

**TO:** GOVT 370 Students

**FR:** Larry Evans

**DT:** January 2020

**RE:** Course outline

GOVT 370, *Legislative Processes*, is a comprehensive introduction to the politics of the U.S. Congress. There are no prerequisites and any student with a strong interest in American national political institutions or campaign strategy is more than welcome in the class. Based on thirty years of course evaluations, most students appear to view GOVT 370 as a demanding class. The readings are extensive, certain of the assignments are time-consuming, and standards are fairly high.

The U.S. Congress is a microcosm of American politics in general. As a result, we will consider the entire range of political actors and processes, from campaigns and elections to the policy consequences of procedure and strategic interactions across different branches of government. Obviously, with the presence of split party control and the highly controversial agenda and style of the Donald Trump administration, Spring 2020 is going to be a particularly interesting period for studying the Congress.

In this class, students will explore the full range of academic theories about congressional behavior and institutions. In addition to introducing students to what scholars write about Congress, I also hope to expose you as much as possible to the practical exigencies of electoral and legislative politics in the contemporary era, primarily through two applied assignments. In the first, students will work in small groups to create campaign commercials for or against incumbent members of the House or Senate likely to be running for reelection in 2020, using the web for information and the studios in the Swem Media Center for production. The second applied assignment is an elaborate simulation exercise in which students will be assigned roles as current members of Congress.

**Logistics.** All students who signed up for the course should already be enrolled on the Blackboard course site for GOVT 370. I will regularly communicate with students through the email listserv on the course site. My office location is 236 Tyler Hall, and my office telephone extension is 1-3030. My office hours for Spring 2020 are Tuesday afternoons from 2:00 to 5:00. I am in my office most days, however, so you should feel free to drop by any time. You also can arrange an appointment with me via email ([clevan@wm.edu](mailto:clevan@wm.edu)). On most days, I follow email closely between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m., and typically respond to messages within an hour or two.

**Assignments and Grading.** There are three required books for GOVT 370, all of which are available for purchase at the William and Mary bookstore or online. The three volumes are:

*Congress Reconsidered, 11<sup>th</sup> ed.*, by L. Dodd and B. Oppenheimer

*Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process, 11<sup>th</sup> ed.*, by W. Oleszek, M. Oleszek, E. Rybicki, and B. Heniff

*The Whips: Building Party Coalitions in Congress*, by C. L. Evans

Be absolutely sure to get the right editions for the *Congress Reconsidered* and *Congressional Procedures* books. A schedule for the readings is attached to this memo. Although course lectures and discussions will sometimes parallel, sometimes diverge from the reading schedule, you will be expected to have read the assignment for a particular day prior to the class meeting on that day.

Grading for the class will be based on five factors: a midterm exam (20%), a final exam (30%), the campaign commercial (20%), the simulation exercise (20%), and class participation (10%). Extensive information about the campaign commercial assignment will be provided during late January. It should be emphasized that there is no expectation that students will have any background or abilities in the area of video production. As part of the assignment, you will work closely with technical assistants for the class who do have that expertise and will provide the necessary guidance. Over the years, the students enrolled in GOVT 370 have had no technical problems at all in completing the assignment. Indeed, they generally viewed it as the most straightforward and enjoyable feature of the course. This exercise also will include web-based research, as well as the writing of two brief memos.

### **Reading and Assignment Schedule**

January 23 – No assignment  
January 28 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 1 - 2  
January 30 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 3  
February 4 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 4-5  
February 6 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 6  
February 11 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 7-8  
February 13 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 11  
February 18 – Evans, Preface, Ch. 1-3  
February 20 – Evans, Ch. 4  
February 25 – Evans, Ch. 5-7  
February 27 – Evans, Ch. 8-10  
March 3 – Oleszek et al., Ch. 1-2  
March 5 – **Midterm Exam**  
March 17 – Oleszek et al., Ch. 3-4  
March 19 – Oleszek et al., Ch. 5  
March 24 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 12  
March 26 – Oleszek et al., Ch. 6  
March 31 – Oleszek et al., Ch. 7  
April 2 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 13  
April 7 – **Campaign Ads Due**; Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 14  
April 9 – Oleszek et al., Ch. 8-9  
April 14 – Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 16  
April 16 – April 23 – Committee simulation exercise  
April 28 – **Spin Control Memos Due**; Dodd and Oppenheimer, Ch. 17  
April 30 – No assignment  
May 8 – **Final Exam Section 01 (2:00pm-5:00pm)**  
May 12 – **Final Exam Section 02 (9:00am-noon)**