POL 485 Congress
M/W/F, 10:00am-10:50am, MER 404

Dr. Robert Lucas Williams
rwillia1@misericordia.edu
MER 404
Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 11:00am-1:00pm 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. Most political science theories have been developed with the U.S. Congress in mind. We will explore these theories and explanations in detail. We will also assess the U.S. state legislatures as a point of comparison.

Credit Hours: 3

Text(s): Congress and Its Members, 15th Edition

Supplementary texts to be provided on Blackboard.

Learning 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:

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments/Activities (5)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams (2)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Professionalism:

Professionalism includes demonstrable characteristics such as 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 generally keep up with the news regarding political events. 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. You will gain broader perspectives through your interactions with classmates. However, everyone must be willing to open an empathetic ear where possible and a sympathetic ear otherwise. We will learn on the first day the difference between dialogue and debate. The point of a dialogue is to understand the speaker’s argument, nothing more. The point of a debate is to exchange ideas such that you may persuade someone else to your position or come to some middle ground. As a class we will always be aware of which of these modes we are in. Neither of these modes allows for hostile or incendiary language. You must earn these points by being on time and prepared for class as well as contributing to class discourse. You will find a rubric on Blackboard.

Assignment/Activities:

You will be given five small projects to complete either own your own outside of class or in-class in student groups. Each project will be worth 5% of your grade. These projects are designed to reinforce course material as well as give you an opportunity to exercise your intellectual and writing abilities. Individual due dates will be issued along with each assignment. Assignments to be completed outside of class will be posted on Blackboard.

Exams:

We will have two exams in this course. Question material may come from any part of this course including readings, lectures, class discussion, visiting speakers, and current events. Each exam will be administered in class. Exams will consist of multiple choice question format and open-ended written responses. Written responses are designed for you to demonstrate the knowledge you have accumulated and to test your ability to apply that knowledge to practical problems in American legislatures. If you have a legitimate excuse that prevents you from taking an exam on the scheduled day, you must contact me ahead of time to schedule a make up. Otherwise, no make up exams will be given.

Term Paper:

You will write a full length (in the 10-20 page range) research paper examining a scientific question regarding legislatures. We will look at many theories developed by other legislative scholars to answer their questions. You should develop your own original question that is rooted in these existing theories. Then, you will write a literature review that examines the relevant existing research related to your research question. Next, you will write a theoretical expectations section that describes what you expect to find if you were to conduct an analysis of this research question. This section relies heavily on your own thoughts about the underlying causes of the phenomenon under consideration. Last, you will write a research design section that lays out what information you might need to assess your central research question. You will turn in each of these sections of the paper throughout the semester, each worth 5%. Then, on the day of the final exam, you will turn in
a finished product that includes and introduction and conclusion. This final draft will be assessed for the remaining 15% of your term paper grade.

Letter Grade Distribution:

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Classroom Expectations:

- The items below are expected of you by both me and your classmates.
- **Be respectful.** We will cover contentious topics on a daily basis. Everyone possesses the ability to converse in a cordial manner. We will foster a safe space in which you can discuss sensitive topics in a productive way. REASONABLE PEOPLE OFTEN DISAGREE.
- **No web surfing during class.** You may type notes and look up relevant information, but do not play around online. It is distracting to both me and your fellow students if you are not paying attention and not engaging in the material. Keep your phone on silent and out of sight.
- **Be on time.** This should go without saying.
- All of these rules will be a factor in your professionalism grade.

Academic Integrity:

- This class strictly adheres to the MU policy on academic honesty. Misericordia University has an academic integrity policy found in the university catalog available online on the university website. Please read the entire policy online if you are not already familiar with the policy.
- Serious violations (i.e., extensive non-citation of the work of others) will be penalized with a failing grade on the assignment and an official report to the VPAA. If this offense is committed on a subsequent assignment, the student will receive a failing grade on the assignment and for the course, and an official report will be sent to the VPAA.
- Minor violations include the failure to cite a source when other sources are cited, the failure to include a work cited page, and the improper use of footnotes or endnotes.

Emergency Response:

- To be prepared in the event of an emergency situation, students should keep their cell phone on vibrate during class to receive any message from the emergency alert system (EAS). However, checking your phone for non-EAS messages or texting during class will be treated as a refusal to participate in class and will affect your participation grade. In the event that you need to receive a call for a personal emergency, please notify me before class to receive permission to answer your phone outside the classroom.
- In the event of an emergency, I will inform students and coordinate the response recommended by public safety. I expect students to comply with my instructions to ensure the safety of all.
Tutorial Assistance:

- Peer Tutoring Program: Misericordia University offers a variety of tutorial options to assist students in achieving academic goals. Individual and group peer tutoring is provided in most core curriculum courses and some professional courses dependent on student tutor availability. The Peer Tutoring Program services are provided by the Student Success Center, which is located in the lower level of Alumnae Hall. All tutoring services are free of charge.

- Smarthinking is an online tutoring service available to all students. Students can drop in on a live tutoring session, submit papers, or schedule private sessions in many subject areas, such as statistics, economics, biology, physics, chemistry, and many others. Smarthinking registration and log in information can be found on the Student Success Center channel found under Student Services.

Mental Health Support:

- The Counseling and Psychological Services Center (CAPS) provides free counseling services to students. If students find their studies are suffering due to mental health concerns, please contact CAPS directly for support.

Mental Health Support:

- In Accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Misericordia University strives to ensure that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program administered by the university.

- If you are a student who requires academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Kristen Ricardo in the Student Success Center at kricardo@misericordia.edu or (570) 674-6205.
**Tentative Course Outline:**
The weekly coverage might change as it depends on the progress of the class.

**Week 1 - January 15th-19th**
- Introduction and syllabus discussion
- Article 1 U.S. Constitution
- Chapter 1: The Two Congresses (all)
- The Broken Branch articles (on Blackboard)

**Week 2 - January 22nd-26th**
- Chapter 2: Evolution of the Modern Congress (all)
- Legislative Professionalism (on Blackboard)

**Week 3 - January 29th-February 2nd**
- 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

**Week 4 - February 5th-9th**
- NO CLASS: Wednesday 2/7 - University Weather Day
- Chapter 5: Being There: Hill Styles and Home Styles

**Week 5 - February 12th-16th**
- Chapter 6: Leaders and Parties in Congress
- NYT OP-ED “Why Congress Doesn’t Always Do the Right Thing”

**Week 6 - February 19th-23rd**
- Chapter 4: Making It: The Electoral Game
- **EXAM 1**: Wednesday 21st
- Bring research questions to class

**Week 7 - February 26th-March 2nd**
- **Meet in Library Monday 2/26**: 2nd floor data lab for literature review tutorial
- Chapter 7: Committees: Workshops of Congress
- Partisan Stacking on Legislative Committees -Hedlund et al
- The Evolution of Legislative Jurisdiction -Baumgartner et al

**Week 8 - March 5th-9th**
• Spring Break!

Week 9 - March 12th-16th

  • Chapter 8: Congressional Rules and Procedures
  • Legislative Organization and the Second Face of Power - Anzia and Jackman
  • **PA State Rep. Kaufer (R-120)** Visiting class - March 16th

Week 10 - March 19th-23rd

  • Chapter 9: Decision Making in Congress
  • Listen and discuss “Legislating in the Dark” podcast in class
  • **Professor Matt Hinton** Wednesday March 21st - Citations Workshop
  • Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment - Butler and Nickerson 2011

Week 11 - March 26th-30th

  • Chapter 10: Congress and the President
  • Healthcare bill timeline chapter from Jacobs and Skocpol
  • **NO CLASS** Friday March 30th

Week 12 - April 2nd-6th

  • NO CLASS Monday April 2nd
  • Chapter 11: Congress and the Bureaucracy
  • Chapter 12: Congress and the Courts

Week 13 - April 9th-13th

  • Chapter 13: Congress and Organized Interests
  • Why ALEC Has Tremendous Influence in State Legislatures
  • How Money Talks in State Legislatures

Week 14 - April 16th-20th

  • Chapter 14: Congress, Budgets, and Domestic Policy Making
  • Chapter 16: The Two Congresses and the American People

Week 15 - April 23rd-27th

  • Student presentations

Week 16 - April 30th-May 5th

  • **EXAM 2** Wednesday May 2nd