Course Objective

The United States Congress and the United States Presidency have been called the “two great institutions” of American government (Polsby 1972). They represent one of the earliest and most successful experiments in democratic government. Together, their actions decisively shape policies that influence the world in which we live. Throughout the history of the United States, both branches of government have been accused of doing too little or too much to address the problems faced by American society. In this class, we will focus our discussions on the ways that actors in the legislative and executive branch work together or against one another to help the American people achieve “a more perfect union.”

This is an Advanced Writing Course, commonly called a Capstone Seminar. It is meant to bolster (and test) skills you developed in first-year writing classes and in Political Science 200. In many ways this should serve as the culmination of your experience in the Political Science Department at BYU. It will require you to engage in the “kinds of written and oral communication, reading, and research typical” to practicing political scientists (University Writing Program website). You should have come to this class well trained, and I will expect to see that training reflected in your participation and work.

Under normal circumstances Capstone courses are demanding, but the time constraints of a spring term compound the difficulty. You should expect to read more than 100 pages per class meeting – more than 200 pages per week. In addition, you will be writing a series of papers that will come together as a fully realized research paper in less than eight weeks. It is possible to do all of this, but I do not recommend that you take on a Capstone if you expect any major distractions over the next several weeks.
Teaching Philosophy

I believe my role as instructor in this course is to provide an environment in which students may develop three levels of knowledge related to the United States Congress. First, students should finish this class with a good understanding of the basic facts about Congress. Second, students should have an understanding of the analysis conducted by experts, their questions, their answers, and the methods used to analyze Congressional institutions and behavior. Finally, students should be able to carry out their own analysis of the Congressional institutions and behavior.

Teacher-student interaction is critical for the development of these latter levels of knowledge. This interaction will occur in the classroom, but I also encourage you to take time to meet with me in person during my office hours. I will do my best to make time in class and in my office to answer students’ questions, but that presupposes that students are intellectually curious (and humble) enough to ask.

Books

Please purchase the following texts for use throughout the semester. All are available at the BYU Bookstore or for purchase through online retailers.

Required


Recommended
Course Policies

The final paper must be turned in by 4pm on June 18. Papers turned in after this deadline will receive zero credit. Likewise, I will not grant an incomplete grade in order for students to finish their papers after spring term ends. All other assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. I will only accept hard copies of assignments, and I will not accept emailed assignments. Late assignments will receive a zero. If a student anticipates missing class the day something is due, he or she is expected to make arrangements to turn the assignment in early.

Academic Integrity

I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this course. The BYU Honor Code office provides several helpful resources on their website. Please review these materials carefully.

https://honorcode.byu.edu/

Please review the brief explanation of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty on this page so that you are reminded of your responsibilities as a scholar. Expect me to enforce the University’s policies regarding academic integrity completely. This may include failing an assignment, failing the course, or referral to the Dean for further action. In general, if you have any question about issues of academic integrity, please feel free to ask me.

In addition, “submitting the same work for more than one class without disclosure and approval” is dishonest, a violation of BYU’s honor code, and considered cheating. If you write a paper for another course (past or present) that uses the same topic or material as a paper for this course, you need to approve it with me first, and then you must turn in to me a copy of the paper from your other course.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course; however, I expect that students who have successfully completed of both Political Science 200 and 328 will have an advantage. In order to fulfill the universities advanced writing requirement, you will need to have successfully completed Political Science 200. That class also provides helpful background in writing and research. Political Science 328 provides an understanding of how to conduct and write about empirical research. Some background in game theory will also help you to “consume” research on Congress and the President. Please speak with me if you have any questions about this. Students will also benefit from having taken Political Science 310 (Theories of Political Science).
Contacting the Instructor

My office hours are scheduled for Wednesday from 3pm to 4pm. If the scheduled times do not work for you, I encourage you to contact me and set up an appointment to talk about your paper or the material we cover in class. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee that I will be able to meet with students outside of office hours without an appointment.

I am typically quick to answer emails; however, I ask that you give me at least twenty-four hours to respond. In addition, many questions will be more easily addressed in class or in person, so please understand if I defer your question or concern until we can meet in person. **I ask that you include “PS 410” in the subject line of any email associated with this class that you send to me.** This will expedite the process of receiving and responding to your messages.

From time to time, I will also post important announcements and supplemental readings to my twitter feed (@DanielMagleby). While it is not the focus of the class, we will occasionally discuss developments in congressional or presidential politics in class. You are strongly encouraged, but not required, to get a twitter account and follow me and your colleagues comments about the goings on in Washington.

Most importantly, materials for the course (updated syllabi, readings, etc.) will be posted on the Learning Suite site associated with this course. You are responsible for checking it regularly. Please contact me if you have a problem accessing the site or the files posted there.

Sexual Harassment

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 378-2847.

People with Disabilities

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (378-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 378-5895, D-282 ASB.
Evaluation

Paper (75%): This component of your grade will break down as follows.

Proposal (5%) – A 150 word summary of the paper you hope to write in which you describe the theory and possible findings.

Theory and Research Design Paper (10%) – A 1000 word paper that describes the theory (assumptions and conclusions) you will test in your final paper along with a plan for testing the conclusions derived from that theory.

Analysis Paper (10%) – A 1000 word paper that presents the preliminary descriptive as well as inferential findings that you will include in your paper.

Draft Paper (10%) – A complete draft of the paper you will turn in to me at the end of the semester. It should be polished (i.e. not a first draft).

Peer Reviews of Draft Papers (5%) – You will read and provide comments to two of your peers. These comments should address both the style and substance of the paper.

Final Paper (35%) – A fully realized research paper.

Presentation (10%): A presentation that will summarize interesting aspects of your theory and highlight your most important findings.

Participation (15%): Participation will consist of a combination of your attendance and contributions to discussions in class.

Paper

You will write a fully realized research paper. It should make a contribution to our understanding of the politics of the executive branch, the legislative branch, or interactions between the two branches. For Political Science 410 to fulfill the university's advanced writing requirement, you must receive at least a C− on your final research paper. Students with lower grades on the final paper will receive a T grade, signifying ongoing work, and will need to revise the paper until it reaches a C− standard before the grade will be changed.

Several smaller assignments and papers related to the final paper will be completed throughout the course. These smaller papers will guide you in the developing ideas and data analysis for your final paper. Failure to complete even one of the assignments related to the final paper will result in a failing grade for the final paper.

Presentation

You will make oral presentation of your written argument. Your main task is to persuade the rest of the class that your argument works. You are welcome to use whatever evidence
or materials seem relevant. You will work within time constraints, so in addition to being persuasive, your presentation needs to be parsimonious. I will ask questions, as will the other class members, so be prepared to defend weaknesses in your argument.

**Participation**

Throughout the semester you should come prepared to talk about all of the readings listed on the syllabus. You will be completely prepared if you can answer the following questions about each reading.

1. What is the question be asked?
2. Why is that question important?
3. What is the author’s answer to that question?
4. What is the test, how would I know if his or her answer is wrong?
5. Is his or her answer wrong?
6. If his or her answer is correct, what else should be true?

I will “cold call” students, and they will be evaluated on their ability to discuss the readings in this framework. Discussion is extremely important in a seminar/discussion based class. It is through discussion that we make comparisons; propose, defend, or attack arguments; and evaluate evidence. Most importantly, discussion allows us to learn from each other. I expect you to contribute to these discussions.
Course Schedule

The schedule of assignments and readings are listed below. Most readings are available in the bookstore or online. All other readings will be posted to Learning Suite. I reserve the right to add to or alter the readings and assignment schedule according to the progress of the class.

Assignment Schedule

Unless I announce otherwise, all assignments are due at 4pm on the dates listed below. I may not accept late assignments, but I will certainly penalize them.

May 3 Proposal – Turn in a hard copy to the front desk in the Political Science Department office and upload an electronic version to the dropbox on Learning Suite.

May 17 Theory and Research Design Paper – Turn in a hard copy to the front desk in the Political Science Department office and upload an electronic version to the dropbox on Learning Suite.

May 31 Analysis Paper – Turn in a hard copy to the front desk in the Political Science Department office and upload an electronic version to the dropbox on Learning Suite.

June 7 Draft Paper – Posted to discussion forum on Learning Suite.

June 10 Peer Reviews of Draft Papers – Post comments on two colleagues’ papers on the discussion forum on Learning Suite.

June 18 Final Paper – Turn in a hard copy to the front desk in the Political Science Department office and upload an electronic version to the dropbox on Learning Suite.

Topic Schedule

All readings listed are required. Come to class on the scheduled prepared to discuss each.

April 30 – Introduction

May 2 – Fundamentals


May 7 – Policy Making in the House


May 9 – Policy Making in the Senate


May 14 – Congressional Organization


May 16 – Inter-Cameral Negotiations


May 21 – Policy Making in the Executive Branch


May 23* – Divided Government


May 28 – Executive Influence in Congress


June 4 – Individual Meetings

June 6 – Individual Meetings

June 11 – Presentations

June 13 – Presentations