

# POLS 3364 Legislative Process

Tuesday-Thursday, 2:30pm-4:00pm, C 111

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PGH 426

Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 1:30-2:30 or by appointment

\*This syllabus is subject to change depending on class cancellations and the evolving nature of current political events.

**Course Description:** The objective of this course is to understand how legislatures function in pursuit of resolving political conflicts. Toward this end, we will examine why nearly 90% of Americans disapprove of Congress. We will learn how ideas are developed into legislation, how legislators influence policymaking, the role of elections and representation, how parties and interest groups constrain legislators, and what institutional rules mean for the ability of these actors to achieve their goals. Much of what political scientists know about legislatures has been focused on the U.S. Congress. We will explore these theories and explanations in detail. We will also assess the U.S. state legislatures as a point of comparison.

**Prerequisite(s):** POLS 1336

**Credit Hours:** 3

**Text(s):** *Congress and Its Members*, 15<sup>th</sup> Edition

**Author(s):** Davidson, Olezek, Lee, and Schickler; **ISBN:** 978-1-4833-8888-5

Supplementary texts to be provided on Blackboard.

## Course Objectives:

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Assess the relationship between the American public and Congress
2. Describe the historical development of Congress and the state legislatures
3. Critically dissect rules and procedures and their effects on policymaking
4. Evaluate congressional interactions with other branches of government
5. Describe the role parties and interest groups play in lawmaking
6. Explain how legislatures organize their workload
7. Assert potential solutions for the problems facing Congress

## Grade Distribution:

Professionalism	15%
3 Simulation Assignments	30%
Article Critique/Presentation	25%
Weekly Quizzes	30%

## **Professionalism:**

Professionalism includes the following demonstrable characteristics: punctuality, genuine commitment, and intellectual participation. Your classmates and I expect you to be on time and meet deadlines. We also expect you to read the assigned material and keep up with the news regarding legislative activities. Class discussion is incredibly important to the success of this course. As is the case in healthy democratic politics, the exchange of perspectives and ideas is essential to finding problems, exploring solutions, and locating possible points of compromise. Class discussion is the one time in this course where you will not be penalized for being wrong. I will gain an understanding of other points of view from your input and you will do the same from your classmates' contributions. We will take this new information and incorporate it into our positions accordingly. Sometimes we will not be able to converge our opinions. That is okay. Reasonable people will disagree on occasion. However, everyone must be willing to open an empathetic ear where possible and a sympathetic ear otherwise. Your grade will not begin at 15% and be reduced as you fail to be professional. You must earn these points by being on time and prepared for class as well as contributing to class discourse.

## **Reading Assignments:**

While no individual portion of your grade comes from reading, expect to see information in your assigned readings to show up throughout the course. You should draw on information from your readings in class discussion. Your simulation assignments should include references to the reading material, where appropriate. Many test questions will come directly from the readings. I will expect to have an interactive discussion about the readings in class. Read the assigned material before the week it is assigned.

## **Simulation Assignments:**

Simulations are designed to put you in a legislator's shoes in order to understand the types of things that motivate their behavior. There are three of these assignments that will count 10% each. I will provide you with handouts uploaded on Blackboard detailing the requirements for each assignment. They are typically 2-3 pages each. In addition to learning about legislative life, you will hone your writing skills. I will provide you with tough critiques of your writing. You are expected to improve over the course of the semester. Be prepared to talk about your legislator in class on the day the assignments are due.

## **Article Critique:**

You will select an article from a political science journal that deals with legislative politics in some way. It is up to you to find an article and have it approved by me. Use Google Scholar, JSTOR, or other library resources to locate these articles. A good practice is to follow citations in class readings that interest you most. If you come across a book that interests you, then you may choose an empirical chapter in place of the article. I will give you a brief demonstration in class on how to conduct a useful literature search. This will be the last assignment of the semester. It should be at least five pages in length. You are expected to demonstrate knowledge you have gained throughout the semester as well as your improved writing skills. The contents of your cri-

tique should include a brief description of the article. Tell me the primary aim of the authors, their main theoretical contribution, how they go about testing their claim, and implications of their findings. The rest of your paper should discuss flawed assumptions, missing pieces of the puzzle, empirical shortfalls, and future directions for research of this question. You will submit a draft of this paper to me, I will provide you with comments and a grade. If you are unsatisfied with your grade, then you will revise and resubmit the paper on the final due date based on my comments.

### Quizzes:

We will have 10 periodic quizzes in lieu of major midterm and final exams. Some quizzes will be 10 multiple choice questions. Others will be 3 short answer questions. Others will be a single essay question. The subject matter will come from the readings and lectures for the corresponding week. If you read the material and come to class, you will have no problem with this portion of the class.

### Letter Grade Distribution:

$\geq 93.00$	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	$\leq 59.99$	F

### Course Policies:

- **General**

- Electronic devices are permitted for note taking purposes only. I frequently tour the room during class. Students I observe engaging in activities that go beyond course relevance will be severely penalized on their professionalism grades. Excessive violations may result in dismissal from class.
- Quizzes and exams are closed book, closed notes.
- A single day at the end of the semester will be designated for make-up exams.

- **Grades**

- Grades in the **C** range represent performance that **meets expectations**; Grades in the **B** range represent performance that is **substantially better** than the expectations; Grades in the **A** range represent work that is **excellent**.
- Grades will be maintained on Blackboard. Students are responsible for tracking their progress by referring to the Blackboard gradebook.

- **Writing Assignments**

- Students are expected to work independently. **Offering** and **accepting** solutions from others is an act of **plagiarism**, which is a serious offense and **all involved parties will be penalized according to the Academic Honesty Policy** found here: <http://publications.uh.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=4210>. Discussion amongst students is encouraged, but when in doubt, direct your questions to the professor.

- **No late assignments will be accepted under any circumstances.**

- **Attendance and Absences**

- Attendance is expected and will be taken each class. You are allowed to miss **1** class during the semester without penalty. Any further absences will result in point and/or grade deductions.
- Students are responsible for all missed work, regardless of the reason for absence. It is also the absentee's responsibility to get all missing notes or materials.

- **Classroom Decorum**

- Discriminatory language will not be tolerated.
- Discussing politics often involves controversial topics. In our course, there will be a time for debate, a time for discussion, and a time for dialogue. Other times discussion and debate will develop more organically from classroom conversations. Maintaining a civil demeanor throughout is a requirement for this course.
- While politicians, media personalities, and others in the public sphere do not always adhere to this policy, our classroom will remain a cordial and constructive environment.

## Tentative Course Outline:

The weekly coverage might change as it depends on the progress of the class. However, you must keep up with the reading assignments.

### Week 1 - January 19th and 21st

- Introduction and syllabus discussion
- Chapter 1: The Two Congresses (all)
- The Broken Branch
- Quiz 1

### Week 2 - January 26th and 28th

- Chapter 2: Evolution of the Modern Congress (all)
- Video-Ideological Evolution of Congress
- Article 2 U.S. Constitution
- 101 Legislatures: Chapter 1
- Legislative Professionalism
- Quiz 2

### Week 3 - February 2nd and 4th

- Texas Legislature
- Chapter 3: Going for It: Recruitment and Candidacy
- Gendered Perceptions and Political Candidacies: A Central Barrier to Women's Equality in Electoral Politics -Fox and Lawless
- Simulation Assignment 1 **DUE TUESDAY FEBRUARY 9TH beginning of class**

### Week 4 - February 9th and 11th

- Chapter 4: Making It: The Electoral Game
- Chapter 5: Being There: Hill Styles and Home Styles
- Quiz 3

### Week 5 - February 16th and 18th

- Chapter 6: Leaders and Parties in Congress
- No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislatures -Seth Masket pages 108-116, 128-153, 157-159
- Partisan Stacking on Legislative Committees -Hedlund et al
- Quiz 4

### Week 6 - February 23rd and 25th

- Chapter 7: Committees: Workshops of Congress
- The Evolution of Legislative Jurisdiction -Baumgartner et al
- Simulation Assignment 2 **DUE TUESDAY March 1st beginning of class**

Week 7 - March 1st and 3rd

- Chapter 8: Congressional Rules and Procedures
- Legislative Organization and the Second Face of Power -Anzia and Jackman
- Quiz 5

Week 8 - March 8th and 11th

- Chapter 9: Decision Making in Congress
- Quiz 6
- Simulation Assignment 3 **DUE TUESDAY MARCH 22ND beginning of class**

Week 9 - March 15th and 17th

- Spring Break!

Week 10 - March 22nd and 24th

- Dynamic Representation -Stimson et al
- Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment -Butler and Nickerson 2011
- How Money Talks in State Legislatures
- Quiz 7

Week 11 - March 29th and 31st

- Chapter 10: Congress and the President
- Healthcare bill timeline chapter from jacobs and skocpol
- Chapter 11: Congress and the Bureaucracy
- Quiz 8

Week 12 - April 5th and 7th

- Chapter 12: Congress and the Courts
- Chapter 13: Congress and Organized Interests
- Why ALEC Has Tremendous Influence in State Legislatures
- Quiz 9

Week 13 - April 12th and 14th

- Chapter 14: Congress, Budgets, and Domestic Policy Making
- Chapter 15: Congress and National Security Policies
- Quiz 10

Week 14 - April 19th and 21st

- Chapter 16: The Two Congresses and the American People

Week 15 - April 26th and 28th

- Research guidance day
- Article Critique **DUE MAY 5TH**

Week 16 - May 3rd and 5th

- NO CLASS