

POLS 326: Legislative Process

Instructor: **Dr. Giovanni D. Pleites-Hernandez**

Office: Zageir 204

Office Hours: MW 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Tu 12-1 p.m.

Email: gpleites@unca.edu

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Office Phone: (828) 251-6634

Class: TR 1:20 – 3:00 p.m.

Room: Sherrill Center 407

Course Description

This course is designed to get an in-depth understanding of Congress as an institution and how it works (or doesn't for that matter). However, to understand the contemporary institution that we are all familiar with, we need to familiarize ourselves with the institution as it was designed by the Founding Fathers and the changes that have occurred since then. While a core goal of this course is to develop a nuanced understanding of the legislative process, any perspective that fails to take into account the individuals that make up the broader institution – and their relationships with each other and other actors – gives us an incomplete picture of said process, which is why we will learn about individual members of Congress (MCs) and how they operate in Capitol Hill and at home. We will also learn about the rules and procedures that structure the legislative process and its consequences for the formulation of public policy.

Course Structure

This class is structured as a hybrid course, where both lecture-based and instructor-led learning will take place. Though either of the two learning methods can take dominance at any part of the semester, it is the first part of the course where the traditional lecture-based teaching will take place. This increased role in the classroom means more work outside of the classroom for you as a student. This includes reading the assigned materials, preparing notes based on those readings, and engaging in thoughtful discussion in the classroom. Though I am in charge of leading the seminar in those class periods, we cannot have a productive discussion in class unless you all thoroughly read and engage with the assigned readings. You should look at our class meetings as opportunities to showcase your thoughts and insights in addition to presenting questions for further thought and/or clarification.

Course-Specific Learning Objectives

After this class, students should be able to:

1. Describe how Congress has changed as an institution over time.
2. Talk about the structure of Congress and how it impacts the legislative process.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the different factors that influence Congressional elections and the legislative behavior of representatives in office.
4. Describe the dynamic interbranch interactions and their impact on public policy.
5. Speculate on the extent to which the government is responsive to the interests of the American people and the various subgroups in American society.
6. Discuss contemporary issues in the study of legislative politics.

Political Science (POLS) Student Learning Outcomes

POLS Outcome No. 1: Knowledge of the Field – Concepts and Theories

- Students learn the defining concepts and theories political scientists use to study and explain political phenomena in the discipline.

POLS Outcome No. 2: Writing – Academic Writing and Information Literacy

- Students learn to effectively use argument to communicate claims to know in academic writing appropriate for the discipline.

Departmental and University Requirements Met

POLS 374 contributes to the requirement of at least 20 (of the 34 required for the political science major) that have to come from the 300 to 400 level range. This course also contributes to the required 120 semester hours of credit required for receiving a baccalaureate degree.

Required Materials*

Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, Frances E. Lee, and Eric Shickler. 2019. *Congress and Its Members*, 17th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA. CQ Press. ISBN: 978-1544322957.

*Additional materials will be distributed in class, via e-mail, or posted on Moodle (<https://learnonline.unca.edu/>).

Required Instructional Technology

Familiarity with the Moodle learning management system.

Student Assessment and Evaluation Methods

Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend all class meetings, complete the assigned readings before class, and participate in class discussions.* Together, attendance (13%) and participation (22%) will make up 35% of your overall course grade. *Individuals with more than 5 absences, unless cleared by the instructor, will receive a zero for attendance. Any individual with more than 9 (or more) absences will receive an F for the course.*

In addition to the in-class discussions, your participation grade will also include other activities such as in-class group work, presentations, pop-quizzes, and any other activities that don't fall into any of the other assignment categories.

*Note: I reserve the right to assign in-class pop-quizzes for the assigned readings. I will only resort to this if it is clear that students are not doing the readings.

Readings

A large part of your success in this course is directly related to you actively reading, and engaging with, the assigned readings. Some of the assigned readings will be challenging, both theoretically and methodologically, which is why I recommend that you don't wait until the last minute to look at them, as quick scans will not adequately prepare you for the in-class discussions we will have throughout the course of the semester.

Suggested News Sources to Follow

Though you will – as part of completing your Competitive Election Evaluation assignment (see below) – know what's happening with your own chosen races, I encourage you all to stay up to date with what's happening with Congress. I recommend getting an online subscription to one of

the major newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, etc.). Being up to date on current events, especially those related to Congress, will help with our class discussions and allow you to connect what we're learning to the real world. In addition, there are a few other resources that can help keep you in the know.

The Hill (<https://thehill.com/>)

Roll Call (<https://www.rollcall.com/>)

Politico (<https://www.politico.com/>)

The Monkey Cage (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/>)

FiveThirtyEight (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/elections/>)

Competitive Election Evaluation Assignment [Main, Course-Long Assignment]

Preliminaries

Claim your race. There is a link to a Google Sheet document on the Moodle course page with chosen competitive races in the House and Senate. You have until **September 11th at 11:59 p.m.** to notify of your choice via Moodle. No two people can choose the same race. If you fail to contact me in time, then a race will be chosen for you. It might also be beneficial to familiarize yourself with the rest of the assignment (see below).

Part 1: Background Research Paper and Pre-Election Assessment Plan

Once you have your race, your next task is to develop your knowledge about the district (and/or state) and the candidates. You will also need to figure out how you're going to track the race leading up to the general election in November. Two deliverables come along with this part of the assignment: a 2 ½ to 3 ½ page* background research paper describing the district and the major candidates in the 2020 race you've chosen **and** a 1 ½ to 2 page plan describing how you will track (e.g., what sources do you plan on using?; what metrics do you plan to focus on?; how often are you planning to look for information?; what are key dates in your expected plan?; etc.) the race. Both are due on Moodle by **Friday, October 2nd, at 11: 59 p.m.** Each of these papers will be worth 5% of your overall grade.

*Note: These and all other papers for this class are expected to conform to the following guidelines: single-spaced, size 12-point font, and page numbers.

Part 2: Pre-Election Assessment

Your next task is to generate an informed prediction of the outcome of your race. This prediction should take into account both micro-political (e.g., candidates' inherent strengths and weaknesses, endorsements, campaign finance, media coverage, communication (and other) strategies, public opinion polls) and macro-political context (e.g., economy/economic outlook, presidential approval, presidential margin of victory in prior election, national-level public opinion polls). For this part, you will be required to submit a 4 ½ to 5 ½ page paper providing a prediction and also, more importantly, detailing how you arrived at your prediction for the outcome of the race. This paper is due by **Friday, October 30th, at 12:00 p.m.** This paper will be worth 15% of your overall grade.

Part 3: Post-Election Assessment

Once the election is over, you are expected to evaluate your pre-election assessment – along with other post-mortem assessments by news outlets and pundits – in light of the outcome. For this part, you will be required to turn in a 1 ½ to 2 page paper reflecting on the election outcome. This short paper is due by **Monday, November 9th at 12:00 p.m.** via Moodle. You will also be expected to engage in a preliminary discussion of your post-election assessment on Thursday, November 5th during our class meeting. This paper will be worth 5% of your overall grade.

Here are some questions that your small papers should seek to address (for the appropriate assignment):

- (1) a brief description of the candidates; describe the incumbent's (if there is an incumbent) record and the challenger's qualifications. Is the challenger a "quality" challenger? Has the challenger run for the seat before? Did either candidate face a primary challenge? How did this affect the November race?
- (2) a description of the district – including its demographics and electoral history. How long has the incumbent served? Has (s)he faced strong challengers in the past? Has the incumbent generally won by big or small margins? How did the Presidential candidates do in the district in 2016? Describe the two candidates' campaigns. Which candidate ran the stronger campaign? Did both candidates conduct negative campaigns – or did either?
- (3) an analysis of campaign spending. How much did the incumbent and challenger spend? Was the challenger competitive in spending? Why or why not? How much did outside groups contribute to the race?
- (4) an analysis of the issues in the race. What were the key issues? Did they benefit the incumbent or the challenger?
- (5) an analysis of the incumbent's record. Was the incumbent a strong supporter or opponent of the President? On what committees did the incumbent sit? How might the incumbent's record affect the primary and general election voting?

Presentation

Part of your grade in the course will come from presenting your competitive election evaluation assignment, in its entirety, to the class. This will be a 10 – 12 minute presentation where you provide us with a shortened version of each of the different papers you submitted as part of the overall competitive election evaluation project. The bulk of your time should be spent on discussing your pre-election assessment of your chosen race. The presentation will be worth 5% of your overall grade. Presentations will take place in class on **Tuesday, November 10th** and **Thursday, November 12th** – logistics will be worked out later in the semester.

Potential Resources

Ballotpedia: This website provides a lot of information – both historical and contemporary – about campaigns, districts, and candidates. The following link is for the 2020 election: https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Congress_elections,_2020. However, you can search for individual districts or states as you're working on finding background information.

U.S. Census and My Congressional District: The Census website provides lots of information ranging from basic demographics (i.e., population counts, age distribution, etc.) to more nuanced

information on subgroups in American society. You can search for different topics across different geographic areas and years. The main website you can use to find this information is: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/advanced>. While that website is very useful, for a quick glance at the demographics of a district, you can visit <https://www.census.gov/mycd/>. This latter website provides a snapshot of the population size, the workforce, educational level, and plenty of other useful demographics.

Federal Election Commission (FEC) and OpenSecrets: The FEC website (<https://www.fec.gov/>) has campaign finance information for all federal races. Though complete, the FEC website could be a little less user-friendly than one very good alternative, a website called OpenSecrets (<https://www.opensecrets.org/>). This latter website provides the same information as the FEC, but they do it in a more accessible fashion and they have some pretty good visuals as well.

Candidate Websites and Vote Smart: Candidate websites are a good resource for information on candidates – from biographies, to issue positions, and endorsements, amongst other information that can be useful. Incumbents have their official house.gov (or senate.gov) websites, which can be used to find lots of useful information, but they also have separate, non-governmental websites to run for reelection. In addition to going straight to the source (i.e., via their websites), Vote Smart (<https://justfacts.votesmart.org/>) is one website that seeks out candidates and asks them to take positions on the issues of the day. When candidates choose not to complete the survey, the individuals that run the website will look for press releases, speeches, and other published statements for positions. In addition to issue positions you can also find other information (e.g., votes, funding), but there are better resources (see above) to get that kind of information.

Local Newspapers and Social Media: I also recommend that you look at local newspapers and the social media profiles of the candidates to get more information that could help with your assignment.

Note: This is not an exhaustible list of resources, or even ones you have to use, but they can provide a lot of the information necessary to complete your semester-long election assignment.

Congressional Reform (Term Paper) Paper

For this assignment, you are tasked with coming up with a proposal for reform in Congress. While some of you may subscribe to the notion that the institution is fine the way it is, that isn't an option here – you need to come up with an option for institutional reform. You have free rein with respect to the chosen proposed reform topic. There are various routes you can take from institutional design (e.g., unicameral legislature, proportional representation), to rules and procedures (e.g., cloture, House Rules Committee, Speaker of the House power, earmarks, budget process, committee chair/general selection), and even electoral reforms (e.g., campaign finance, non-partisan elections), amongst others. For the paper, you need to: (a) present a problem (i.e., background information); (b) discuss your reform and how it addresses the problem; and (c) the proposed process through which this reform would take place (e.g., Constitutional amendment, law, rules changes within the chamber, changes within each party).

This paper will be worth 10% of your overall grade and should be anywhere from 3 ½ to 4 ½ pages in length. This paper is due on **Thursday, November 19th at 5:00 p.m.**

Late Work

No late work will be accepted except in extraordinary circumstances. Make sure you pay attention to the due dates and the times at which these assignments are due.

Extra Credit

One extra credit opportunity will be made available before the end of the semester. More information will be presented in class and/or Moodle.

Exam

There will be a single exam that takes place on **Thursday, September 24th**, during our regularly scheduled meeting time. The exam will primarily consist of multiple-choice questions, though others – such as short answer, matching, fill-in-the-blank, and essay format – should be expected. You will be provided with a study guide and we – as a class – will have a review session the class meeting before the exam (i.e., Tuesday, September 22nd).

Key Dates

Choose Race: Friday, September 11th at 11:59 p.m.

Exam: Thursday, September 24th

Background & Assessment Plan: Friday, October 2nd at 11: 59 p.m.

Pre-Election Assessment: Friday, October 30th at 12:00 p.m.

Post-Election Assessment: Monday, November 9th at 12:00 p.m.

Presentations: Tuesday, November 10th and Thursday, November 12th

Term Paper: Thursday, November 19th at 5:00 p.m.

Grading and Course Requirements

Your final grade will be determined by your performance on the abovementioned assignments. See the following grading scale and assignment breakdown:

Grading Scale				Grading Formula	
A	92 – 100	C	72 – 77	Attendance & Participation	35
A-	90 – 91	C-	70 – 71	Midterm Exam	20
B+	88 – 89	D+	68 – 69	Competitive Election Papers	30
B	82 – 87	D	60 – 67	Competitive Elect. Presentation	5
B-	80 – 81	F	Below 60	Term Paper	10
C+	78 - 79			Total	100%

Office Hours

You must make an appointment to meet with me by email. I have office hours Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and Tuesdays from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. In addition to these set hours, I am willing to work around your schedule whenever possible.

Technology

Computers and tablets are allowed in the classroom for note-taking and other class-related purposes. You are not allowed to use these devices for browsing the internet, social media, or checking email. Cell phones must be silenced and cannot be used in class at all. Failure to comply with these rules may result in a zero for both attendance and participation for the day. In addition, you may be asked to leave for the day.

Communication of Announcements

Announcements will be sent via e-mail to your official UNCA e-mail address and/or posted on Moodle. You are responsible for monitoring your school e-mail account and the course Moodle site (<https://learnonline.unca.edu/>) daily.

E-Mail

All emails sent to me must include the following: the student's name, course section number (i.e., POLS 326), a proper and formal greeting, a clear subject line about the purpose of the e-mail, and the actual request or question that prompted the email. You should expect a response within 72 hours. If you have not received a response within 72 hours, then please send me another email.

The Writing Center

You are encouraged to visit the University Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.unca.edu/>) on campus for help with assignments for this and other courses. The center supports writers in one-on-one sessions lasting 10 to 45 minutes. Consultants can help writers organize ideas, document sources, and revise prose. If you visit the UWC, bring a copy of your assignment, any writing or notes you may have, and the sources you are working with. Make an appointment by visiting writingcenter.unca.edu and clicking on "Schedule an Appointment."

Academic Integrity

All rules concerning academic honesty as set out in the current edition of the university's academic catalog (<http://catalog.unca.edu/>) will be enforced. Particular attention should be paid to the policies regarding cheating and plagiarism.

Academic Alerts

Faculty at UNC Asheville are encouraged to use the university's [Academic Alert](#) (AA) system. The purpose of this system is to communicate with students about their progress in courses. Academic Alerts can reflect that a student's performance is satisfactory at the time the alert is submitted or they can indicate concerns (e.g., academic difficulty, attendance problems, or other concerns). Professors use the AA system because they are invested in student success and want to encourage open conversations about how students can improve their performance. When a faculty member submits an alert that expresses a concern, the student receives an email from Academic Advising notifying them of the alert and subsequent registration hold on their account. To clear the hold, the student must complete an online Response Form included in the alert e-mail. The student's responses will be shared with the instructor and advising staff. If a student receives three or more alerts, they will need to meet with an advisor by scheduling an appointment using the online appointment service at advising.unca.edu and select 'Academic Alert Appointment' as the type of appointment. The

professor may also request to meet with the student to discuss the alert. It is in the student's best interest to complete the alert process quickly, as students who do so are more likely to earn credit for the course. Failure to complete the alert process means the student won't be able to register for the next semester's classes until they have submitted the required form and completed any requested meeting requirements. Questions about the alert system can be directed to Anne Marie Roberts (amrober1@unca.edu) in the [Academic Success Center](#).

Student Accommodations

UNCA values the diversity of our student body as a strength and a critical component of our dynamic community. Students with disabilities or temporary injuries/conditions may require accommodations due to barriers in the structure of facilities, course design, technology used for curricular purposes, or other campus resources.

Students who experience a barrier to full access to this class should let the professor know, and/or make an appointment to meet with the Office of Academic Accessibility as soon as possible. To make an appointment, call 828.232.5050; email academicaccess@unca.edu; use this link <https://uncaoaaintake.youcanbook.me/>; or drop by the Academic Accessibility Office, room 005 in the One Stop suite (lower level of Ramsey Library). Learn more about the process of registering, and the services available through the Office of Academic Accessibility here: <https://oaa.unca.edu/>.

While students may disclose disability at any point in the semester, students who receive Letters of Accommodation are strongly encouraged to request, obtain and present these to their professors as early in the semester as possible so that accommodations can be made in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow this process each semester.

Sexual Harassment and Misconduct

All members of the University community are expected to engage in conduct that contributes to the culture of integrity and honor upon which the University of North Carolina at Asheville is grounded. Acts of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking jeopardize the health and welfare of our campus community and the larger community as a whole and will not be tolerated. The University has established procedures for preventing and investigating allegations of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking that are compliant with Title IX federal regulations. To learn more about these procedures or to report an incident of sexual misconduct, go to <https://titleix.unca.edu/>. Students may also report incidents to an instructor, faculty or staff member, who are required by law to notify the Title IX Office.

Health and Wellness

UNCA offers resources for students who are coping with both physical and mental health issues. If you would benefit from assistance, please contact the Health and Counseling Center. Contact information can be found at <https://healthandcounseling.unca.edu/>.

Mask Policy and Social Distancing

The university has been very clear about how all individuals in our community at UNC Asheville are expected to behave during the semester (see here: <https://coronavirus.unca.edu/return-to-campus/community-expectations/>). I will not belabor those points made by the school here but

know that students (and faculty/staff) are expected to wear a face mask and maintain social distancing in our class meetings and other settings on campus. Failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in a student's grade being negatively affected and/or a referral for discipline from the university.

Alteration of this Syllabus

The instructor reserves the right to revise, alter, and/or amend this syllabus as necessary. Students will be notified by email and/or Moodle of any such revisions, alterations, and/or amendments.

Key Resources for Students

Coronavirus Information: <https://coronavirus.unca.edu/>
Political Science Department Website: <https://politicalscience.unca.edu/>
Academic Planning: <https://advising.unca.edu/>
Student Affairs: <https://studentaffairs.unca.edu/>
University Catalog: <http://catalog.unca.edu/>
Ramsey Library: <https://library.unca.edu/>
Career Center: <https://career.unca.edu/>

Schedule and Topics

Week 1: Course Introduction

August 11th: Introduction and Syllabus Review

August 13th: The U.S. Constitution and Congressional Development

Assigned Reading: Chs. 1 and 2 in Davidson et al. textbook; U.S. Constitution

Week 2: Getting to Capitol Hill (Elections)

August 18th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 3 in Davidson et al. textbook

August 20th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 4 in Davidson et al. textbook

Week 3: Getting to Capitol Hill (Elections) cont.

August 25th:

Assigned Reading:

Guest Speaker: Col. Moe Davis (Candidate for NC-11th Congressional District)

August 27th: In-Class Redistricting Activity

Assigned Reading: Ch. 2 in Jacobson and Carson*;

Congressional Research Service (CRS). 2019. "Partisan Gerrymandering Claims Not Subject to Federal Court Review: Considerations Going Forward." Report: Washington, D.C.

Week 4: Staying in Capitol Hill (Careerism)

September 1st:

Assigned Reading: Fenno, Richard. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71(3): 883-917.

September 3rd:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 5 in Davidson et al. textbook

Week 5: Representation

September 8th:

September 10th:

Assigned Reading: Hayes, Matthew and Matthew V. Hibbing. 2017. "The Symbolic Benefits of Descriptive Representation and Substantive Representation." *Political Behavior* 39(1): 31-50.

Week 6: Legislative Organization

September 15th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 6 in Davidson et al. textbook

September 17th:

Assigned Reading: T.B.D.

Week 7: Rules and Procedures (Lawmaking)

September 22nd:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 7 in Davidson et al. textbook

September 24th: Midterm Exam

Week 8: Rules and Procedures (Lawmaking) cont.

September 29th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 8 in Davidson et al. textbook

October 1st:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 9 in Davidson et al. textbook

Week 9: Unorthodox Lawmaking and The Budgeting Process

October 6th:

Assigned Reading: T.B.D.

October 8th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 14 in Davidson et al. textbook

Week 10: Congress and... Interest Groups; the President

October 13th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 13 in Davidson et al. textbook

October 15th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 10 in Davidson et al. textbook

Week 11: Congress and... the Bureaucracy; the Courts

October 20th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 11 in Davidson et al. textbook

October 22nd:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 12 in Davidson et al. textbook

Week 12: Foreign Policy

October 27th:

Assigned Reading: Ch. 14 in Davidson et al. textbook

October 29th:

Assigned Reading: T.B.D.

Week 13: The 117th Congress

November 3rd:

Assigned Reading: T.B.D.

November 5th:

Assigned Reading: T.B.D.

Week 14: Paper Presentations

November 10th: Day 1

November 12th: Day 2

Week 15: Finals Week

November 19th: Term Paper Due on Thursday, November 19th at 5:00 p.m.