Washington & Jefferson College

Department of Political Science

**LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES**

**POL 315**

**Spring 2015**

**Instructor:** Nichole Fifer

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**Office hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 10:00 AM -1:00 PM and by appointment

**Class Meets:** Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 1:00- 2:05 PM, 304 Old Main

Course Overview

This is a specialized upper level course designed to familiarize students with congressional politics, congressional procedure, and the legislative functions of the American policy making process. The course will cover material pertaining to: legislative behavior and decision making; legislatures as institutions; forces involved in the formulation of public policy; the congressional budget process; executive-legislative relations.

**Course Objectives**

1. *Critical Thinking* – to improve students’ ability to critically evaluate political realities and arguments
2. *Writing, Research and Presentation* – to improve students’ ability to express their opinions and ideas and to carry out independent research
3. *Substantive Understanding* – students will gain an understanding of the American legislative system and political issues therein.

**Learning Outcomes**

At the end of the course, through active participation in all aspects of the course, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge about the key features and actors in the legislative process
2. Identify important structural and procedural differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate
3. Provide explanations for contemporary legislative politics and policy making trends
4. Explain legislative decision making and the forces that drive it.
5. Understand the effects of politics, and government structure on congressional outcomes and policy.

Required Texts and Materials

1. Oleszek, Walter J., Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process. 9th edition, CQ Press (2014).
2. Arnold, Douglas. The Logic of Congressional Action. Yale University Press (1990).
3. LegSim Student Access - http://www.legsim.org/

*\*\*\* Additional readings will be provided by the Instructor and posted on Sakai. All distributed material is required reading\*\*\*\**

**Course Requirements**

Budget Assignment 5%

Policy Brief 15%

Debate Preparation 10%

Reflection Essay 6%

Midterm 1 12%

Midterm 2 12%

Final Exam 20%

Class participation 20%

**Grading Scale**

A= 93-100 (A), 90-92 (A-)

B= 88-89 (B+), 83-87 (B), 80-82 (B-)

C= 78-79 (C+), 73-77 (C), 70-72 (C-)

D= 68-69 (D+), 63-67 (D), 60-62 (D-)

F= 59 and below

**Class Policies**:

Students will be expected to attend all lectures, do the assigned readings, and participate in discussions. If you have any questions or problems, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail ([nfifer@washjeff.edu](mailto:nfifer@washjeff.edu)) or see me in my office hours.

1. Please be courteous to your fellow class members. Discussion is an important part of this course and it is expected that everyone will respect the comments of fellow students. Failure to be respectful will result in a zero participation mark.
2. Extreme cases or repeat cases of disrespect toward the instructor or fellow students will result in the loss of a letter grade from the student’s final score.
3. The instructor reserves the right to request disruptive and disrespectful students to leave the classroom.
4. Students will be strictly held to the Washington &Jefferson code of student conduct.
5. Attendance and punctuality are crucial to understanding the material and doing well on exams. Please be in class on time.
6. Students are expected to read the assigned materials prior to the class, and be prepared to discuss them.
7. Students are responsible for both the assigned readings and the lecture material – exams WILL cover both.
8. Academic honesty is a must in this class. Please refer to any and all College and departmental regulations regarding cheating and plagiarizing. These regulations apply to this class and will be enforced.
9. Please turn off all cell phones and pagers. These devices are disruptive to both the instructor and fellow students. Technology is a privilege in this classroom students using technology inappropriately will be banned from their use during the class period.
10. The Instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus during the course of the semester

**Contacting Me:**

Please feel free to email me at any time. When you email please write the title of the course (POL 315) in the subject line so that I may easily identify student e-mails from each course. If there is an emergency or your concerns are urgent please indicate this in the subject line of your email. I will respond to urgent messages as soon as possible/ necessary. I will respond to all emails within 24 hrs with the exception of weekends and holidays.

**Assignments:**

**Budget Assignment (5%):** We will study the budget making process at length in this class. In addition to this formal study we will also discuss the current budgetary environment and specific deficit based policies. In this assignment you will be given a series of questions to address based on both the formal budget study and the current policy discussion.

**Policy Brief (15%):** After you have been assigned to a committee you will need to do research and bring yourself up to speed on the current policies under consideration by your committee. After you have completed your research you will pick one policy as your “area of expertise”. You will then write a brief succinctly explaining the policy, its history, and the current debates surrounding it. You must also write a brief summary of your position on the policy.

**Debate Preparation (10%):** Once your committee has selected a policy and drafted a bill to bring to the floor you must prepare a speech and a set of talking points on your bill that you will use to guide your floor debate. You will be graded on the organization and quality of your talking points as well as the strategy that you employ in your speech.

**Reflection Essay (6%):** During the last week of class you will be asked to write a paper reflecting on the legislative process and what you have learned from both the course materials and from your experience in the simulation. You will be graded on the depth and content quality of your reflection.

**Late Assignments:** Five percentage points will be deducted from your assignment grade for each day you are late turning it in. A final deadline for turning in all work will be announced near the end of the semester.

**Exams (44%):** There will be two mini-midterm exams worth 12% each, and a comprehensive final exam worth 20%. The mini-midterms will be predominantly short answer and the final will be predominantly essay. The final exam will require a synthesis of course material and must exhibit the student’s proficiency in the course materials as well as their ability to integrate major concepts. Further details on midterm and final exam expectations will be discussed in class as they approach.

**Participation (20%):** Attendance and Participation are required. You are responsible for work that is assigned and material taught whether you were present or not. It is YOUR responsibility to find out what you missed due to absence. Please see me before or after class when you return from illness or before you leave if you have a planned absence. Your “participation and attitude” grade will reflect exactly those things.

**\*\*Each student is permitted 4 absences for any reason. Each additional absence will result in a loss of 5% of the students cumulative score.**