

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

POLS 219-01 // Spring 2020 // Morse-Ingersoll Hall 10 //
MWF 10:00 – 11:05 AM // Professor Philip Chen // chenp@beloit.edu //
Office: Morse-Ingersoll 7 // Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00 – 3:30 PM

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://moodle1920.beloit.edu/course/view.php?id=2178>

There are two required books for the course:

Nivola, Pietro & David Brady (ed.). (2008). *Red and Blue Nation? Volume Two: Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics*. NOTE: There is also a Volume One. You do not need to buy this, you only need Volume Two.

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. 45% 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). 10% of your grade consists of participation in class and in the simulations (3). Finally, 20% of your grade consists of weekly reading quizzes (4).

Reading Quizzes (Top 6)	20%
Debriefing Essays	25%
Comparative Analysis	
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
Peer Review Group Participation	Required for Grade
Final Paper	45%
Participation and Attendance	10%

Comparative Analysis (45%) – Each student will write a comparative analysis that identifies a policy that was passed or enacted in the past year 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 research questions, your final grade would be a B. If you were missing both the research questions and proposal, your B+ would become a B-.

Weekly 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. I will not lecture much on the readings, as I believe classroom discussions are both more enjoyable and a better way for students to learn the ability to critique and challenge the works we read. In order for you to be prepared for these discussions, you will need to do 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. On Monday of most weeks we will have a short, graded reading quiz. 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. I understand that sometimes things come up and readings don't get done. Over the course of the semester, there are 9 Mondays when I will administer quizzes. This makes for an odd division of 20% of your grade. Out of these 9 quizzes, I will drop your lowest score. Of the remaining 8 quizzes, each will be worth 2.5% 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.

At the end of the semester, I will simply take your highest 6 quiz grades (dropping the lowest grade) and average them. 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 before 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 1,200-1,500 words (approximately 4 pages double spaced). I will distribute a separate handout with more information about this assignment.

Participation (10%) – The participation portion of your grade includes regular attendance in class, completion of in-class activities, participation in class discussions, and asking questions during class, and, most importantly, being an active and committed member of each simulation.

Half 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. There are 25 days in the semester that we will meet as a class, and I will use the following scale to determine your attendance grade:

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

The other half 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.

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 20	Introduction – No Readings
January 22	Read: Bright Line Survey Report (May) Bright Line Survey Report (September) Is American Democracy Really Under Threat? (Uri Friedman, The Atlantic)
January 24	Read: Achen & Bartels, Chapter 1*
January 27 (RQ)	Read: Nivola & Brady Volume One, Chapter 1* (NOT Volume Two)
January 29	Read: Nivola & Brady Volume One, Chapter 3* (NOT Volume Two)
January 31	Read: Fiorina, Chapter 3*
February 3 (RQ)	Read: Levendusky (2010)* Jones (2010)*

Congress

February 5	Simulation Prep (<i>Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab, Bring laptop if available</i>) Read: Dolan & Ezra Chapter 1 (Legislative Simulation)* Dolan & Ezra Chapter 2 (Legislative Simulation)*
February 7	Read: Arnold, Chapter 1* Mayhew (Lanahan Readings)* Ellwood & Patashnik (Lanahan Readings)*
February 10 (RQ)	Read: Price (Lanahan Readings)* Binder & Lee (Political Negotiation: A Handbook)* Getting to Maybe (Ryan Lizza, The New Yorker)
February 12	Read: Fenno (Lanahan Readings)* Frisch & Kelly Chapter 6 Nivola & Brady Chapter 2
February 14	Simulation Prep – No Readings (<i>Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab</i>)
February 17 (RQ)	Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 1 Frisch & Kelly Chapter 2

February 19 Read: Binder Chapter 1*
 Binder Chapter 2*
 DUE: List of Potential Policies

February 21 Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab*)

February 24 Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab*)

February 26 Legislative Simulation – No Readings

February 28 Legislative Simulation & Debrief – No Readings

The Presidency

March 2 (RQ) Simulation Prep (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab, Bring laptop if available*)
 Read: Dolan & Ezra Chapter 1 (White House Media Simulation)*
 Dolan & Ezra Chapter 2 (White House Media Simulation)*

March 4 Read: Neustad Chapter 3*
 Schlesinger (Lanahan Readings)*
 Patterson (Lanahan Readings)*
 DUE: Debriefing Essay #1

March 6 Read: Kernell pg 46-57*
 [The Unpersuaded](#) (Ezra Klein, The New Yorker)

March 9 - 13 NO CLASS – Spring Break

March 16 (RQ) Read: Jacobs & King (2010)*
 Mayer (Lanahan Readings)*

March 18 Read: Nivola & Brady Chapter 4
 DUE: Description of Policy and Process

March 20 Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab*)

March 20 Event Weissberg Lecture (Joan Carling) @ 7:30 PM
 Short reaction paper can replace 2nd lowest quiz grade

March 23 Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 7

March 25 Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab*)

March 27 No Class – Advising Practicum

March 30 Executive Simulation – No Readings

April 1 Executive Simulation & Debrief – No Readings

The Supreme Court

April 3 Simulation Prep (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab, Bring laptop if available*)
Read: Dolan & Ezra Chapter 1 (Supreme Court Simulation)*
Dolan & Ezra Chapter 2 (Supreme Court Simulation)*

April 6 Read: Johnson Chapter 2*
George & Epstein (1992)*
Irons (Lanahan Readings)*

April 8 Read: Caldeira & Wright (1988)*
Casillas, Enns, & Wohlfarth (2011)*
Rosenberg Chapter 2*
DUE: Debriefing Essay #2

April 10 (RQ) Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab*)
DUE: Institutional Challenges

April 13 Read: Nivola & Brady Chapter 3
Coyle (Lanahan Readings)*

April 15 Read: Frisch & Kelly Chapter 8
Keck Conclusion*

April 17 Simulation Prep – No Readings (Professor Out of Town)

April 20 No Class – Peer Review Groups
DUE: First Draft

April 22 No Class – Spring Day

April 24 No Class – Peer Review Groups

April 27 Simulation Prep – No Readings (*Meet in MI 107 Computer Lab*)

April 29 Judicial Simulation – No Readings

May 1 Judicial Simulation & Debrief – No Readings

Reflection: Fixing the Problems

- May 4 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 6 Last Day of Class – No Readings
 DUE: Debriefing Essay #3
- May 11 **Final Draft Due by 12:00 PM (Noon)**

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.