

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 312**  
**THE U.S. CONGRESS**  
**FALL 2007**

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**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesdays 10:30-12:30 or by appointment

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**INTRODUCTION**

Almost everyone has an opinion regarding the U.S. Congress. Many of those opinions are negative...Members of Congress are liars, cheats, or just plain lazy. Some also have an opinion on the various bills Congress produces, or fails to produce. What many people lack, however, is an understanding of the process by which good (and sometimes bad!) ideas become law and the role played by Members of Congress in this process.

In this course, we study the institution of Congress in great detail. We learn about the formal structure of Congress, explore the constraints and challenges faced by Members of Congress, explore the nuances of the legislative process, and discuss the concept of “good” representation. In these ways, this course is quite similar to many other college courses on the topic. However, in our course, you will explore these topics, ideas, and concepts through the eyes of a Member of Congress.

I believe that we learn best when we experience and participate in the learning process and when that process is incredibly fun. Throughout this semester, we participate in legislating through a computer-based Congressional simulation program called LEGSIM. You will have the opportunity to learn the legislative process by walking through it...as a Member of the 312<sup>th</sup> Congress. This course requires you to think beyond the traditional four walls of the classroom as you explore this central component of our government. At times it will be frustrating, at times exciting; whatever your reaction at the moment, I know that you will enjoy the experience and learn more than you could from a basic lecture format. I hope that you come in to this class with an open attitude and adventurous spirit. I am looking forward to this course and to getting to know you over the semester!

**TEXTBOOKS & COURSE MATERIAL**

- *Congress and Its Members, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition* by Roger Davidson, Walter Oleszek and Frances Lee. CQ Press (2008)
- *Freshman Orientation: House Style and Home Style* by Edward Sidlow. CQ Press (2007)
- *From Inspiration to Legislation: How an Idea Becomes a Bill* by Amy Black. Pearson-Prentice Hall (2007)
- Registration with LEGSIM (<http://www.legsim.org/>). I will talk you through this process in class. It will cost \$12 to register for LEGSIM and you must pay with a credit card.
- Selected readings available on Moodle reserve.

## GRADES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade for this course is based on a number of components. As you may notice, there is no midterm or final exam...only a short quiz on the “rules of the game.” That quiz will cover some basic components of parliamentary procedure that guide the way Congress operates. The intent of this quiz is to make sure that everyone is familiar with these basic procedures.

Much of your grade is based on a series of writing assignments. I will assign four questions over the course of the semester that you are asked to respond to in 3-5 page essays. You will submit one originally-written bill for grading (you will likely write more than one bill for the simulation, but you get to choose what bill gets graded). Your final project is a reelection report. At the beginning of the simulation you will be assigned an “opponent.” Since you will each represent a different district, you are not true opponents, but your job will be to monitor your opponent and design 1) a reelection campaign *for* yourself in *your* district and 2) a campaign *against* your opponent in *their* district.

The final components of your grade are based on participation and legislative effectiveness. The nature of this course means that your full participation is imperative. It will simply not work if you don't participate. I am able to track your on-line participation electronically and will be paying attention to determine participation levels. And finally, as in the real Congress where Members are rewarded for hard work (in their case, getting reelected, creating good public policy, and exerting influence), Members of the 312<sup>th</sup> Congress who are successful will be rewarded through the legislative effectiveness component of the grade.

| <u>Assignment</u>         | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Due Date</u>        |
|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Rules Quiz                | 5%                | Friday, October 5      |
| Bill Assignment           | 15%               | Friday, October 19     |
| Reelection Report         | 15%               | Friday, December 14    |
| Member's Journal (4)      | 40%               | Various (see syllabus) |
| Legislative Effectiveness | 5%                | Ongoing                |
| Participation             | 20%               | Ongoing                |

## STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

**Participation:** Your participation is an integral part of this class. Participation includes attending class and being on time (obviously, you can't participate if you're not here), completing the assigned readings before class, contributing to class discussions with thoughtful comments, and listening attentively to me and to your classmates. Here's what these things mean to me.

- I consider your completion of the assigned readings to be your ticket of admittance to class. You cannot participate meaningfully in a discussion of the readings if you have not completed them. In the event that you have not completed the readings, I may ask you to leave and you will be counted as absent for the day.
- Your contribution to class discussion will come in many forms: active participation (leadership) in small group activities, asking questions about the course material in class, contributing meaningful comments and observations in large group discussions, answering questions I pose to the class, etc.
- Listening is a valuable skill. It is important that you learn to hear and respond to the comments made by your classmates as well as to my comments, so always look for ways you can engage with comments from a previous speaker. This means that you should not be talking when other people are speaking.

## COURSE POLICIES

**Attendance:** You are an adult and therefore, you do not need to notify me when you miss class and you do not need to explain your absences to me. Please do not send me an email asking if you “missed anything important in class”! If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate for notes. If you have any questions about your notes, please see me during my office hours. Missing more than *two* classes during the semester *will negatively affect your participation grade* regardless of the reasons for the absences.

**Academic Honesty:** Gustavus Adolphus College standards for academic honesty apply in this class. If you have questions about these standards, please consult the College Honor Code. Your decision to remain enrolled in this class will serve as your agreement to abide by the following statement for each assignment you submit: *“On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others’ use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.”* Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any thoughts or ideas that are not your own, even if you are not directly quoting a source must be attributed to their source through in text citations. Plagiarized work will be given a zero and cases will be reported to the dean.

**Cell Phones:** Please turn off your cell phone before class. If a cell phones rings during class time, the owner will be asked to bring a treat to share with the entire class during our next meeting to compensate us for the distraction.



**Grade Dispute:** Any grade disputes must be submitted in writing to me no later than one week after the assignment is returned.

**Special Accommodations:** If you have a physical, psychiatric/emotional, medical, or learning disability that may have an effect on your ability to complete assigned course work, please contact Laurie Bickett, the Disability Services Coordinator, in the Advising Center. She will review your concerns and decide with you what accommodations are necessary. I will be happy to work with you, upon receipt of documentation from her.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Week 1: An Introduction to U.S. Congress

Wednesday, September 5: Welcome to U.S. Congress!

Friday, September 7: An Introduction to Congress

Read: D & O 1

## Week 2: The Structure of Congress

Monday, September 10: Congress and the Constitution

Read: D & O 2; U.S. Constitution (including the Amendments)

Wednesday, September 12: Congress and the Constitution

Read: D& O 3

Friday, September 14: LEGSIM Orientation (Computer Lab)

Read: LEGSIM Rules of Procedure

## Week 3: Congressional Representation

*By the end of this week (Friday at 5:00 p.m.), you should have selected the district you want to represent, learned about the important demographic, economic, and political features of the district, and posted a member profile on LEGSIM.*

Monday, September 17: Representation

Read: Sidlow 1-3; “Representation”

Wednesday, September 19: Representation

Read: Sidlow 4-5; Mayhew “Congress: The Electoral Connection” (Moodle)

Friday, September 21: Using LEGSIM (Computer Lab)

Read: Sidlow 6-7; D & O 5

## Week 4: Parties and Leadership

*This week you will organize a leadership structure for your Congress*

Monday, September 24: New Member Reception

Read: D & O 6; Sinclair “An Effective Congress and Effective Members”

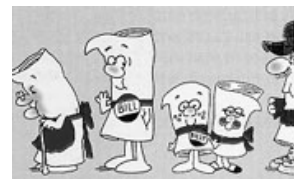
Wednesday, September 26: Parties and Leadership

Read: VandeHei and Murray “Post-Abramoff Mood Shaped Vote for Delay’s Successor”

Friday, September 28: Writing Bills

Read: Black 1-3

Assignment: *Journal 1 is due Friday, September 28 by 5:00 p.m.*



## **Week 5: Committees**

*By the end of this week all Members should be assigned to at least one committee.*

*By the end of this week (Friday by 5:00), every Member should have at least one bill written and submitted to LEGSIM. This is not necessarily the bill you will submit to be graded, although it may be.*

Monday, October 1: Committees

Read: Black 4-6

Wednesday, October 3: No Class (Nobel Conference)

Friday, October 5: Class Time

In Class: Rules Quiz



## **Week 6: Committees**

Monday, October 8: Committees

D & O 7

Wednesday, October 10: Committees

Friday, October 12: Committee Meetings

Assignment: *Journal 2 is due Friday, October 12 by 5:00 p.m.*

## **Week 7: Congressional Strategy**

Monday, October 15: Congressional Strategy

Read: D & O 8

Wednesday, October 17: Congressional Strategy

Read: Black 7-9

Friday, October 19: Coalition Building

Read: Arnold "Strategies for Coalition Leaders"

Assignment: *Graded Bill Assignment is due Friday, October 19 by 5:00 p.m.*

## **Week 8: Strategies and Coalitions**

Monday, October 22: No Class (Fall Break)

Wednesday, October 24: Voting Behavior

Read: D & O 9; Kingdon "Models of Legislative Voting"

Friday, October 26: Committee Meetings

Assignment: *C-SPAN Response Essay due Friday, October 26 by 5:00 p.m.*

### **Week 9: Congress and the Public**

Monday, October 29: Constituents

Read: D & O 13

Wednesday, October 31: Constituents

Read: Nather “A Waning Season for Making Law”

Friday, November 2: Computer Lab Time (Meet in Library Lab)

Assignment: *Journal 3 is due Friday, November 2 by 5:00 p.m.*

### **Week 10: Congress and the Other Branches**

Monday, November 5: Relations with the Executive Branch

Read: D & O 10, 11

Wednesday, November 7: Relations with the Judicial Branch

Read: D & O 12

Friday, November 9: Formal Debate

### **Week 11: Budgets and Appropriations**

Monday, November 12: Domestic Policy and the Budget Process

Read: D & O 14

Wednesday, November 14: The Budget Process

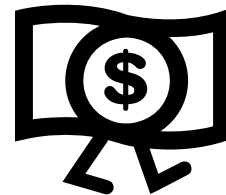
In Class: Computer Activity (BUDGSIM) (meet in Library Lab)

Read: Coburn “The Spending Process is Broken”

Friday, November 16: Foreign Policy and the Budget Process

Read: D & O 15

Assignment: *Journal 4 is due Friday, November 16, by 5:00 p.m.*



### **Week 12: Unorthodox Lawmaking**

Monday, November 19: What is Unorthodox Lawmaking?

Read: Sinclair “Unorthodox Lawmaking”

Wednesday, November 21: No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)

Friday, November 23: No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)

### **Week 13: Campaigns and Elections**

Monday, November 26: Congressional Campaigns

Read: Sidlow 8

Wednesday, November 28: Campaigns and Elections

Read: D & O 4

Friday, November 30: Formal Debate

### **Week 14: Campaigns and Elections**

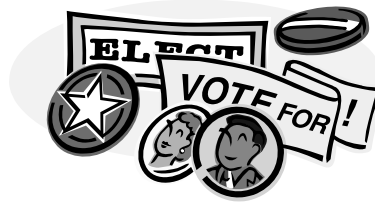
Monday, December 3: Campaigns and Elections

In Class: Taking on the Kennedys (Film)

Wednesday, December 5: Campaigns and Elections

In Class: Taking on the Kennedys (Film)

Friday, December 7: Formal Debate



### **Week 15: Reflections**

Monday, December 10: Reflections on Congress

Read: D & O 16

Wednesday, December 12: Wrapping Up

Friday, December 14: Closing Reception

Assignment: *Final Report due, Campaign posters due*

In Class: *Reelection campaign reception, LEGSIM awards*

# **BILL ASSIGNMENT**

*Due: Friday, October 19*

You will select one bill for me to grade. You are welcome to select any bill that you have written and may even revise a bill you already submitted to LegSim to use as your graded assignment. There is no specific page length for this assignment (you will be graded on quality, not quantity). In evaluating your bill I will look at the following four components, each of which will be weighted equally in the grading of your bill:

1. **Problem Identification**: Your bill identifies a clear problem that is both important to address and falls within the jurisdiction of Congress. You are able to clearly articulate the problem and explain why Congressional action is necessary.
2. **Research**: Your bill is clearly based on research regarding both the problem and the proposed solution. You provide factual evidence to support your proposal. You appropriately cite supporting material. You are aware of proposals and ideas from the real Congress regarding this topic (in part so that you are not inadvertently guilty of plagiarism).
3. **Thoughtfulness & Creativity**: The solution you identify through your bill creatively and originally addresses the problem you outline. You are thorough in terms of the details of your plan and the costs associated with your plan.
4. **Clarity & Presentation**: Your bill is clear and succinct. You have proofread your bill for spelling and grammatical errors. Your bill includes the important sections contained in a real bill (including, but not limited to, short title, findings and purposes, proposed legislation, and authorization of appropriations)

## **Bill Assignment Guidelines**

- No length requirements
- Typed
- Double Spaced
- Times New Roman, 12 point font
- Standard 1-1.5 inch margins
- Page numbers
- Works cited page (APA or Chicago Style)
- Fully proofread for spelling, grammar, and style errors
- Stapled

# REELECTION REPORT ASSIGNMENT

*Due: Friday, December 14*

In this course, you have studied two arenas of legislative politics: elections and lawmaking. This assignment asks you to connect these arenas by relating what you have learned in this course to what you have accomplished as a legislator. Specifically, you are asked to evaluate your record of accomplishments and develop a reelection strategy that reflects your record and the characteristics of the district you represent. I expect you to draw heavily from course readings and concepts in your report. Your report should be 8-10 pages in length (double spaced, standard font, not including the posters or a works cited page) and it should demonstrate an appreciation of the relevant readings. Any and all readings you reference should be properly cited. Your paper is comprised of two parts:

## Part I

- Objectively evaluate your legislative accomplishments. Highlight both the activities that will help you get reelected in your district, as well as the activities that may create problems during your reelection campaign. Remember to think more broadly than simply the votes you took. You may want to draw upon leadership experience, committee actions, bill submissions, or informal activities that helped to “represent” your constituents.
- Design your reelection strategy. This strategy must be sensitive to the district that you represent. It should describe specific tactics for emphasizing aspects of your legislative record that help you win reelection. It should also anticipate and describe how you will respond to the issues that your opponent is likely to raise against you during that campaign.
- Design a campaign poster that illustrates a primary tactic of your reelection campaign strategy

## Part II

- Objectively evaluate the legislative accomplishments of your opponent. Highlight both the activities that will help them get reelected in their district, as well as the activities that may create problems during their reelection campaign. Again, you may need to think beyond floor votes when you consider their representational success or failure.
- Design a strategy for defeating your opponent *in his or her district*, by drawing on his/her record in office. It should describe specific tactics for emphasizing aspects of their legislative record that help you defeat them. Remember, you are designing a campaign against them in their district—not in your district. This means that you may need to do a little research regarding their district because it will be less familiar to you.
- Design a campaign poster that illustrates a primary tactic of your campaign to defeat your opponent.

## Final Notes

You may find it useful to think of yourself as a campaign manager for this assignment to help you objectively identify the strengths and weaknesses of both candidates and devise appropriate strategies. Your paper does not need to be written as a fully unified essay (although you are welcome to use this model). Alternately, you may find it useful to write it in the form of a campaign memo or report.

Ultimately, you have a great deal of creative license in this project, however it is critically important that you draw upon the course readings in this assignment regardless of what style you adopt. You should clearly demonstrate to me that you understand the theoretical material by incorporating the language of the readings and the concepts from the readings in your paper. I can't read your minds so you will need to be explicit in your use of course material.

### **Reelection Report Guidelines**

- 8-10 pages in length
- Typed
- Double Spaced
- Times New Roman, 12 point font
- Standard 1-1.5 inch margins
- Page numbers
- Cover page with name, title, and date
- Works cited page (APA or Chicago Style)
- Fully proofread for spelling, grammar, and style errors
- Stapled

# MEMBER'S JOURNAL

*Friday, September 28*

*Friday, October 12*

*Friday, November 2*

*Friday, November 16*

Throughout the semester I will pose four questions that require you to apply the theoretical material covered in class readings, lectures and discussion to your experience in the simulation. These assignments are designed to assess your understanding of the theoretical material and require you to synthesize and apply information from two dramatically different sources (the course readings and your personal experiences). I expect you to draw heavily from the readings and course material in constructing your responses to these questions. Be sure to explain or define the course terms and concepts you use. I cannot read your mind and so you must demonstrate to me that you know what these terms and concepts mean. I also expect you to use specific examples from LEGSIM to illustrate the points you make.

## **Journal Guidelines**

- 4-6 pages in length
- Typed
- Double Spaced
- Times New Roman, 12 point font
- Standard 1-1.5 inch margins
- Page numbers
- Cover page with name, title, and date
- Works cited page (APA or Chicago Style)
- Fully proofread for spelling, grammar, and style errors
- Stapled

## Grading Scale for Written Assignments

*You can earn an A or A- if you do a superior job of developing original ideas, organizing arguments logically, finding credible supporting evidence, and communicating the information without stylistic or mechanical errors. These papers present a significant and thoughtful position that is both convincing and thought-provoking. These are the kind of papers that leave a memorable and lasting impression on the reader. I reserve this grade for papers that are truly excellent, and A grades, in particular, are rare.*

*You can earn a B+, B, or B- if you do a good job developing your thesis, organizing arguments in a logical way, finding credible supporting evidence, and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These are papers to be proud of because they are very strong and reflect a clear understanding of both the assignment and the course material, however, they lack the sophistication and polish of A papers.*

*You can earn a C+, C, or C- if you do an average job of developing your thesis, organizing arguments in a logical way, finding credible supporting evidence, and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These papers reflect the minimum expectations I have for good college-level work. They clearly answer the question, but arguments may need to be more clearly developed, or supporting evidence may be inappropriate and/or lacking. These papers often contain distracting stylistic or mechanical errors or they may be poorly organized in a way that impedes your ability to construct a persuasive argument. This grade often reflects a lack of time or effort in researching, writing, revising, editing, or proofreading.*

*You can earn a D+ or D if you do a poor job of developing your thesis (you may not even have a thesis), organizing arguments in a logical way (you may not have supporting arguments or any sort of organizational structure), finding credible supporting evidence (you may not have the right kind or amount of evidence or you may not be citing that evidence properly), and communicating the information without distracting stylistic or mechanical errors. These papers reflect poor-quality college-level work with little time or effort put into the writing process.*

*You can earn an F if you do not turn in a paper, plagiarize your paper in any way, do not answer the question, and/or do such a poor job in writing your paper that it is impossible to understand what message you want to communicate with the paper.*

### Course Grade Scale

|    |        |
|----|--------|
| A  | 95-100 |
| A- | 90-94  |
| B+ | 87-89  |
| B  | 83-86  |
| B- | 80-82  |
| C+ | 77-79  |
| C  | 73-76  |
| C- | 70-72  |
| D+ | 65-69  |
| D  | 60-64  |
| F  | <59    |