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<http://faculty.washington.edu/jwilker/353/POLS353Fall2016Syllabus.pdf>

3/9/2016

POLS 353: U.S. CONGRESS

Professor [John Wilkerson](#)

Office Hours: Wed 1:30-3:00 (or by appt)
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MW 12:30-1:30 Smith 220B

Congress - the people's branch - is famously unpopular. Roughly 9 out of 10 Americans disapprove of its job performance! Yet, Americans will reelect over 90% of House members and 80% of Senators? Many factors may help to explain this paradox. Candidates, including those currently serving (incumbents), tend to run for Congress by running against it. But approval of Congress is at record low levels for reasons that are not completely understood.

How policy proposals become law also defies simple prescriptions. Otto von Bismark once said "Politics is not a science, as the professors are apt to suppose. It is an art." Scholars do have something to contribute in terms of discovering and sharing broader patterns of politics. But particular outcomes often hinge on less generalizable factors, such as events, personalities and behavior.

"Playing politics" can be an effective way to appreciate these lessons. In this class we are going to learn about Congress by studying and practicing its politics. Roughly 50% of class time will be devoted to a student-run simulation and nearly all of the graded assignments are simulation-related. As is the case in Congress, there are many different ways to contribute (public speaking is only one of them). But please take this class only if you are interested in the simulation.

Learning Goals

Demonstrate appreciation of:

- the role of Congress in society
- the legislative process, its logic, and proposed reforms
- the external and internal influences shaping legislative behavior

Improve your:

- listening and communication skills
- collaboration skills
- strategic skills

Required Readings

Readings are listed on the schedule below.

Two books are also required (Odegaard reserve has one copy of each (24 hour))

Lee Hamilton, *How Congress Works*

Robert Kaiser, *Act of Congress: How America's Essential Institution Works, and How It Doesn't*

LegSim

Everyone needs to register and create a profile on LegSim by Jan. 10 at 11pm. There is a \$16 registration fee. See registration instructions at the very bottom of this syllabus.

Legislative Resources

Links to resources that may prove useful for assignments

<http://faculty.washington.edu/jwilker/353/353Assignments/Legislative%20Resources.pdf>

Assignments and Grading

See below for dates and more information about specific assignments

The capstone assignment of the course is the [Final Report on Legislative Accomplishments](#) (20%), which asks you to reflect on your legislative performance and explain how you will win reelection. Reading it now may be helpful. The assignments that come before are intended to help you become a more effective legislator, in order to be able to write a better Final Report.

Your opponent. As part of their final report, another student will be holding you accountable for decisions you've made that may hurt your reelection prospects.

Topics of Instruction

The links below are to readings and resources relevant to the weekly topic or topics. Some lectures will draw on specific readings. Other readings are supplemental.

Week 1 – Jan. 4: Introduction

[What do lawmakers want students to know about Congress?](#)

Congress is unrepresentative, unpopular and dysfunctional

[Composition of Congress](#)

[Public Approval of Congress](#)

[Resumes of Congressional Activity](#)

[Artifacts discovered in D.C.](#)

Is the US political system obsolete?

[Obama takes on gun control](#)

[U.S. Constitution](#) (Congress' role is found in Article 1 section 8)

[Federalist #51](#)

Cutler, [To Form a Government](#)

Week 2 – Jan. 11: Elections and Representation

[Michelle Nunn Campaign Strategy memo](#)

Anatomy of a congressional campaign

[Who Votes?](#)

Money is corrosive, but maybe not for the reasons you assume

[The Rules](#) [The Practices](#)

4 hours a day

It's not about votes

Good representation is multifaceted

Eulau and Karps: [The Puzzle of Representation](#) (styles and forms)

Fenno; [Home Style](#) (presentation of self)

[Speech by Rep. Paul Broun \(R-GA\)](#)

Responsive representatives are not necessarily good representatives

[Americans flunk Budget IQ test](#) Take the [Pew Knowledge](#) quiz

Appelbaum and Gebeloff, [Even critics of safety net depend on it](#)

Tierney, [Which States are Givers and Which are Takers?](#) (added 1/12)

Hofstadter, [The Paranoid Style in American Politics](#) (written in 1952) Focus on p.29 and after

Chuck Norris' Dire Warning ([Video](#))

Week 3 – Jan. 18: Lawmaking

No class Monday

[The Way to Beat Poverty](#)

What laws do

[US Code](#)

[Code of Federal Regulations](#)

[List of US Depts and Agencies](#)

[Federal budget](#)

[Dodd-Frank example](#)

The lawmaking process

[simple](#) / [gory](#) / [multimedia!](#)

Film: HR 6161: *An Act of Congress (1977)*

In 1970 Congress passed the Clean Air Act, which set deadlines for reduced emissions, including from automobiles. In 1977, Congress faced threats from the U.S. auto industry that it would shut down if the deadlines weren't extended. The film focuses on the 'markup' of a bill in House Energy and Commerce committee. The brand new technology being discussed ("Does the car have to drive?") is the catalytic convertor.

Week 4 – Jan. 25: Coalitions and leaders

Klein, [Unpopular Mandate](#)

Parties in Congress

[Guide to Republican herd](#); [Guide to Democratic herd](#)

Brooks, [Ryan's Biggest Mistake](#)

Little Legislatures: Committees in Congress

[Committee Theories Reconsidered](#)

Student Activity: Leader candidate introductions

Student Activity: New members' reception

Week 5 – Feb. 1

Nixon, [Visa overstays](#)

Drafting good legislation: Intentions, effects, and politics

Fagone, [The Serial Swatter](#)

[Sample](#) bill format [Ten Questions checklist](#)

Student Activity: Adopt procedures for selecting leaders and assigning committee positions

Student Activity: Leader Elections

Week 6 – Feb. 8

Waxman, [The Orphan Drug Act](#)

Cultivating legislative support

Arnold, [Strategies for Building Coalitions](#)

Schneider and Ingram, [Social Construction of Target Populations](#)

The schedule becomes more flexible after this week. Class time will be used for simulation activities if the chamber leader requests class time in advance and informs the legislature (via LegSim) at least 24 hours in advance of the pending agenda.

Week 7 – Feb. 15

No class Monday

Power of the Purse: Budgeting and Appropriations

[Authorizations versus Appropriations](#)

[Budget Process](#)

[A Tour of the Federal Budget](#)

Doing the right thing while avoiding the landmines: Voting decisions

Kingdon, [How Legislators Decide](#)

[Voteview blog](#) see esp. [Sept 19](#)

Two years of hard work summed up in 20 seconds or less: Campaign advertising:

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, [Tony Schwarz tribute](#)

Cohen, [Getting the Hogs to the Corn](#)

Week 8 – Feb. 22

TBA

Week 9 – Feb. 29

TBA

Week 10 – March 7

Legislature adjourns *Sine Die* on March 9

Course wrap up, March 11

Assignments (100pts total)

Important! There are no exams in this class. In exchange, we expect your essay responses to demonstrate that you have been attentive to the lectures and assigned readings. Be sure to cite relevant readings where appropriate. This [grading rubric](#) provides a rough sense of the differences between fair, good and great essays. The political science writing lab also has excellent [on line resources](#) and consulting.

Late assignments will be accepted but penalized. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are submitted to Catalyst <https://catalyst.uw.edu/collectit/dropbox/jwilker/37181>

Assignments with deadlines

- Jan. 10, 11pm.** Complete the [constituency research assignment](#) and your LegSim profile **5pts**
- Jan. 17, 11pm** [Propose Your Legislative Agenda](#) **5pts**
This assignment asks you to describe your legislative goals and how they relate to your representational responsibilities and interest in being reelected.
- Jan. 19 (in section)** Procedural quizzes. This is a group activity: **2pts**
[Senate Procedures Quiz](#) (pw "Reid") [House Procedures Quiz I](#) (pw "Boehner")
Submit results indicating that you scored at least 70% on both to your TA.
- Jan. 31, 11pm** [Explain your committee requests](#) **5pts**
This assignment asks you to explain how your committee assignments requests will advance your goals. Keep in mind that you may not get your most preferred committees.
- Feb. 14, 11pm** [Major bill assignment](#) [Ten Questions checklist](#) **10pts**
You can sponsor as many bills and resolutions as you'd like. This assignment asks you to draft and explain a 'major' bill. If you are uncertain about whether your bill idea meets the guidelines, please ask in advance!
- Feb. 16, 11pm:** [Committee Jurisdiction Research](#) **3pts**
This is a team project. Note that individual parts of the project will need to be submitted ahead of the deadline to the chair.
- Feb. 21, 11pm** [How Congress Works](#) Essay Assignment **15pts**
This is based on the two required books. Plan ahead!
- Mar. 16** [Final Report on Legislative Accomplishments](#) **20pts**
The campaign propaganda component is due in class Mar. 11

The written report is due Mar. 16.

Open due date assignments:

[Prepare a Committee Report](#) **10pts**

Prepare a committee report on an introduced bill and submit it to your TA. A sample committee report is located under 'Instruction' on LegSim.
1 pt deduction if submitted after Mar. 1. No credit if submitted after Mar. 6, 11pm

[Prepare debate remarks](#) **5pts**

Prepare talking points for a legislative debate, applying the strategies of persuasion we've covered in class.
1 pt deduction if submitted after Mar. 3. No credit if submitted after Mar. 8, 11pm

Section Participation **10pts**

Attendance, assignments/quizzes, and participation in section activities

LegSim Effectiveness **10pts**

Contributions to the collective class experience, on-line and during class debates

100pts

Extra credit!

Give a morning speech (by Dec. 3 (but no guarantee there will be time on Dec. 3!))

- 1 pt

Get elected (and reelected) to a leadership position

- 2 pts Speaker of the House (2 more points if reelected)
- 1 pt Committee chair (1 more point if reelected)

Earn a Leadership PAC Contribution

- The Speaker awards 2 pts (campaign funds) to 3 different legislators
- Each committee chair awards 1 pt to 2 different legislators

LegSim Registration

LegSim is a class resource. Please think twice before posting something silly or offensive (and then don't do it!). Your profile photo is important. It makes it possible for classmates to associate names with faces.

**LegSim will not work if your browser security settings do not allow cookies.

There is a \$16 registration fee to be paid by credit card during the registration process.

To register, go to www.legsim.org, select **University of Washington Winter 2016** from the drop down box and click 'new user.' Enter the authorization code (below) where it is requested. Save the user name and password you specify.

96d9ed819498c1e9897c19a516083698

If you leave the process without paying, you will need to start over using a different email address (or contact support@legsim.org to have your information deleted).

Within a few minutes, LegSim sends an email with an activation link to the email address you specified during the payment process. You must click on that link to login for the first time (using the user name and password you provided earlier).

If you don't get the email, check your junk folder. If it's not there, contact support@legsim.org