



Course Syllabus: Congress

POLS 4043-201

Spring 2025

Tuesday/Thursday 9:30am-10:50am

Classroom: PY 209

Contact Information

Dr. Jeremy F. Duff

Office: 211 O'Donohoe

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 10:00am-11:00am

Tuesday/Thursday: 8:30am-9:30am

E-mail: jeremy.duff@msutexas.edu

Course Description

This class explores the process by which the U.S. Congress has been institutionalized throughout U.S. History to create a political entity whose main role is to protect the interests of its members. Students will be taught not only how the U.S. Congress works, but the theories and concepts that underscore how Congress has become the institution we see today. To do this we will focus on Congress's "collective dilemma": Can a truly representative legislature also be a responsive and efficient political institution? What tradeoffs occur when legislators seek to maximize both representation and responsibility?

Textbooks

The United States Congress. E. Scott Adler, Jeffrey A. Jenkins, and Charles R. Shippan. 2nd Edition, 2021. W. W. Norton.

Course Website

The course will use a D2L page as a place to obtain copies of the syllabus, and any other course documents that may be posted. You will also use the dropbox in D2L to turn in some of your assignments.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook-2024-25](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty is cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without

following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the [Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Grading

The two exams will count 40% (20% each) toward your final grade. 30% of your grade will be made up of your participation in the legislative simulation. Your grade for this part of the course will consist of my evaluation of your participation as a whole in the simulation as well as your completion of the assignments associated with the simulation. The last 30% of your grade will be your active learning assignments.

Table 1: Grade Scheme

Cut Off	Grade
90-100%	A
80-89%	B
70-79%	C
60-69%	D
Less than 60%	F

Student Responsibilities

Readings

The readings serve as a point of departure for lectures and discussions. Therefore, it is imperative that each student completes the assigned reading before a topic is taken up in class. Remember, the readings are a point of departure from class lectures. You will be held accountable not only for my discussion in lecture, but also for anything in the textbooks that may not be covered in lecture or discussion.

Attendance

Class attendance is strongly encouraged. It has been my experience that those who do not attend class tend to have a difficult time with the course and generally receive lower grades. During the simulation, I will take attendance, and attendance will be considered when evaluating your participation.

Participation

Students should feel free to raise questions concerning the readings, the instructor's discussion, and the comments of other students. Participation enhances course quality.

Active Learning Assignments

Several times throughout the course, we will engage in a variety of active learning exercises. This will typically involve breaking the class up into smaller

groups where each group will discuss a specific issue, question, or topic related to some facet of elections. Each group may then be asked to make a very brief presentation during the last part of class. More details will be provided early in the semester.

Writing Rubric

For all writing assignments, the following rubric will be used for evaluation:

100-90% – The assignment is thoughtful, concise (but thorough), well-articulated and well-developed. Student demonstrates advanced understanding of the topic and raises interesting questions and/or observations about the material. There are few, if any, stylistic or grammatical writing errors.

89-80% – Good points are made about the material, but the discussion falls short of the thoughtfulness and insight described above. The essay is well articulated and concise, but not particularly insightful. There are a number of stylistic or grammatical writing errors.

79-70% – An attempt is made at the material, but the student does not demonstrate a solid grasp of the main points of the material, nor does he or she raise any particularly interesting questions. There are several stylistic or grammatical writing errors.

69-60 % – This is a poor assignment on the whole. While the student attempted to address the assignment, the work is choppy, disorganized and largely irrelevant to advancing understanding of the topic. Stylistic and grammatical writing errors occur throughout.

Below 60% - The student did not follow directions, the writing is unintelligible, the paper is riddled with stylistic and/or grammatical errors, and/or page number guidelines were not met.

0% - There is plagiarism involved.

I encourage all students to visit the *Writing Center* for tips and assistance with all written class assignments. Likewise, I am pleased to provide help to you throughout the term. In my office is an envelope with a twenty dollar bill in it. The first student to come to my office, during office hours, and say “Big gulps huh, alright, well see ya later”, and tell me what movie the line is from, will get it.

Congressional Simulation

Students will be required to play a role in a congressional simulation. Specific guidelines for the simulation will be provided in a separate handout. All material for the simulation must be turned in on the due dates provided. Late work will not be accepted. This portion of the class makes up 30% of your final grade and should be taken very seriously.

Required Examinations

There will be two required examinations. The scheduled examination dates are as follows (these will not change):

Exam 1: February 27, 2025

Exam 2: April 15, 2025

Basic Policies

Make-up Policy

If a student has a University-approved excuse and if the instructor is notified in writing, prior to the examination or assignment, and the student can provide official documentation to validate the excuse, arrangements for a make-up may be made. If a student fails to do any of these things, the student will receive a zero for the exam or assignment. Official documentation does not include a letter from the Dean of Students Office. You must provide actual documentation that validates the excuse and clearly demonstrates that you were unable to complete the assignment (or exam) by the due date. If a student fails to notify the instructor, or provide the proper documentation, the student will receive a zero for the assignment (or exam).

Exams, Assignments, and Grading

I will only discuss a grade with you in my office hours or via e-mail. I will not discuss a grade with you before or after class in the classroom, in the hallway, outside by my car, or over the phone. I want you to take time to look over your exam thoroughly before you make an argument for a different grade. Any discussion of exam grades should take place within my office hours or via e-mail. If you feel that you and another student provided similar or equal answers to an exam question and you received a lower grade on that question, then both students must come to the assigned office hours with their exams in order for me to evaluate the answers equally and fairly. Keep in mind that in some cases I may lower the grade of the other student and not raise yours after reviewing both answers, if I feel that the situation deems it necessary.

Taking Exams Early

You will not be allowed to take an exam early.

Wikipedia

At no time will a student be allowed to use Wikipedia as a source for any project or paper in my class. If it is determined that Wikipedia was used as a source for a project or paper, the student will be given a grade of zero automatically.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all writing assignments should be the original work of the student. Developing strong competencies in this area will prepare you for a

competitive workplace. Therefore, AI-generated submissions are not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism and a violation of the MSU Texas Academic Dishonesty Policy. Your work will be checked with AI checking tools and if it is determined that your assignment was completed using AI, you will be given a grade of zero for that assignment.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable. Any test, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor.

In all of your assignments, including your homework or drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, web sites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. "Proper attribution" means that you have fully identified the original source and extent of your use of the words or ideas of others that you reproduce in your work for this course, usually in the form of a footnote or parenthesis.

As a general rule, if you are citing from a published source or from a web site and the quotation is short (up to a sentence or two) place it in quotation marks; if you employ a longer passage from a publication or web site, please indent it and use single spacing. In both cases, be sure to cite the original source in a footnote or in parentheses.

This is not limited to direct quotations. Any time you use material from a published source, whether quoting directly, borrowing from it, or paraphrasing, you can only do so with proper attribution.

If you are not clear about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or examination, be sure to seek clarification from me.

Finally, you should keep in mind that as a member of the campus community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors and will be evaluated on your own merits. So be proud of your academic accomplishments and help to protect and promote academic integrity at MSU. The consequences of cheating and academic dishonesty – including a formal discipline file, possible loss of future internship, scholarship, or employment opportunities, and denial of admission to graduate school – are simply not worth it.

Any paper or assignment that is found to be plagiarized will be given a grade of zero and will be reported through the proper channels according to the guidelines provided in the MSU Student Handbook.

Late Assignments

I do not accept late assignments, papers, exams, quizzes, or anything else. If it is late, it will receive a grade of zero. If you miss an assignment because you arrive to class late, you will receive a grade of zero on that assignment.

Cellphones

These should be turned off when entering the classroom, unless prior arrangements have been made with me concerning a family emergency. At no time will you be allowed to look at your cellphone during an exam or quiz. If you are observed looking at your cellphone once an exam or quiz has been handed to you, you will automatically receive a grade of zero for that exam or quiz.

General Behavior

Students are expected to act like responsible adults. There should be no talking while I am lecturing or while another student is answering a question or sharing their opinion on the subject matter of the class. If this occurs, students will be warned and if the disruptive behavior continues you will be removed from the class.

Student Honor Creed

As an MSU Student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else do so. As students at MSU, we recognize that any great society must be composed of empowered, responsible citizens. We also recognize universities play an important role in helping mold these responsible citizens. We believe students themselves play an important part in developing responsible citizenship by maintaining a community where integrity and honorable character are the norm, not the exception. Thus, we, the Students of Midwestern State University, resolve to uphold the honor of the University by affirming our commitment to complete academic honesty. We resolve not only to be honest but also to hold our peers accountable for complete honesty in all university matters. We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any unauthorized material in examinations, or to present, as one's own, work or ideas which are not entirely one's own. We recognize that any instructor has the right to expect that all student work is honest, original work. We accept and acknowledge that responsibility for lying, cheating, stealing, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty fundamentally rests within each individual student. We expect of ourselves academic integrity, personal professionalism, and ethical character. We appreciate steps taken by University officials to protect the honor of the University against any who would disgrace the MSU student body by violating the spirit of this creed.

Written and adopted by the 2002-2003
MSU Student Senate.

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Disability Support Services in Room 168 of the Clark Student Center, 397-4140.

Campus Carry Statement

Senate Bill 11 passed by the 84th Texas Legislature allows licensed handgun holders to carry concealed handguns on campus, effective August 1, 2016. Areas excluded from concealed carry are appropriately marked, in accordance with state law. For more information regarding campus carry, please refer to the University's webpage at [Campus Carry Policy Website](#).

Course Schedule

Date	Readings/Activities
January 21	Introduction and Overview of the Course No Readings
January 23-28	Representation and Governing in a Separated System Chapter 1
January 30-February 4	The Historical Development of Congress Chapter 2
February 6-11	Representation Chapter 3
February 13-18	Elections Chapter 4
February 20-25	Committees Chapter 5
February 27	Exam 1
March 4-6	Parties Chapter 6
March 10-14	Spring Break: No Classes
March 18-20	Policy Making Chapter 7

Date	Readings/Activities
March 25-27	The Legislative Effectiveness of Congress and Its Members Chapter 8
April 1-3	Congress and the President Chapter 9
April 8-10	Congress and the Bureaucracy Chapter 10
April 15	Exam 2
April 17	Holiday Break: No Class
April 22	Simulation Begins Party Caucuses
April 24	Writing Legislation
April 29	Health Education and Welfare Committee Hearing
May 1	Economic Affairs Committee Hearing
May 6	Health Education and Welfare Committee Markups
May 8	Economic Affairs Committee Markups
May 13 8:00am-10:00am	Floor Session

Here are some simple lessons that will take you far in class (and in life more generally) and it is best to start practicing them now as they will definitely pay off later:

1. It is critical to learn how to write an effective email. First, begin with a proper greeting such as "Dear Dr. [Last Name] or Professor." Don't begin with "Hey!" It's not professional.
2. On a related point, keep your emails short and to the point. We don't need to know every detail of your life. But, most importantly, be direct and provide some context. If I have no idea who you are or what you are asking for, I may not respond as quickly. For example, always include which class you are in (name of class and time), and get the name of the class correct. Political Science is not History.
3. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing an exam or the due date for an assignment, I am willing to work with you up to a point. If you must miss an exam or turn in a paper late because your high school buddy is getting married and you want to leave town early to attend the rehearsal dinner, that unfortunately doesn't qualify.
4. The date of the final exam is set by the university, and I can't do anything about it so plan accordingly. Also, taking an exam early is never an option so please don't ask to do so. On a similar note, please tell your parents not to buy you a plane ticket home before the actual end of the semester so we can avoid any awkward discussions at the end of the semester.
5. Proofread everything you email or submit for a grade. It really does make a difference.
6. Always consult the syllabus before quickly firing off an email with a question that is likely already addressed in the syllabus (such as when an assignment is due or when the next exam is scheduled). It will ultimately save everyone time in the end.
7. Expect a reasonable turnaround time when you do email me. Do not be surprised or angry when you email me at 12:30 a.m. on a Friday or Saturday night and I don't email you back until Monday. Professors have lives and many of us have families.
8. Don't ask for extra credit, especially after not completing some of the work during the course of the semester. That is also unprofessional.
10. At some point, you may need one or more professors to write you a recommendation letter for a job application, an internship you are interested in, or for a scholarship that you'd like to apply for. Keep the above suggestions in mind before you ask for one because our letters can be quite honest in terms of focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals we are writing about. Employers and those screening applicants for various positions expect that from us.