

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA**

**RESEARCH IN AMERICAN POLITICS: BUILDING A BETTER CONGRESS
PLAP 2500**

**SPRING 2016
Tuesdays 1:00-3:30
Monroe 134**

Prof. Craig Volden
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Office hours: Thurs. 1:30-2:30 (or by appt.)
L040 Garrett Hall

This course introduces students to research in American politics, with a specific focus on the legislative effectiveness of individual members of the U.S. Congress. Under the guidance of Prof. Volden, students will conduct research into the lawmaking effectiveness of members of the U.S. Congress. This course is run in parallel with Prof. Alan Wiseman's course at Vanderbilt University. Building on Legislative Effectiveness Scores from Volden and Wiseman's prior research, groups of students will develop and test hypotheses about: (a) how to detect candidates who will be effective lawmakers, (b) how to cultivate effectiveness among existing lawmakers, and (c) when voters hold lawmakers accountable for their ineffectiveness.

Required Book and Readings

The following book can be purchased at the UVA student bookstore. Additional readings will be made available on the class Collab site.

Volden, Craig, and Alan E. Wiseman. 2014. *Legislative Effectiveness in the United States Congress: The Lawmakers*. Cambridge University Press.

Course Requirements and Grading

The course grade for PLAP 2500 will be derived from the class assignments, course participation, the group presentation, and the group research report. Grading of group-based work throughout the semester will be partially based on peer evaluations.

The percentage distribution for each activity is as follows:

Class assignments	50 percent
Group presentation	10 percent
Final report	25 percent
Class participation	15 percent

Class Participation

Effective participation includes preparation, class involvement, and anything else that advances the agenda of learning the course material for the class as a whole. Ineffective participation includes being unprepared for class, absence or consistent tardiness, working on unrelated material during class time, or any other behavior detrimental to the learning environment. Participation also involves completion of the course evaluation.

Honor Code: As in all courses at the University of Virginia, the Honor Code applies (<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/>). Students should also familiarize themselves with the concept of plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarizing the work of others (<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/PlagiarismSupplement2011.pdf>).

DETAILED CLASS SCHEDULE—SUBJECT TO SMALL CHANGES

SESSION 1: JANUARY 26

Introduction to Course and to the Legislative Effectiveness Project

- Distribution of syllabus and discussion of areas of research inquiry

SESSION 2: FEBRUARY 2

Background and Research Questions

Readings:

- Volden and Wiseman (entire book)

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- Students generate three research questions ahead of class (placed within areas of (1) recruitment, (2) cultivation, or (3) accountability).

SESSION 3: FEBRUARY 9

Research Scope and Hypothesis Development

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- Students code each other's research questions from red to green, in regards to areas that are likely very difficult/impossible to investigate within a semester (red) to very straightforward to investigate (green).
- Within green (and perhaps yellow) areas, students generate three hypotheses.

Accomplishment:

- By end of the class session, students will be formed into research groups, with tentative hypotheses for investigation.
- Students will learn how to identify relevant literatures.

SESSION 4: FEBRUARY 16

Refined Hypotheses and Relevant Literatures

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- Each group will refine its research hypotheses and present them clearly to the class at Vanderbilt.
- Each group will identify ten readings from the relevant literature, in a document listing the full academic citation, the abstract (or brief summary, if no abstract is available), and a sentence on how the work will likely be relevant to the research hypotheses.

Accomplishment:

- By the end of the class session, each group will have refined hypotheses and tentative reading lists.

SESSION 5: FEBRUARY 23

Research Design and Research Schedule

Reading:

- First half of student-generated reading list

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- One-page summary of each reading on list and its relevance for the research project. Each student will be responsible for one summary, made available to the rest of the class.

Accomplishment:

- By the end of the class session, each group will have a schedule for their research through the rest of the semester to its final products.

SESSION 6: MARCH 1

Gathering Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Reading:

- Second half of student-generated reading list

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- One-page summary of each reading on list and its relevance for the research project. Each student will be responsible for one summary, made available to the rest of the class.
- Each student should identify *another* 1-3 readings from the relevant literature not already summarized by someone in the class.

Accomplishment:

- By the end of the class session, each group will have a clear idea for the data they will gather over the next several weeks, and will begin to work on individual assignments.

SESSION 7: MARCH 8

Spring Break – No Class Session Scheduled – Enjoy!

SESSION 8: MARCH 15
Refining Research Design

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- Each group produces a 3-5 page report on their refined hypotheses, links to literature, and research design.

Accomplishments:

- Troubleshooting for research design and data gathering moving smoothly forward.

SESSION 8.5: FRIDAY, MARCH 18, TENTATIVE D.C. RESEARCH TRIP

SESSION 9: MARCH 22
Data Gathering Issues

Assignments (5% of final grade):

- One-page summary of each reading on refined list and its relevance for the research project. Each student will be responsible for one summary, made available to the rest of the class.
- Each student produces a 1-2 page summary of their data gathering activities, process, accomplishments, and problems.

Accomplishments:

- Class dedicated to basic understanding of data analysis techniques used in the Legislative Effectiveness Project.
- Troubleshooting for data gathering moving smoothly forward.

SESSION 10: MARCH 29
Individual Group Troubleshooting I

Accomplishments:

- Each group will meet individually with Prof. Volden to assess development of research and confront problems.

SESSION 11: APRIL 5
Individual Group Troubleshooting II

Accomplishments:

- Each group will meet individually with Prof. Volden to assess development of research and confront problems.

SESSION 12: APRIL 12
Preliminary Reports and Presentations

Assignments (10% of final grade):

- Each group turns in rough draft of preliminary research report, with sections on (1) introduction/background, (2) research question/thesis statement, (3) literature review/hypotheses, (4) research design/data gathering, (5) preliminary results, (6) implications and conclusions, (7) references, and (8) any technical appendices needed.
- In this class section, each group will present their findings to date to the class as a whole, and lay out the remaining steps.

Accomplishments:

- Class will offer feedback and suggestions on completion of research.

SESSION 13: APRIL 19
Presentations from Vanderbilt

Accomplishments:

- Students from Vanderbilt will present their projects and findings, with students from Virginia asking Q&A.

SESSION 14: APRIL 26
Penultimate Drafts

Assignment (5% of final grade):

- Each group will turn in a completed full draft of research report.

Accomplishments:

- Students will work on their final presentations.

SESSION 15: MAY 3
Final Presentations

Assignment:

- Groups will present their projects and findings, engaging each other in Q&A (10% of final grade).

*****FINAL GROUP REPORT (25% of final grade) DUE – TUES., MAY 10, 5:00 p.m.*****