

**Member (student) Tutorial**

**LegSim is your legislature**. Your job is to represent your constituency and advance your policy views. You and your classmates will choose your leaders and organize your committees. You will then draft bills, evaluate and decide the fate of bills as committee members, and vote on those that make it to the floor.

This may seem straightforward but it is complicated by the fact that there will inevitably not be enough time to give every proposal the attention it deserves, and by the fact that there will be disagreements about which proposals should have priority. There will be winners and losers in this process!

An effective legislator understands the legislative process. A bill must pass certain hurdles to become law. But there are also different ways to get past these hurdles. Preparation provides important advantages. If you know the rules, know the issues , and appreciate the issues from the political perspectives of your colleagues, you will find that you have more influence.

Legislatures have norms of behavior in addition to rules of procedure. In debate, members refer to one another not by name but as representatives and senators (for example, the "distinguished representative of Colorado"). This non-personal way of addressing colleagues reminds everyone that the views being expressed are part of a representation process. Personal attacks during debate are a violation of the rules and can lead to censure. They are also usually counterproductive.

You may be surprised by how invested you become in this “simulation.” You are putting your ideas out their public scrutiny (hopefully). There will be winners and losers. In the heat of the moment, be sure to take a breath and think longer term. Do you want to burn your bridges or is that legislator a possible future ally? Once you send that dear colleague e-mail, it will be impossible to take back!

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS**

To give you a better sense of what is coming, this tutorial describes a bit about each major stage of your simulation. The other tutorials on the LegSim website provide the more specific information you will need along the way.

The four general stages are:

    Organizing the legislature
    Bill Introductions and cosponsorship
    Committee deliberation
    Floor action and enactment

Your instructor will probably ask you to complete certain tasks by specified dates. This is to ensure that each student has completed needed steps to allow the collective activity to proceed.

**1. ORGANIZING THE LEGISLATURE**

**Member profile**

You have probably already begun to create your member profile. The 'edit profile' option is where you make additional changes. Every bill that you sponsor or cosponsor, every vote that you cast (etc.) will be automatically archived here.

Your instructor will provide information about how to select a constituency, and how to research it in order to answer the question posed on your profile page.

Providing a valid e-mail address is essential so that you receive mail sent through the LegSim system

Other legislators will study your member profile to find out more about you, your political interests, and the constituency you represent. Thus, the profile is is an important for establishing the relationships that will help you to advance your policy priorities.

**Requesting and assigning committee positions**
One of the goals of LegSim is to draw attention to the importance of organizations and rules in legislatures. Every bill that is introduced is first considered by a smaller committee of legislators. Committees are a means of dividing the workload, but because they are smaller they also give committee members greater influence over how certain issues develop. You indicate your committee preferences using the 'request assignment" option under the ‘committees’ link. While you are at it, check out the individual committees to learn more about the issues under their jurisdiction.

The legislature as a whole decides how to allocate committee assignments, including the number of committee positions and who will serve in those positions. In the real world, the parties usually control this process (some state legislatures have different practices). But LegSim leaves these decisions up to each class. Given the important of committees in the process, it is worth a little of your time to think about how you would like committee assignment and committee chair decisions to be made!

**Forming caucuses**
A caucus is an informal group that members create to advance a shared interest. Most legislatures have party caucuses (e.g. Democrats), but they will often have many more (e.g. the Congressional Hispanic caucus and the Kidney Disease caucus, seriously).

Any member can create a caucus. Go to the 'form caucus' option under the 'committees' link. Once your caucus has been created, other members can 'request' to join, but only the member who created it can admit new members.

**Selecting leaders**
Your legislature needs leaders to manage the legislative process, from formally assigning members to committees, to referring bills to the appropriate committees, to scheduling floor votes. Chamber and committee leaders have special levels of access to LegSim that allow them to perform these tasks.

Leaders have more control over the agenda and hence more power. A leader who manages the agenda efficiently benefits everyone. But leadership is also a human endeavor. A leader needs to care about the interests of those s/he represents, but must also be willing to make difficult (and unpopular) decisions necessary to advance collective goals.

Most schools will leave it to the membership to select their leaders (in some classes the instructor may assume this role, due to time constraints for example). Choosing a single leader from a pool of candidates (assuming there are more than two nominees) is not straightforward. Suppose, for example, there are 5 candidates. Should the candidate with the most votes win? Or should a leader receive at least a majority of the votes? If so, how can majority support be ensured? Should this selection process be open or secret?

Committee leaders have primarily responsibility for getting the committee’s work done. One of the likely challenges is that other committee members may not be equally eager to do what is necessary to see the work of the committee completed!

**2. BILL INTRODUCTION AND COSPONSORSHIP**

**Introducing a bill**

Introducing a bill is easy. You’ll find the ‘submit a bill’ option under the 'clerk' link. Your bill is assigned a number and is posted to the website as soon as you click ‘submit.’ From there, it is automatically sent to the chamber leader’s desk, who has 24 hours to refer it the appropriate committee or committees.

Whether your bill progresses beyond this stage is much less certain. (In the U.S. Congress, only 2 out of 10 bills make it beyond committee referral.) In most classes, students will be encouraged to draft bills on subjects of their choosing (although in some classes, the choices will be constrained by the instructor’s desire to limit attention to a limited number of issues).

No one is expecting you to be a policy expert from the start. There is a ‘sample bill' located under the 'Instruction' link on LegSim to give you a better sense of how bills are structured. The LegSim student [information page](http://info.legsim.org/students/resources/) also offers resources for researching particular issues.

No one enjoys criticism, but if your goal is to be successful, then it may be a good idea to shop your idea around a little before you actually submit it your bill. A bill that has been submitted can’t be edited, except through committee or floor amendments. Thus, it’s also a good idea to draft your bill on your laptop in order to give yourself time to think about and edit what you have written and perhaps share it with some of your colleagues. Finally, check it carefully for spelling errors before you click submit!

**Soliciting cosponsors**
In most classes, a lot of bills will be introduced, but most students will not check LegSim for the new arrivals. For this reason, it’s important to promote awareness of your legislation. The ‘dear colleague’ letter (‘send a letter’ under the ‘members’ link) was designed exactly for this purpose. It is an easy way to grab the attention of busy legislators, if only for a moment. Use the subject line to highlight your bill’s main attraction. Keep the letter short and to the point. Why should other legislators care about your bill, among the many that have been introduced? Do you want them to act, and if so how?

One possible action is co-sponsorship. A bill that seems to have widespread support may be more likely to receive notice in committee or on the floor. Co-sponsorship also helps you to identify potential allies.

Why should you consider cosponsoring? In addition to lending your support to a bill, co-sponsorship is a visible action (like sponsoring a bill) that sends a signal about priorities to your constituents. To cosponsor, go to the bill (using the ‘clerk’ link) and click on the cosponsor link at the bottom of the page. Bills can be cosponsored until they are reported from committee and placed on a floor calendar.

**3. COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS**

A list of committees can be found under the ‘committees’ link on the sidebar. As a committee member, your organizational role is to help the legislature decide priorities, and to improve the quality of the proposals it considers. The importance of committees is demonstrated by the fact that although very few bills fail once they reach the floor, a very large proportion of bills never makes it that far.

Committees are also positioned to exercise agenda control in ways that serve the interests of committee members. In the U.S. Congress, for example, about 80 percent of all bills reported to the chamber by committees are sponsored by committee members. Part of the explanation is that the members who serve on a committee tend to have the greatest interest in the issues under the committee’s jurisdiction. But committees can also exercise ‘negative agenda control’ by refusing to advance bills proposed by other lawmakers.

In considering a bill, the essential questions that must be answered by the committee are:

    Do we want to hold a hearing on this bill or ignore it?
    Do we want to recommend this bill to the legislature?
    Do we want to propose changes to the bill?

The committee chair controls the LegSim tools, but the chair acts with the consent of the committee majority. As a committee member, you have the right to participate in decisions about which bills will be scheduled for hearings; to propose committee amendments; and to decide whether a bill will be reported to the chamber. The chair can (and probably should) delegate responsibility for preparing the required committee report - an example can be found under the ‘instruction’ link.

**4. FLOOR ACTION AND ENACTMENT**
A bill reported from committee is automatically sent to the chamber leader’s desk, who is then required to place it on the appropriate floor calendar. The bill may still see no action beyond this point.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, under ordinary procedure, bills are debated chronologically (the first placed on the calendar is the first to be considered). If your bill is not at the top of the calendar, the other option is to persuade the legislature to adopt a special rule proposed by the Rules committee.

In the U.S. Senate, bills are brought to the floor according to terms proposed by the majority leader and adopted by the legislature.

**Amendments, debate and voting**
Bills placed on the calendar are open to amendment (the option of offering an amendment is located at the bottom of the bill itself). The 'Sample Bill' under the 'Instruction' link also offers information about the proper drafting of committee or floor amendments.

Whether an amendment is considered once the bill reaches the floor voting stage depends on the floor procedures adopted. Under ordinary U.S. House and Senate procedures, every amendment is in order and must be considered. However, in both chambers there are ways to limit amendments.

 In the House, special rules that limit amendments are frequently adopted. A majority of legislators in the House can also vote to ‘end debate,’ cutting off additional amendments. In the Senate, amendments can be limited through unanimous consent agreements or by cloture.

**Floor debate**

LegSim includes tools for debating issues on online. The leaders of parties, caucuses, committees and the chamber all have the ability to create discussion threads on any subject, which are indicated on the home page of the party, caucus etc. Once created, members can contribute whenever they like.

The value of these threads obviously depends upon student participation and they are no substitute for synchronous debates or discussions if such opportunities can be arranged. Lawmaking is a human experience and restricting activities to a web interface is, well, de-humanizing!
 **Floor voting**
When the leader schedules an on-line vote on a motion, amendment or bill, s/he also decides the length of the voting period (typically 24 or 48 hours). A legislator can change her vote until the voting period ends, so this can be an interesting period of negotiation. When the vote closes, each legislator’s position is permanently and publicly indicated the floor/previous votes page. A legislator who does not vote, is recorded as having been absent.

**Enactment**
In a single chamber U.S. legislature simulation, a bill that passes the chamber is sent to the President for a signature or veto (if there is a President in your session). If the President signs the bill it becomes law.

If the President vetoes the bill, LegSim does not currently have an override mechanism. The chamber leader should introduce a resolution, use the administrator’s ability to move it through a committee and to a floor vote and then set a 2/3rd threshold for adoption. If this motion is successful, your bill becomes law (even though it will indicate ‘Vetoed’ on the website).

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