

# Department of Political Science

## The University of Oklahoma

### Norman Campus

**Course Title: The U. S. Congress**

**Course Number: PSC 3143**

**Fall 2005**

**Instructor:** Professor Peters

**Day and Time:** Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00-4:15 or by appointment

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**Description:** The course will examine the structure and function of the United States Congress, with emphasis upon the dynamics of the legislative process and the political context within which it takes place. The goal is to understand the role the Congress now plays in the constitutional system of separated institutions sharing powers. We will examine the relationship between the electoral process and the legislative process, which political scientists now label the 'permanent campaign.'

Central to our concern is to understand how the Congress has changed over the past thirty years. The transformation of the Congress from the 'textbook' version that political science described in the 1950s and 1960s to the institution we see today required a gradual evolution under first Democratic, and then Republican majorities. In general, the trend was from a highly decentralized to a highly centralized institution. Why did this change take place, and what has been its impact on the Congress as a representative and policy-making institution?

The course will be comprised of two components. The first is the traditional lecture/discussion format which will address important aspects of congressional governance as presented in the two books assigned for the class. The second is a comprehensive simulation of the legislative process, described in more detail below.

We will rely on available technology to support us in our shared endeavor. To begin, the course is mounted at <http://learn.ou.edu>. Here, you will find all necessary information to support your participation in the class. This includes this syllabus, simulation sources and materials, quizzes, and articles. We will also be using the H-ITT student responder system. This means that you will need to purchase a “clicker” for the H-ITT system at the bookstore and bring a functioning clicker to class each time you come.

## **Requirements:**

### **(A) The ‘Regular Course’**

#### Quizzes:

In lieu of examinations during the course, we will administer a series of quizzes that will cover the assigned readings as further augmented by lecture and class discussion. Each quiz will be comprised of a single essay question, and you will have 45 minutes in which to respond. For each section of the course being quizzed, there are a set of essay questions. When you log in to take the quiz, Learn.OU.edu will randomly select one of the essay questions for this section of the course. Thus, while the test is “open book,” you are advised to study the assigned readings for that section so that you will be prepared for the question Learn delivers to you.

There will be five quizzes. Each quiz will be scored on a 25 point scale. Learn will drop your lowest quiz score. Therefore, a total of 100 points will be available from the quizzes.

#### H-ITT:

We will use the H-ITT student responder system. This means that you must purchase an H-ITT “clicker” at the Book Store and bring it to class with you each day. We will use the H-ITT system to pose questions, survey class attitudes, and take votes in the simulation if we can get some legislation to the floor of the House and/or Senate. The new clickers have three sensors. You can get by with a two-sensor clicker. However, any one-sensor clickers surviving from prior years will not read effectively.

All H-ITT questions will count toward your course grade. For some of these questions, you will receive 1 point for answering the question and an additional point if your answer is correct. H-ITT questions will be taken from the course readings assigned for that day, any Roll Call articles or other articles that have been posted for your review, or questions created “on the spot” to reinforce lecture and discussion topics.

The exact number of H-ITT points available cannot be known in advance. I would hope for somewhere around 100 over the course of the semester, but it could be somewhat less or more.

Final Exam: The Final Exam will be administered on December 14th from 4:30-6:30 in the classroom.

### **(B) The Simulation**

Details about the simulation are posted in a separate document in the Content area of Learn. Here, I simply summarize the graded items.

Team Scores -  
On Line Hearing 50 points  
Overall Team Score 50 points  
Individual Scores  
Peer Evaluation 50 points  
Member Profile 50 points  
Hearing Testimony 50 points

## Summary

Quizzes: 100  
H-ITT: 100 (estimated)  
Final Exam 100  
Simulation. 250

Total: 450

**Course Grade:** This course has in its design features that are amenable to cooperation among students. For example, the on-line quizzes are essentially open book exercises in which collaboration between or among students is possible. If such collaboration occurs, it is cheating, and would lead to potential sanctions if discovered. The simulation, by contrast, encourages cooperation and holds students collectively accountable on some components, and includes peer evaluation. Here there may be an incentive for students to be generous rather than honest in their evaluation of each other's contributions to the team effort. Additionally, the number of points available via the H-ITT system cannot be known in advance. These considerations lead me to expect that the final grade distribution for this class will be based on a curve. While the final contours of a curve cannot be determined until the actual distribution of scores is available, I would expect that in a 3000 level political science course a reasonable curve would produce around 20% A's, 30% B's, and the rest mostly C's. D's and F's should require real non-effort on the part of the student, but any student whose point total falls down toward 50% of the available points should not be surprised if he or she earns a low grade for the course.

Since the course will be curved, students should recognize that it is very much in their interest to be positive contributors to the simulation team and it is very much not in their interest to help classmates on the quizzes or by sharing H-ITT responses.

Now, to anticipate the natural question, students will ask whether they can earn 95% of the points and be curved down to a B. To which I answer, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

## Course Readings and Materials:

Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek. *Congress and Its Members, 10th Edition*. CQ Press, 2005.

David E. Price. *The Congressional Experience, 3rd Edition*. Westview. 2004

Lauren Cohen Bell. *The U.S. Congress: A Simulation for Students*. Thomson Learning. 2005. (With InfoTrac).

HITT Student Responder (Clicker).

Available Online:

*The Federalist Papers #s 47-66.* <http://www.law.ou.edu/hist/federalist/>

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's work as if it were your own. It can take many forms. The most obvious form is to turn in a paper that someone else wrote over your signature. Or, you might copy material from a book or an article and present it as your own work. When you use words that are directly copied from a source, you *must* place them in quotation marks and cite the source. A person might make a few changes in the text, and then think that it is permissible to present the material without using quotation marks or without citing the source. This is a form of paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is still plagiarism, unless you explicitly say that you are paraphrasing and cite the source from which the original material comes. Plagiarism is academic misconduct and is severely penalized. Do not plagiarize. If you do, expect that if you are caught you will face disciplinary procedures that can include expulsion from the University and will almost certainly result in your receiving an F in this class. Remember that cheating with the clickers is like any other form of cheating.

For OU's policy on Student Ethics and Plagiarism, please consult the following web site:

<http://www.ou.edu/provost/pronew/content/integritymenu.html>

### **Decorum**

Please arrive on time. Please make sure that your cell phone is turned off during class. This classroom has Internet connections at each seat. Please do not use your computer to exchange email, play games, or surf the Net during class. Please avoid casual conversation during lectures and class discussions. Please sleep elsewhere.

**Policy on Withdrawals and Incompletes:** You will only be allowed to withdraw from this course with a passing grade if you are in fact passing. You are passing if the number of semester points that you have earned comprises 60% or more of the points available to the date of proposed withdrawal. If you are ill or have some personal situation that prevents you from attending class, your obligation is to contact us as soon as you start missing class in order to discuss your situation. Exceptions to this policy will be made only in cases of complete withdrawal from the University approved by Student Affairs and the Dean's office.

Incompletes will be given only upon request and for good cause. Incompletes will not be given if a student has missed so much of the course that it is in a practical sense impossible to make up the work. If an incomplete is given, the student will be asked to sign an agreement specifying the work to be completed and the date the work will be due. The student will participate in the determination of the deadline. Extensions will be given only under exceptional circumstances.

**Policy on Challenged Persons:** If you have a disability that may affect your participation or performance in this class you should contact me personally as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunity. In particular, if you are qualified and plan to take your examinations at disability services, you need to provide the written documentation prior to each exam and make sure that we know that you are planning to take your exam there so that we can make arrangements for it.