

## POLITICAL SCIENCE 246 *THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS*

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Office Hours: W 10:30 – 11:30; F 2-4; By Appt.

Dickinson College  
Spring 2019  
MWF 9:30 – 10:20  
Denny Hall 103

### Course Overview

This course will provide an overview of the legislative process in the United States. The majority of the course will focus on Congress. The first unit of the course will cover the basics of how Congress operates – the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the rules and procedures that dictate the operation of the House and Senate, and the organizations like Congressional committees and legislative parties that structure Congressional activity. The second unit of the course will review the dynamics of Congressional elections and representation. The third unit will be an assessment of the performance of the contemporary Congress. Topics will include the impact of polarization and divided government, the Congressional budget process, public opinion, and different measures of legislative productivity. The final section of the course will examine the legislative process at the state level. Topics will include legislative professionalism, direct democracy, and the role of state governors, among others. Finally, on several occasions over the semester invited speakers will provide an inside look at the legislative process based on their own personal experience as participants.

This course meets the political science department's major research methods requirement. As such, students will be exposed to a number of methodologies used to study legislative politics, and students will gain experience applying some of these methodologies in their own analysis of roll call voting.

### Assignments

**Roll Call Analysis (20%)** – This assignment will ask students to construct their own index of roll call votes that will score all members of Pennsylvania's House delegation on their record of support for higher education during the past 115<sup>th</sup> Congress (2017-2018). How roll call records are used in research will be discussed thoroughly in class. Instructions for this assignment will be distributed in class on **February 1**. Student projects will be due on **February 25**.

**Representation Analysis (15%)** – For this essay, students will be assigned a member of the House of Representatives to write about. Students will then research that member's district and legislative record, and then seek to understand that member's record through an application of the different representational concepts students will be introduced to in class. Papers should be about **8 pages** in length. A prompt will be distributed on **March 4**, and the paper will be due on **March 27**. A select group of students will share the results of their research with the rest of the class in presentations to take place March 27 and 29.

**Midterm Exam (15%)** – An in-class midterm exam will be given on **March 6**. All students must take the exam on this date. A make-up will only be offered in the event that a student misses the exam due to a family or medical emergency.

**Essay on Proposals to Reform Congress (15%)** – Students will be asked to write a **6 page** paper that identifies several specific problems that they feel impede Congress’ effectiveness. Students will then conduct research on realistic proposals that potentially could help solve these problems. More detailed instructions will be distributed in class on **April 3**. Papers will be due **April 29**.

**Final Exam (20%)** – A final exam will be administered during the College’s exam days. The exam is scheduled for **May 7 at 9:00 AM**. The exam will be limited to material from after the midterm. A make-up will only be offered in the event of a family or medical emergency.

**Participation and Attendance (15%)** – This part of your grade will be calculated as follows: First, your participation will be judged as to whether it is of excellent, above average, average, below average, or low quality. Note, *quality* does not necessarily mean *quantity*. Excellent participation is worth 15 points, above average participation is worth 14 points, average participation is worth 13 points, below average participation is worth 12 points, and low quality participation is worth 11 points.

Attendance will also be taken at the start of each class by means of a sign-in sheet. It is your responsibility to sign-in. This is the official record of your attendance. Absences will be excused only in the event of my prior approval or a family or medical emergency. Two (2) unexcused absences will be forgiven over the course of the semester. After that, each additional absence will result in a 1 point deduction.

For example, consider a student whose participation is above average but who has four unexcused absences. This student will receive 12 points for participation and attendance (14 for participation and a 2 point deduction for the four absences).

## Learning Goals

After completing this course, students should:

- Be familiar with the lawmaking process from start to finish, at both the Congressional and state levels. Students should be able to recognize important legislative rules and procedures, as well as be able to understand the strategic rationale behind different actions.
- Be able to recognize the important individual actors in the legislative process. Students should understand the nature of the authority that these individuals wield.
- Have developed a more nuanced understanding of the performance of America’s legislative institutions. Students should be able to evaluate what America’s legislatures do well, what they do poorly, and be able to intelligently discuss different proposals for reform.
- Understand the different methods scholars use to study legislative behavior and outcomes, and be better prepared to read complex scholarship and design original research.

## Accommodating Students With Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning

difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to [www.dickinson.edu/access](http://www.dickinson.edu/access), email [access@dickinson.edu](mailto:access@dickinson.edu), call (717) 245-1734, or go to ADS in the Lower Level of Old West, Room 5.

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet soon to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your Blue Forms. If you will need test proctoring from ADS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

### **Take a Dickinsonian to Lunch Program**

In an effort to encourage small group interaction between students and college faculty/staff, students and college employees can request vouchers to take each other out to lunch at various local restaurants, the Union Station or the college cafeteria. This program is funded by the Student Senate and administered by the Office of Leadership & Campus Engagement. Vouchers can be picked up in the Student Life Office on the lower level of the HUB, weekdays from 8:30am - 4:30pm and are valued at \$10 per person.

Participating restaurants include: Grazery, Dickinson College Cafeteria, Dickinson College Union Station, Helena's Chocolate Cafe, Market Cross Pub, Miseno's II, Mt. Fuji, North Hanover Grill, Redd's Smokehouse, Spoons Cafe, Carlisle Thai, Denim Coffee, PB's Italian Kitchen, and Pizza Grille.

I make an effort to get to know each student who takes a class with me. I encourage you to take advantage of one of these initiatives, or at the very least to make use of my office hours at some point this semester.

### **Course Outline**

The purchase of the following two books is required:

- Smith, Steven S., Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2015. *The American Congress*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Squire, Peverill, and Gary Moncrief. 2015. *State Legislatures Today: Politics Under the Domes*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Students will be expected to complete the assigned readings by the end of each topic for which they are assigned.

## Introduction

January 21

### **Unit 1: Congressional Basics**

#### The Constitution and Congressional Rules and Procedures

January 23, 25, 28, 30, February 1

- **Assignment Instructions for Roll Call Analysis are Distributed on February 1**
- *The American Congress, 44-51*
- *The American Congress, 219-248*
- *The American Congress, 265-275*

#### Congressional Committees

February 4, 6, 8

- *The American Congress, 173-218*

#### Congressional Parties and Leadership

February 11, 13, 15

- *The American Congress, 131-172*

### **Unit 2: Congressional Elections and Representation**

#### Congressional Elections

February 18, 20, 22, 25

- **Roll Call Analysis is Due February 25**
- *The American Congress, 63-91*

#### Representation

February 27, March 1, March 4

- **Assignment Instructions for Representation Analysis are Distributed on March 4**
- *The American Congress, 93-130*

#### Midterm Exam

March 6

## Unit 3: Congressional Problems and Performance

### Polarization and Divided Government

March 8

- *The American Congress*, 3-10; 316-318

### Spring Break

March 11, 13, 15

### Congress and Special Interests

March 18, 20

- *The American Congress*, 351-379

### The Congressional Budget Process

March 22

- *The American Congress*, 381-407

### Congressional Oversight

March 25

- *The American Congress*, 309-313

### Presentations on Representation Analysis

March 27, 29

- **Representation Analysis is Due March 27**

### Congress and the Judicial Nomination Process

April 1

- *The American Congress*, 338-346

### Congress and American Foreign Policy

April 3

- **Congressional Reform Paper Assignment Instructions Distributed on April 3**
- *The American Congress*, 296-299

### Assessing Legislative Productivity

April 5

Congress and Public Opinion

April 8, 10

- *The American Congress*, 14-19

Congress: An Insider's Perspective

April 12

- **In-Class Video Conference with former Congressman Jim Gerlach (R-PA 6, 2003-2015)**

**Unit 4: The Legislative Process at the State Level**

The Legislative Process at the State Level

April 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26

- *State Legislatures Today*, 1-2; 8-29; 61-102; 133-139; 157-158; 181-190; 205-223

State Politics: An Insider's Perspective

April 29

- **Class Visit by Pennsylvania State Senator Lindsey Williams (D- 38<sup>th</sup> District, 2019 - Current)**
- **Congressional Reform Papers Due on April 29**

**Unit 5: Concluding Thoughts on Modern Lawmaking**

How to Fix Congress

May 1

Last Class

May 3

Final Exam

May 7 at 9:00 AM