Course Description and Objectives

This course is meant to provide an advanced social scientific understanding of legislative behavior, particularly in the U.S. Congress and in U.S. state legislatures. This is not narrowly a course on Congress; but instead, we will cover much about state legislatures (often by comparing and contrasting with the national Congress). In particular, this is an election year in the Virginia House of Delegates (the lower house of the Virginia General Assembly), and we will dive deep into the dynamics and policy importance of a number of intriguing elections.

Legislative politics are complex, so our understanding will not come by simply covering the structure of Congress/state legislatures, what they do, and how they do it. Instead, we must address some pertinent questions about how American legislatures relate to other policymaking institutions in our constitutional system. We will discuss member motivations, how well legislators represent the interests of the public, how Congress and state legislatures have changed over time, what these legislatures currently do, and how this affects policy outcomes. Conceptually, we will focus on three ways in which to examine American legislatures:

1. Political behavior and preferences: how and why do politicians and voters decide to do what they do?
   - We will examine this particularly through the electoral process.

2. Political institutions: what are the "rules of the game," and how and why have they changed over time?

3. Political outcomes: The legislature is just one piece of the policymaking puzzle – what roles does it play, and how do these roles differ across political issues?

Required Books

Course Requirements

This will primarily be a lecture class given its size. However, regular attendance and participation is required in order to keep up with the material. The lectures cumulate in that each lecture builds off of the material in previous lectures. I post lecture slides on Blackboard, but these are merely outlines for the materials covered, so it is not a good idea to regularly miss class. The lecture content will cover and clarify material from the textbooks, but will also touch on the issues addressed in the additional reading and may include commentary on current events that aren’t in the reading assignments. Everything covered in this course (lectures, readings, in-class discussion) are fair game for exams and assignments. Of particular note, the readings listed in addition to the textbooks are required and will be covered in the exams, so do not neglect them.

I will evaluate student performance by way of the following assignments. A series of “Election Expert” assignments will allow you each to become expert in a Virginia House of Delegates race taking place this semester. On the first day of class, I will randomly assign each student to 1 of 13 possible competitive Virginia House of Delegates districts. Each district will have 3 students assigned to it and each group of 3 students will be partners on a number of Election Expert assignments throughout the semester. There are multiple components to this assignment, some involving group work, and they are each noted below. There will also be homework problem sets and a midterm and final exam. The components listed below are the only graded elements of the course. There will be no extra credit, so please do not ask about this.

- **Election Expert Blog Posts (x3)** 4% each - **12% total**: 3 times throughout the semester, you will be given a short writing assignment about your district. Think of these writing assignments as being similar in length and specificity to a blog post. These are individual writing assignments and each member of each group should do them independently. These posts are due a week after the prompts are posted to Blackboard. All essays will be posted to a discussion forum where other members of the class can read and comment (but they will not be available to the general public).
  - Assignment #1 is given on 9/27 and due on 10/4
  - Assignment #2 is given on 10/23 and due on 10/30
  - Assignment #3 is given on 11/13 and due on 11/20

- **Election Expert Class Presentations (x3)** 4% each - **12% total**: On the due dates for the writing assignments listed above, we will dedicate class time to hearing one member of each group give a short (and I mean short: 3-5 minutes) in-class presentation on the district and its electoral race. These presentations will ideally display information more visually than your blog posts — try to prepare 2-3 visual slides to present to class. One member of each group will present on each presentation day and the grade earned is given to all members of the
group; but, since there are 3 presentation days throughout the semester, each member of each group will have this responsibility only once. The presentation days are listed in the schedule below - there are no assigned readings for these days. Yet, I expect close to full class attendance to hear your colleagues’ thoughts on their districts.

- Presentation Day #1 is 10/4
- Presentation Day #2 is 10/30
- Presentation Day #3 is 11/20

- **Election Expert Group Podcast 12%**: As a final "Election Expert" assignment, each group will create an approximately 30 minute "podcast" where each group member will discuss the buildup and outcome of the election that they covered throughout the semester. I will distribute technical details via Blackboard during the semester, but you should develop an early plan for meeting as a group to set the themes for your podcast and to discuss options for producing an audio file that will be the final submission.
  - A audio file with the podcast must be uploaded to Blackboard by 3:00PM on 12/11.

- **Homework Problem Sets (x2) 7% each - 14% total**: These problem sets test your knowledge of the material from Charles Stewart’s *Analyzing Congress* book that we will cover during the semester. You will have one week to complete each assignment by the dates noted below. I will NOT, under any circumstances, accept late homework assignments, so plan ahead.
  - Problem Set #1 is given on 10/11 and due on 10/18
  - Problem Set #2 is given on 10/18 and due on 10/25

- **Midterm Exam 20%**: There will be an in-class midterm examination covering material from the first half of the course. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and analytic (homework style) questions based on material presented in class and in the readings. The exam will take place on Wednesday 10/18.

- **Final Exam 30%**: There will be an in-class final examination covering material from the entire course (comprehensive), though concentrating on material from the last half of the course. The exam will include identifications, short answers, and essay questions (closed book, closed-note) based on material presented in class and in the readings. The exam will be administered during the regular final exam scheduled time for our class on Monday, December 18, 2017 at 1:30pm – 4:15pm. This is the ONLY time to take the exam.

### Student Responsibilities

- **Class Attendance and Participation**: You are expected to attend class (showing up on time) and pay attention to lecture. This is a lecture class, but the material is often reflected in current events and we will often discuss politics and political science. These discussions are to remain civil and informed, and each student is expected to participate through discussion or by respectfully paying attention to the content of discussion.

- **Reading the news**: On this last point, I expect you to read at least 1 national news story (from whatever newspaper or website that you prefer) per day. Avoid sources that peddle "fake news" (hint: if the ratio of advertising and merchandise to news content is greater than 1:1,
it’s probably a fake news site.) On the days we have lecture, I may call on people to discuss such stories and the events surrounding them, so be prepared to introduce your story when called upon. Try to find stories that involve a U.S. legislature (Congress or a state legislature) in some way.

- **Readings**: Complete the readings listed in the course schedule. All reading should be completed before the lecture on the topic. 9 times out of 10, when struggling students come to my office, they admit that they haven’t been reading – this is the single best way to improve in the class. Read before lecture, listen and take notes, then read again.

- **Technology**: Turn your phones off while in class. **You may not use laptop computers or tablet devices in class, except if you are sitting in the back row.** If this restriction poses a challenge for you, please discuss it with me.

- **Email**: Use proper email etiquette. There are lots of guides online. See here for a good one: [http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor](http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor). Do not ask for extra credit or for grade changes over email. Also, do not email "I missed class yesterday - did I miss anything?" I will not reply to these emails. You need not inform me of each absence you may take throughout the semester, but if you need to miss an extended period of time, please communicate this to me.

- Regularly check the course Blackboard page for announcements and quizzes.

### Grade Components

- **Election Expert Blog Posts (x3)** 4% each - 12% total
- **Election Expert Class Presentations (x3)** 4% each - 12% total
- **Election Expert Group Podcast** 12%
- **Homework Problem Sets (x2)** 7% each - 14% total
- **Midterm Exam** 20%
- **Final Exam** 30%

### Letter Grade Distribution

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### Class Schedule

The following is a *tentative* schedule for the course. Updates to this schedule may be posted to Blackboard or communicated in class, as appropriate. This schedule is meant to give you a sense
of the topic(s) to be covered on a given day. It is also meant to guide you if you wish to complete readings ahead of time. You are required to have read the assigned reading by the week listed below.

**Week 01, 08/28 — Monday — Class Intro**

- *CaiM*, Chapter 1
- The U.S. Constitution (https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript)

**Week 01, 08/30 — Wednesday — Origins and Development of Congress**

- *CaiM*, Chapter 2

**Week 02, 09/04 — Monday — Labor Day (NO CLASS)**

**Week 02, 09/06 — Wednesday — Origins and Development of State Legislatures**

- *Squire and Moncrief*, Chapter 1

**Week 03, 09/11 — Monday — Congressional Elections I**

- *CaiM*, Chapter 3

**Week 03, 09/13 — Wednesday — Congressional Elections II**

- Bring your computers to class today! http://www.redistrictinggame.org/

**Week 04, 09/18 — Monday — Congressional Elections III**

- *CaiM*, Chapter 4
Week 04, 09/20 — Wednesday — State Legislative Elections

- *Squire and Moncrief*, Chapter 2

Week 05, 09/25 — Monday — Representation: The Electoral Connection

- *Mayhew*, part 1

Week 05, 09/27 — Wednesday — Representation: The Electoral Connection

- *CaiM*, Chapter 5
- *Squire and Moncrief*, Chapter 3

Week 06, 10/02 — Monday — Representation: Race and Gender


Week 06, 10/04 — Wednesday — Election Experts Presentation Day 1

- No readings

Week 07, 10/10 — Tuesday (Abnormal Schedule) — Collective Action and Spatial Theory 1


Week 07, 10/11 — Wednesday — Collective Action and Spatial Theory 2

- Homework #1 Distributed
Week 08, 10/16 — Monday — Legislative Data

- These articles can get a bit “mathy” - skim to get the general understanding

Week 08, 10/18 — Wednesday — Midterm Exam

- Homework #1 due; Homework #2 distributed

Week 09, 10/23 — Monday — Congressional Committees

- CaiM, Chapter 7
- Mayhew, part 2

Week 09, 10/25 — Wednesday — State Legislative Committees

- Squire and Moncrief, Chapter 4
- Homework #2 due

Week 10, 10/30 — Monday — Election Experts Presentation Day 2

- No readings

Week 10, 11/01 — Wednesday — Parties and Leaders I


Week 11, 11/06 — Monday — Parties and Leaders II

- CaiM, Chapter 6
- Elections tomorrow!
Week 11, 11/08 — Wednesday — Parties and Leaders III

- Election recap

Week 12, 11/13 — Monday — Rules and Procedure in Congress

- CaiM, Chapter 8

Week 12, 11/15 — Wednesday — Rules and Procedure in the States

- Squire and Moncrief, Chapter 5

Week 13, 11/20 — Monday — Election Experts Presentation Day 3

- No readings

Week 13, 11/22 — Wednesday Thanksgiving Break (NO CLASS)

Week 14, 11/27 — Monday — Congress and the President

- CaiM, Chapter 10

Week 14, 11/29 — Wednesday — Policymaking and Gridlock


Week 15, 12/04 — Monday — Congress and the Bureaucracy

- CaiM, Chapter 11

Week 15, 12/06 — Wednesday — Legislatures, Influence, and Public Policy

- CaiM, Chapter 13
- Squire and Moncrief, Chapter 7
— The Final Election Expert Podcast assignment is due on Monday 12/11 at 3:00 PM

— The FINAL EXAM will be held on Monday 12/18 from 1:30-4:15 PM

Additional Concerns

Syllabus

This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course. I reserve the right to make announced changes to this document and will distribute these changes in class and on the course website. Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class.

Class Conduct

Class atmosphere will be quite relaxed. Just a few guidelines to make sure:

- Arriving a few minutes late is tolerated as long as you make an effort to minimize the disturbance for other students.
- Eating and drinking in class should be reduced to a minimum. It is not forbidden, but please make sure that you are not disturbing others.
- Turn off all cell phones (or don’t even bring them).
- If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance. It is very rude to simply walk out in the middle of a class.

Disabilities and Accommodations

Please let me know within the first week of class if you require assistance or special consideration. I can make accommodations for those who need them but must be informed of the need in advance. Any requests for accommodation based on a disability must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). http://ods.gmu.edu/

Academic Integrity

All work completed in your name must be yours and yours alone. Any work you borrow or ideas you gather from other sources must be cited properly. Please see me if you are concerned about proper citation style. Any attempt to present someone else’s work as your own will be met with the harshest consequences. You will receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, notification of, and supporting documentation for, the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Scheduled adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

- Last Day to Add: 9/5
• **Last Day to Drop: 9/29**

Please note, after the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate Students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

**Other Useful Campus Resources**

Writing Center

- A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; [http://writingcenter.gmu.edu](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu)

University Libraries

- [http://library.gmu.edu](http://library.gmu.edu)

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

- 703.993.2380; [http://caps.gmu.edu](http://caps.gmu.edu)

**University Policies**

The University Catalog, [http://catalog.gmu.edu](http://catalog.gmu.edu), is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at [http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu). All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.