



## **ENGAGING DEMOCRACY CAPSTONE**

(Revised version—please read)

Winter and Spring 2009  
Political Science Division  
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One of the most pressing problems in American politics today is that the public feels increasingly distant from elected leaders. To many reformers, the health of the nation's democracy can only improve by getting more young people involved in politics. The Engaging Democracy capstone addresses this problem by having students assist Oregon legislators during the 2009 legislative session in Salem, where they will help handle the broad range of responsibilities placed on legislative staff. During classroom times, students will learn about the position of legislatures in American politics and the character of Oregon politics. As a final project, the students will work together on a web-based guide to the Legislative Assembly. The work in the capitol will be arranged around each individual student's schedule. Carpooling should be available. It is likely we will have some funds to offset travel costs.

### **Learning Objectives**

More than anything else, the primary learning objectives are to make students more understanding of the nature of representative democracy and more engaged in our political system. As far as cognitive learning, the objectives of this class are to make students familiar with:

- The structure, procedures, and functions of state legislatures, especially the Oregon Legislative Assembly;

- The importance of particular actors in the legislative process, including individual citizens, legislative leaders, the governor, political parties, and interest groups;
- The demands and pressures put on elected officials;
- The role of staff in the legislature;
- The environment in legislative offices;
- Key forces that shape Oregon politics today.

The capstone is also meant to give students hands-on experience working for an elected official and their diverse constituencies, to enable students to think more critically about politics, and to get students to work together on a joint project that is meant to improve public understanding of the Legislative Assembly.

By providing students with an opportunity to work in the heart of the government process, the course is intended to provide an experience that meets the University Studies four goals: inquiry and critical thinking, communication, the diversity of human experiences, and ethics and social responsibility.

### **Getting Instructor Approval**

To register for this class, you have to have my approval. The reason I require approval is that you will be representing the Political Science Division and the university while you are interning in the legislature. Since this is such an important position, I need to be comfortable that you will do a good job. If a student acts in an unprofessional manner in the internship, it will cause problems for the internship program and make it difficult for other students to intern in the legislature.

In general, I would like you to provide me with a resume, a brief letter of recommendation, and an unofficial copy of your transcripts. In some circumstances I may waive some or all of these requirements. However, it is always helpful to have these items in my files so I can talk intelligently about you if a legislator or an aide calls me.

### **Our Community Partner: The Oregon Legislative Assembly**

Each student in the class will be asked to work as an intern in the state capitol for at least one day a week (8 hours a week) during the winter and spring quarters. In general, I would like all students to work with a member of the House or

Senate. I may allow some students to work in other types of positions in the capitol, though I would prefer you work in a legislator's office.

Once you have been accepted by a legislator as an intern, I need a statement from your supervisor acknowledging that you are interning and outlining your duties. Often students write these statements themselves and then ask their supervisor to sign them. You also need to provide me with the name of your supervisor and his/her phone number. I will distribute a form that can be used to submit this information. The form can also be accessed on line at <http://www.web.pdx.edu/~hprc/FormA.pdf>.

As an intern, you are likely to be asked to handle all the traditional duties of a legislative staff person, including answering phone calls, filing information, doing constituency service, tracking legislation, and conducting research. The legislator may ask you to do other activities as well, including monitoring particular committees, helping organize town hall meetings, or working on a newsletter. It is always interesting if you get the opportunity to trail your legislator through the course of a legislative day. The internship is particularly valuable, however, if you can attach yourself to some substantive issue before the legislature. I don't want you to just be answering the phone and filing newspaper articles. If that happens, you need to assert yourself. Ask the legislator if you can work on a special project, such as conducting research or keeping track of a major bill.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that you are there to help the legislator. Don't just sit and wait to be told what to do. Try to figure out ways you can be helpful and dive in.

### **Finding an Internship**

After the November election, I will be working with individual legislators, staff members, and the party caucuses to find internship opportunities. If you do not have any idea for whom you would like to work, I will talk with you about your interests and then give you a lead on where to apply. It will then be your responsibility to contact the lead to apply for the internship. In most cases, the process is just like applying for a job: after you contact the lead, you will be asked to send a resume and references. If all looks okay, you will be asked in for an interview. Occasionally, the first lead doesn't work out. If so, I will redirect you elsewhere. In a few cases, I may have to go to bat for you (especially if you

are trying to get hired by a legislative leader), but usually it isn't necessary. Most legislators want interns and they will be eager to hear from you.

If you do have an idea for where to apply, don't hesitate to approach the legislator's office on your own without clearing it with me. Just call the legislator's office, let them know you are a PSU student and would like to intern with them. Then ask them how to apply. All I ask is that you let me know where you are applying, so I have good records on who is applying where.

If you are able to set up your internship prior to the winter quarter, it will make the beginning of the quarter go more smoothly. However, there is ample time after the quarter begins to secure an internship.

### **Travel to Salem**

In years past, we have had some money available to help reimburse students for travel on the days they commute to Salem. I am currently working to find money again this year. I am optimistic that we will have some. I encourage everyone to try to carpool whenever possible to conserve gas and our limited funds. Carpooling also gives you a chance to share experiences with other students in the class. Travel reimbursement forms are available in my office.

If you do not drive, it should not be a problem. We are likely to have at least one carpool going down to Salem every day, and probably more than that. If there isn't a regular carpool, I should be able to help you find a ride from another student.

### **Required Texts**

I have asked the PSU bookstore to order two books for students in this class:

Richard A. Clucas, Brent Steel, and Mark Henkels. *Oregon Politics and Government: Progressives versus Conservative Populists*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

Alan Rosenthal, *Engines of Democracy: Politics and Policymaking in State Legislatures*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008.

You should try to read both of these books early in the course. They will provide valuable perspective on your internship work.

## Community Project

The community project for this capstone course is the development of a web-based guide to the Oregon legislature. The guide will provide political background on each legislator, a description of each legislative district, and some relevant statistical information, such as interest group report cards, past election results, partisan registration figures, district population demographics, and economic measures.

In addition to providing this material, I envision the web page being modeled after many political blogs, so that there is a place on the web site where the students in the capstone can share their experiences of working in the legislature and where the readers can contribute their knowledge. There will also be links to other web sites.

At the beginning of the quarter, we will work out what to include on the web site and distribute responsibilities. Everyone in the class will be assigned specific roles much like a staff on a newspaper, with some students assigned the position of editors, others as writers and researchers, and so on. We will also need a production team. I thought this approach would make for a more efficient way to get the project completed. Plus I thought having titles would give you something to put on your resume.

In general, here is how the work will be distributed: I will ask all students to write a short descriptive essay of their own legislator (and his or her district) to make sure everyone has a good sense about the partner with whom they are working. (In the schedule below, I refer to this initial assignment as the First Profiles.) The “writers” and “editors” will put together the short essays on the other legislators and their districts. The “copyeditors” will help fine tune the profiles so they are consistent and clear. The “researchers” will track down and prepare the data included on each legislator, including campaign finance records, election results, district demographics, and legislative voting records. The “production staff” will work to design and oversee the web page. The “editors” will also play a leadership role in developing the project.

## Course Assignments, Deadlines, and Grades

Course grades will be based on two criteria:

(1) Part of the grade will be based on the student's performance in the internship. At the end of the quarter, I will talk with the intern's supervisor about the intern's performance. These reports are taken as recommendations. I will decide the final performance grade. I ask the intern supervisor to evaluate the quality and quantity of the student's work, and whether they behaved in a professional manner. If a student or the intern's supervisor prefers, I will ask the supervisor to provide a written evaluation.

(2) The second factor used to determine a grade is the student's work on the community project. I will use two criteria in determining grades for this project. The first will be the amount of effort the student puts into the project. At the end of the second quarter of the capstone, I will ask all students to provide a self-evaluation of their contributions, which I will use to help assess effort. The second criteria will be the quality of the students' work. Here, I will give a grade to the student essays about their legislators and for their work as writers, editors, and so on.

## Additional Rules, Caveats, and Concerns

*Appropriate Behavior:* Students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner in their internship. This means that they arrive at their work when scheduled, they dress appropriately, they follow directions, and they interact with others in a positive manner. Moreover, students are expected to abide at all times by the ethical standards of the university and the organization in which they are placed. Students who conduct themselves in an unprofessional or unethical manner face a failing grade and/or appropriate disciplinary action. In addition, it is strongly encouraged that all students read the Student Conduct Code (see <http://www.pdx.edu/dos/conduct.html>). It details your rights and responsibilities as a student and as a member of the Portland State Community.

*Students with Disabilities:* Portland State University is committed to providing each student the opportunity to obtain a quality education and develop into a well-integrated and self-reliant graduate. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) was created to assist students in reducing barriers of attitude and physical access that might otherwise impede success. To accomplish this goal, the DRC provides support services and information to help our students develop skills in self-

advocacy and independence, the ability to identify and use resources on and off campus, the appropriate use of problem-solving techniques, and acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through the DRC should contact the DRC immediately. Students with accommodations approved through the DRC should talk with me prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations.

Additional information on the Political Science Division's internship program is available through the division Internship Program Guide. The guide is available on line at <http://www.web.pdx.edu/~hprc/Intern%20guide.pdf>.

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## Schedule of Events

The scheduled course meeting time is on Fridays from 2 to 4 p.m. The legislature rarely meets on Fridays, so this is a good time for all of us to get together. At the beginning of the winter quarter, we will meet frequently to see how the internships are going, to allow you to exchange information with each other, and to plan the final project. I will be bringing in guest speakers who should be able to help answer some of your questions about interning in the capitol. I will probably also give a few introductory lectures so that I know you are up to speed on legislative politics and Oregon government. Once everyone is settled in their internships and we have good direction on the final project, we will meet less often or in smaller groups.

In addition to the regular course meetings, we are likely to have some special meeting dates. I will probably hold a least one meeting in Salem. Also, the interns are likely to be invited to the Alumni Association's annual training session for PSU Advocates.

Since this is the first time I have taught this capstone, it is likely that I will make some changes on dates as time goes along. If there are significant changes, however, I will give you ample time to let you know. Here is our tentative schedule:

### Winter Quarter

January 9	Introduction
January 10 <i>Special Event</i>	PSU Advocates Leadership Training, 8:15 a.m. to noon (Saturday morning). Try to attend if possible. 327 Smith Memorial Student Union
January 12 <i>Special Event</i>	75th Legislative Assembly convenes Governor presents State of the State Address State Capitol
January 16	Project assignments distributed Read: Rosenthal, chapters 1 and 2 Be prepared to discuss both chapters I will also ask everyone to discuss their placement

January 23	<p>Guest speaker (TBA)</p> <p>Read: Rosenthal, chapters 3 and 4</p> <p>We will also discuss placements and the project</p>
January 30	<p>Guest speaker (TBA)</p> <p>Read: Rosenthal, chapters 4 and 5</p> <p><u>First Profile Due</u> (essay on your legislator and district)</p> <p>Note: The profile of each legislator should be about 750 words; the district profile should be around 5 or 6 paragraphs. We will discuss what to include in class.</p>
February 6	<p>No Class</p> <p>Read: Rosenthal, chapters 6 and 7</p>
February 13	<p>Guest speaker (tentative)</p> <p>Read: Rosenthal, chapters 8 and 9</p> <p>Discuss profiles and any internship issues</p>
February 20	<p>No Class</p> <p>Read: Rosenthal, chapters 10 and 11</p> <p><u>Second Profile Due</u> (writers and editors)</p> <p><u>Copyedited Profiles Returned</u> (copyeditors)</p> <p><u>First Data Project Due</u> (researchers)</p> <p><u>Initial Web Proposal Due</u> (production)</p>
February 27	<p>No Class</p> <p>Read: Clucas et al., chapters 1 and 2</p>
March 6	<p>No Class</p> <p>Read: Clucas et al., chapters 8 and 9</p>
March 13	<p>Discuss internships and project</p> <p>Read: Clucas et al., chapters 4 and 6</p> <p><u>Third Profile Due</u> (writers and editors)</p> <p><u>Copyedited Profiles Returned</u> (copyeditors)</p> <p><u>Second Data Project Due</u> (researchers)</p> <p><u>Revised Web Proposal Due</u> (production)</p>
March 16-20 <i>Finals Week</i>	<p>No Class</p>

March 23-27  
*Spring Break* No Class

### **Spring Quarter**

April 3 Discuss internships and project  
Read: Clucas et al, chapters 13-14

April 10 No Class  
Read: Clucas et al, chapters 15-16

April 17 Discuss internships and project  
Read: Clucas et al, chapter 17  
Last Set of Profiles Due (writers and editors)  
Copyedited Profiles Returned (copyeditors)  
Third Data Project Due (researchers)  
Web Frame Due (production)

April 24 No Class

May 1 No Class

May 8 Discuss internships and project  
All material to be posted is due (all)  
All copyediting is to be completed (copyeditors)  
Senate profiles posted (production/all)

May 15 No Class

May 22 Discuss project  
House profiles posted (production/all)

May 29 Discuss project  
Web project complete (production/all)

June 6 Discuss Capstone Experience  
Read: Rosenthal, chapter 12  
Self Evaluations are due