

Spring 2003: Congressional Politics

The following is a verbatim recording of the student comments on the Narrative Course Evaluation Forms that I received. Every response is included (i.e., no “cherry-picking” to include only the best responses) and there is no order to the recorded responses.

**Please comment on the strengths of the course:**

“Lectures were very well structured and easy to follow. The professor was approachable and helpful.”

“Professor Clinton’s enthusiasm and responsiveness was a definite strength. It was clear that he is a young guy excited to be teaching and he really wanted to improve this course. This course is a very necessary addition to the Politics Dept., where American politics classes are a weakness.”

“The Power Point lectures with graphs kept the lectures interesting. The best part was the precept debates on the bills. It allowed us to get a feel for the workings of Congress on a higher level. It should definitely be included in this class in the future.”

“Interesting subject material and clear presentation.”

“The lectures were very thorough and cover all the main points in the readings but still really interesting.”

“Debate was good. Organized lectures (w/ some technical problems).”

“Professor is great. Lectures easy to follow, close to readings.”

“Interesting content. Appropriate problem sets. Great debate that brought together all we’ve learned.”

“Very well thought-out lectures. Great class project (debate). Clear presentation of material.”

“Best politics class I’ve taken in 4 yrs. Interesting subject matter, engaging lectures and precepts. Meaningful assignments.”

“The subject matter was very different from other politics classes I have taken. It was good to have a more social-science based class that you don’t have to use a lot of math/stats in. Clinton was always extremely well prepared and organized for lecture and class and he did a good job.”

“The professor is a great teacher. He gets us engaged in the material. He is incredibly knowledgeable and is always willing to talk/help.”

“Lectures were very interesting and presented material clearly. Class was structured well. I really liked the debate in the end. Overall a really good class.”

“Lectures were very easy to understand. Clinton explained the mathematical models extensively to ensure that we grasped them.”

“Professor Clinton was very clear in the subject matter and did a good job putting together lecture. The mock Congress was interesting, but could have been better planned, but it was still enjoyable.”

“The Debate, letter experiment, lectures, spatial voting theory.”

“The strength was Prof. Clinton’s understanding and explication of analytical models and appropriate statistics. While such subject matter tends to be dry Prof. Clinton was always interested and excited, leading to better student interest. Clinton’s flexibility and openness to student criticism and advice was very good. Clinton did an excellent job in structuring the debates, which I think everyone enjoyed.”

“I enjoyed the theoretical approach to the study of Congress but would advise including specific mention of it in the course summary because I expect people were not expecting it when they signed up for the class. You would get students who were specifically interested in that and not just trying to learn a little more about Congress in a “popular” and not “academic” was, as I was.”

“Lectures easy to follow and illustrated many of the points from the week’s reading. Debate brought a lot of the reading to life.”

“This was the first ‘technical’ politics class I’ve taken at Princeton and I thought it was very clear and thorough. I liked how the instructors were always willing to try things (such as debating in Nassau Hall) and worked hard to make the class accessible and interesting.”

“Clinton is a great lecturer and the readings were interesting. The debate was also interesting and a lot of fun. It helps that the subject matter of this course is so interesting.”

“The lectures clearly presented some fairly difficult concepts. The problem sets may have been more useful if they’d been spaced better in the course, mirroring what we were currently discussing in lecture.”

“The readings/lectures presented the subject matter in a completely new and informative light. I will never look at congressional business the same way again. Our precepts were similarly informative.”

“The course covers a very interesting and relevant subject. It goes beyond the superficial descriptions of Congress and explores systematically the institution of Congress. Good use of data/graphs to prove points.”

“Lectures and readings were clear, little prior knowledge was assumed, it was NOT a current events course (thank God), and it was interesting! NO MIDTERM (we have enough of them as it is) DEBATE WAS GREAT!”

“Powerpoint slides were helpful—presentation of information was straightforward. Readings were somewhat interesting, quite informative. The Nassau Hall debate was fun—but shouldn’t be such a large % of the grade.”

“The multimedia approach (even when it didn’t work) and thorough graphs, charts and information all added to the class.”

“Powerpoint use is great. Debate was awesome. Lectures presented material clearly.”

“Variety of activities: sending representatives letters and especially the debate. Even those of us who are completely terrified of public speaking learned a lot, and our precept really united when engaged in strategic sessions.”

“The lectures were very interesting. Prof. Clinton is genuinely interesting in the material which makes learning it more fun for us. This was a great class for majors and non-majors alike.”

“The class was incredibly informative and the hands on debate project really helped tie the class together. Prof. Clinton was a good lecturer.”

“Precepts – good discussion when everyone got involved. Lectures – very interesting.”

“Diverse assignments. Eager professor. Excellent preceptor.”

“I found the lectures to be interesting for the most part. Precept really helped to clarify the information. I enjoyed the debate in Nassau Hall and found it to be very informative.”

“Professor Clinton has a good attitude toward the subject matter. It was presented very scientifically.”

**Please comment on the weaknesses of the course:**

“Readings often merely repeated what we learned in lecture and felt pointless.”

“Precepts could do more to combine reading with real-world events. By including more reading discussion it would encourage students to do more of the reading as well.”

“The problem sets were geared more towards game theory than politics.”

“Problem sets were unclear and unguided. Could have used more explanation.”

“Problem sets were difficult, no preparation on how to approach them—how did they relate to this class? Readings never incorporated w/ problem sets or in precepts. Did not learn much about congressional politics in this class.”

“Precept seemed pointless.”

“More focus on readings possibly.”

“Could have used more discussion of readings in precepts, although they were pretty straightforward.”

“None.”

“It meets too early.”

“Some of the precept readings were really boring. I didn’t like the course packet. Also there was little incentive to read all of the reading. Final should be closed book and in class if you actually want students to study.”

“No more problem sets. If you must keep problem sets, make them shorter.”

“The reading from the textbooks was very dry and mostly mirrored lecture. Most people did not do the reading for precept.”

“Lack of structure in precept. Not enough emphasis on problem sets given how different they were from usual pol work.”

“I think the paucity of grades could be a problem as the grade on the final will likely be the overall grade.”

“Differences in focus between Clinton lectures and Dickson’s precepts. Focusing on theory in lecture and “real world” politics in precept meant a mediocre treatment of each rather than in depth study.”

“Readings at some times a little too technical, hard to follow the theory. Fine if just Analyzing Congress, but may help to balance the geometry, etc., with a book more qualitative.”

“The first couple of lectures/weeks because they were background material gave the impression that this was more of a history course, but I’m glad I stuck with it.”

“The problem sets were kind of lacking. I don’t see the point of questions that are essentially just looking things up in Firestone or on the Internet.”

“Early on, Prof. Clinton’s speaking style was a bit difficult to follow but got better as the course progressed. Precepts could have been scheduled at a better time. Some weeks readings were very dense and difficult to make sense of.”

“Problem sets, I just felt a little out of sorts with them – maybe because I am not a spatial person. I just wish a large chunk of our grade didn’t depend on them.”

“Lectures were too often identical to the readings.”

“Lectures mirror the reading a little too closely. Course did not move fast enough.”

“Lecture was dry, as were some readings – didn’t ever go much beyond what was on the powerpoint. Readings were also very dry at times.”

“Politics and Problem Sets did not mix well.”

“Final exam preparation (?) The exam guidance seems a bit ambiguous.”

“Readings.”

“There wasn’t much guidance on the problem sets. Plus, I wish there were more graded components of the class.”

“I thought that some of the readings for the different weeks were a little repetitive. Maybe cut one book?”

“Geometry and figures hard to understand at times. Maybe not enough opinions and debate coming out in precept.”

“Readings often repetitive, dry.”

“I was surprised how ‘math’ oriented the problem sets were.”

“I would have enjoyed more discussion of the history and constitutional underpinnings of Congress.”