

Power and Politics in America: From the Halls of Congress to the West Wing

POLS 219-01 // Spring 2022 // Morse-Ingersoll Hall 209 //
TTh 1:05 – 2:20 PM // Professor Philip Chen // chenp@beloit.edu //
Office: Morse-Ingersoll 111 // Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Land Acknowledgement

Beloit is located on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples, and we want to respectfully acknowledge the Potawatomi, Peoria, Miami, Meskwaki, and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) people who have stewarded this land throughout countless generations. To recognize the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those on whose territory you reside, and a way of honoring Indigenous people. Land acknowledgments do not exist in a past tense, or outside historical context: colonialism is an ongoing process, and we need to build our mindfulness of our present participation.

Course Description

How do the three branches of government exercise their power over policy in America? Using a variety of role playing simulations, students get a hands-on view of how the U.S. Congress, Presidency, and Federal Courts function. Working through these simulations, students learn about the shifting balance of power between the three branches and gain an understanding of political actors as they make the decisions that affect hundreds of millions of people. In addition to the simulations, students learn about theories of elite behavior, helping to understand the motivations behind the actions. Throughout the semester, students confront questions about internal and external threats to the health of our democratic institutions. In the age of Russian election hacking, partisan polarization, executive orders, and filibuster elimination, students reflect on how long-standing rules and customs protect democratic integrity. Prerequisite: POLS 110 or Instructor Permission.

Course Objectives

By the end of this semester, you should be able to:

- Understand and describe the rules and customs that govern American political institutions
- Analyze and explain how these institutions create public policy
- Identify and critique contemporary challenges to the integrity of our institutions

Structure of the Class

I will occasionally lecture on new topics or extensions of the readings. However, I do not plan on lecturing on the readings because a) you are expected to have read them already and b) I'm not witty or interesting enough to lecture all the time.

The majority of the class will be spent on discussion and activities that are designed to help you integrate the readings and materials. Please come to class prepared to discuss the day's readings and bring copies of the readings, either in electronic or paper form, as this is a key component of this course.

Office Hours and Help

I strive to make this course understandable and accessible for all students. If you have any questions about the content or structure of the course or about specific assignments, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to help if you come to me before assignments or exams are due. Please do not wait to ask for help until after the due date, come talk to me before if you are struggling.

Required Texts

This class will feature mostly academic books and articles. The required books are listed below and are available at the college bookstore or from Amazon or other places online. Readings are available on the class Moodle site at:

<https://moodle.beloit.edu/course/view.php?id=867>

There is one required book for the course:

Frisch, Scott & Sean Kelly (ed.). (2013). *Politics to the Extreme: American Political Institutions in the Twenty-First Century*.

Grading

Grades are based on four different components, described in more detail below. 35% of your grade will come from a final comparative analysis (1) on a topic of your choosing. An additional 25% of your grade will come from debriefing essays about the simulations (2). 20% of your grade consists of attendance, participation in class, and participation in the simulations (3). Finally, 20% of your grade consists of reading quizzes (4).

Reading Quizzes	20%
Debriefing Essays	25%
Comparative Analysis	35%
List of Potential Policies	Required for Grade
Description of Policy and Process	Required for Grade
Institutional Challenges	Required for Grade
First Draft	Required for Grade
Paper Conference	Required for Grade
Final Paper	Graded
Participation and Attendance	10%
Simulation Participation	10%

Comparative Analysis (35%) – Each student will write a comparative analysis that identifies a policy that was passed, enacted, or struck down in the past three years at the federal level. This can be a case that was decided by the Supreme Court, a law passed by Congress, or an Executive Order signed by the President. Using the chosen policy as a framework, each student is responsible for describing the process by which the policy was enacted and discussing how this process deviates from the hypothetical norm that we saw in our simulations.

The bulk of the paper, however, consists of an analysis of the ways in which polarization or other contemporary institutional challenges produced differences in the institutional processes. In essence, your paper should assess how the process around your chosen policy differed from the norm in the past and what are the likely causes of this deviation.

You’ll notice a number of components marked “Required (No Grade).” These are pieces of the comparative analysis can be thought of as low stakes requirements. In order to receive a final grade on your paper, you must turn in all of these components, even though your performance on these assignments does not factor into your grade. Failing to turn in these assignments will lower your final paper grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each missing piece. For instance, if your grade for the entire paper was a B+, but you failed to turn in your list of potential policies, your final grade would be a B. If you were missing both list of potential policies and institutional challenges, your B+ would become a B-.

Reading Quizzes (20%) – Over the past couple years, I’ve come to dislike the concept of midterm and final exams because they place a premium on memorization and intense study rather than a cohesive synthesis of the material we read. In essence, finals and midterms seem to encourage students to memorize minutiae instead of substance.

However, the readings for this class were chosen with intention and I believe they are important for students to get the most out of the class. While I will sometimes lecture on the readings, the reading quizzes will focus both on things we cover in class as well as things that are only located in the readings.

While I would love to be able to simply ask “did you do the reading?” and grade you on this, it seems unrealistic. Approximately every other week, we will have a short, graded, **open hard copy note** reading quiz. You are welcome to use both class and reading notes, but you **must**

have hard copies of those notes. You will not be allowed to use your phone or computer to access your notes during the quizzes, but you may print off your notes prior to class. These quizzes will consist of a few multiple choice or short answer questions, as well as one or two longer (2-3 paragraph) questions that ask you to synthesize the readings in some way. When we get into the statistics, they may include simple calculations, but you will not be expected to memorize formulae (I'll give you information you need) and calculators, if needed, will be provided.

I understand that sometimes things come up and readings don't get done. Over the course of the semester, I will drop your lowest quiz score and the remaining quizzes will be worth 20% of your grade. While no one quiz will make or break your final grade, failing to do any of the readings will severely limit your potential in this class.

Because you have a quiz that is not counted, you cannot make up quizzes for unexcused absences. However, if you are going to miss a quiz and let me know ahead of time, we can make arrangements for you to take the quiz at a different time. If you are sick or have an approved absence, just make sure to send me an email or talk to me so you can schedule a time to make up the quiz.

Classes with a reading quiz are marked on the schedule with the notation "(RQ)". Reading quizzes are not cumulative, but do include the readings assigned for the day of the quiz.

Debriefing Essays (25%) – Each student will complete three debriefing essays reflecting on their role in the institutional simulation. This paper consists of a brief description of your role in the simulation. The majority of this paper consists of specific questions depending on the role that you took. Refer to the assignment for more specifics.

Papers should be around 1,000 words (approximately 4 pages double spaced). I will distribute a separate handout with more information about this assignment.

Participation (20%) – The participation portion of your grade includes regular attendance in class, completion of in-class activities, participation in class discussions, asking questions during class, and being an active, engaged participant in all three simulations.

A quarter of this grade is based purely off of attendance. I will hand out a sheet for everyone to sign in at the start of class. If you are late to class, please check with me after class to make sure I've recorded your attendance for the day. I will use the following scale to determine your attendance grade:

A	0 – 1 absences	C	8 absences
A-	2 – 3 absences	C-	9 absences
B+	4 absences	D+	10 absences
B	5 absences	D	11 absences
B-	6 absences	F	12 or more absences
C+	7 absences		

NOTE: This count does NOT include excused absences. If you miss class because of an approved college activity, illness, or prior arrangement with me, this will not count against your attendance grade. But you do need to let me know!

Another quarter of this grade is based on in-class participation. I'll advise you that I take the participation portion of the class seriously. I give very few A grades for participation. Thus, you shouldn't assume that simply attending class regularly is enough to get full participation. I grade participation holistically. If you are attentive in class, offer opinions and reactions to readings, and are engaged in discussion, you will do fine. But these are not simply "free" points for the class.

Finally, because the simulations are such an important component of this class, the final half of this grade (10% of your final grade) is based on your active and engaged participation in all three simulations. This includes both participation on the days of the simulations as well as preparation work necessary for the simulations to function well.

Grade Scale:

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	<60

Grading – On some assignments, you may receive a grade of B+/A- or something like that. This is just my shorthand way of assigning a number grade between two letter grades. Thus, an A grade is recorded in the grade book as 100 points while an A- grade is recorded as 92 points. If I think your work fell between these points, you may get an A-/A, which would be recorded as 96 points. So a A-/A is technically an A grade, but in the middle of the A range instead of the high end.

When calculating final grades, I always round up. So an 88.7% in the class becomes an 89% (B+), but an 89.1% would be rounded up to a 90% (A-).

Course Schedule:

Days with reading quizzes marked with (RQ)

Introduction: What's the big problem?

January 25	Introduction – No Readings
January 27	Read: Bright Line Survey Report (May) Bright Line Survey Report (September) Is American Democracy Really Under Threat? (Uri Friedman, The Atlantic)
February 1	Read: Nivola & Brady Volume One, Chapter 1* Nivola & Brady Volume One, Chapter 3* Fiorina, Chapter 3*
February 3 (RQ)	Read: Levendusky (2010)* Jones (2010)*

Congress

February 8	Simulation Prep (<i>Bring laptop if available</i>) Read: Dolan & Ezra Chapter 1 (Legislative Simulation)* Dolan & Ezra Chapter 2 (Legislative Simulation)*
February 10	Read: Arnold, Chapter 1* Mayhew (Lanahan Readings)* Fenno (Lanahan Readings)* Ellwood & Patashnik (Lanahan Readings)* DUE: List of Potential Policies
February 15	Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 6 Price (Lanahan Readings)* Binder & Lee (Political Negotiation: A Handbook)* Getting to Maybe (Ryan Lizza, The New Yorker)
February 17 (RQ)	Simulation Prep – No Readings (<i>Bring laptop if available</i>)
February 22	CANCELLED – ICE AND SNOW
February 24	Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 1 Frisch & Kelly Chapter 2
March 1	Legislative Simulation – No Readings

March 3 Legislative Simulation & Debrief – No Readings

The Presidency

March 8 Simulation Prep (*Bring laptop if available*)
Read: Dolan & Ezra Chapter 1 (White House Media Simulation)*
Dolan & Ezra Chapter 2 (White House Media Simulation)*

March 10 Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 7
Schlesinger (Lanahan Readings)*
Patterson (Lanahan Readings)*
DUE: Debriefing Essay #1
DUE: Description of Policy and Process

RECORDED – READ AND WATCH BEFORE SIMULATION PREP

Read: Jacobs & King (2010)*
Mayer (Lanahan Readings)*
Kernell pg 46-57*
[The Unpersuaded](#) (Ezra Klein, The New Yorker)

March 15 SPRING BREAK

March 17 SPRING BREAK

March 22 (RQ) Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Bring laptop if available*)

March 24 Executive Simulation – No Readings

March 29 Executive Simulation & Debrief – No Readings

The Supreme Court

March 31 Simulation Prep (*Bring laptop if available*)
Read: Dolan & Ezra Chapter 1 (Supreme Court Simulation)*
Dolan & Ezra Chapter 2 (Supreme Court Simulation)*
DUE: Institutional Challenges

April 5 NO CLASS – PROFESSOR OUT OF TOWN
Read: Rosenberg Chapter 2*
Irons (Lanahan Readings)*

- April 7 NO CLASS – PROFESSOR OUT OF TOWN
Read: Johnson Chapter 2*
Casillas, Enns, & Wohlfarth (2011)*
DUE: Debriefing Essay #2
- April 12 Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 8
Nivola & Brady Volume Two, Chapter 3*
Coyle (Lanahan Readings)*
- April 14 (RQ) Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Bring laptop if available*)
DUE: First Draft
- April 19 Judicial Simulation – No Readings
- April 21 NO CLASS – STUDENT SYMPOSIUM DAY
- April 26 Judicial Simulation & Debrief – No Readings

Reflection: Fixing the Problems

- April 28 Read: Azari & Smith (2012)*
[Wiring the Vast Left-Wing Conspiracy](#) (Matt Bai, The New York Times Magazine)
[Which party is more to blame for political polarization? It depends on the measure](#) (Carroll Doherty, Pew Research Center)
[Has the Trump administration crossed the “bright lines” of democracy?](#) (Julia Azari, Vox)
- May 3 Last Day of Class – No Readings
DUE: Debriefing Essay #3
- May 7 **Final Draft Due by 5:00 PM**

Attendance: Regular attendance is vital for your success in this course. I understand, however, that sometimes circumstances prevent you from coming to class. Missing one class will not destroy your grade; missing several will.

Late Work: Assignments are due during class on the day they are listed as due. Any assignments turned in after this time will be subject to the following late penalty: For each day late, I will deduct a third of a letter grade. So if an assignment is due Friday and you turn it in after class on Friday, a B+ paper would receive a B. If you turn it in Saturday, it would be a B-, Monday would be a C. Assignments should be turned in using the Moodle system or handed in with a hard copy.

Grade Changes: Any appeals of a grade must be made at least **24 hours after** I hand back an assignment or exam. If you would like to appeal the grade you got on an assignment, prior to meeting with me you must submit a written statement detailing why you think your grade should be changed. I will then meet with you to discuss your statement and why you think your grade should be changed. If I make a mistake in totaling your grade for an exam or assignment (e.g. I added the points up incorrectly) then you do not need to write a statement or wait 24 hours. Just talk to me after class or during office hours and I'll double check and fix the mistake.

Contacting the Professor: I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course, readings, and assignments. In general, quick clarification questions can be handled over email. More in-depth questions are best discussed in person during my office hours, where we can have an actual conversation. If my office hours conflict with your class or work schedule, I am available by appointment as well. Please allow a full 24 hours for an email response. Often, my responses will be quicker than this, but do not send multiple emails about the same request until 24 hours have passed. I cannot guarantee that if you email me right before an assignment or exam that I will be able to answer your question in time, so please make sure and email me early if you have a time-specific question.

Extra Credit and Retakes: There is no scheduled extra credit in this course. You may not retake quizzes. There may be opportunities for extra credit, however.

Disability Services and Accommodations: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability or health consideration, contact Learning Enrichment and Disability Services (LEADS) located on 2nd floor Pearsons (north side), 608-363-2572, learning@beloit.edu or through olesena@beloit.edu. LEADS will work with you to determine what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. Contact that office promptly, however, since accommodations are not retroactive. Every effort will be made to give you agency over disclosure of your disability status. Confidentiality is maintained to the extent possible but at times others need to know to some information to provide you appropriate accommodations. For accommodations in my class, please provide an Access Letter from the Director of LEADS and then we will discuss how to implement the accommodations. Contact that office promptly; accommodations are not retroactive.

Free peer tutoring is available for most classes. For a tutor, apply by going to your Portal, to the Student Life tab, and then apply using the Tutoring Forms (on left) and Request a Tutor. If you have any questions, contact LEADS.

If you want support from an Organizational Tutor, they are available in the Library Sundays through Thursdays from 6-9 pm.

Inclusivity: **Inclusivity** is a demonstration of equity and social justice through awareness, understanding, and respect for the differences in identity, culture, background, experience, and socialization, and the ways in which these forms of difference impact how we live and learn. Inclusivity requires equitable, institution-wide representation and access to resources. In practice, this manifests itself by each individual being aware of, committed to, and responsible for the well-being and care of all students, staff, and faculty.