapter 14 (pp. 413-429)

November 25 (W) and November 27 (F): Thanksgiving break - No class.

Week 14

November 30 (M): Congress and National Security

- DOL Chapter 15 (pp. 431-444)

December 2 (W): Congress and National Security

- DOL Chapter 14 (pp. 444-461)

December 4 (F): Legislative Process Research 4: Evaluating Political Polarization

- Hetherington, Marc J. "Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 29: 413-448

Week 15

December 7 (M): **Legislative Portfolio Presentations**

December 9 (W): **Legislative Portfolio Presentations**

December 11 (F): Course Wrap-Up

- DOL Chapter 16 (pp. 473-495)
- Hamilton, Lee H. "Ten Things I Wish Political Scientists Would Teach About Congress." Pi Sigma Alpha Lecture, American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, August 31, 2000.

Legislative Portfolio due at 5:00 PM

Week 16

December 18 (F): Final Exam 10:15AM - 12:15PM