

PUBPOL 490: Strengthening the Right to Vote in Michigan
Independent Study Course Fall 1017

Faculty: John Chamberlin and Edie Goldenberg

Credit Hours: 1

Class meetings: Selected Tues 2:30-4:00 (9/19; 10/3; 10/31; 12/12)
1210 Weill Hall

To Register: Permissions are required to enroll. Email fspp-registrar@umich.edu to get enrollment instruction.

Voting is the keystone of democratic government. Yet many citizens are not registered and many who are registered fail to turn out on election day. Turnout rates for young voters lag those of older voters by a considerable margin. There are more than a dozen bills in the Michigan Legislature that would, if enacted, lower the barriers to voter registration and to voting. Several address barriers that confront young citizens and others participating in voting for the first time. In this one-credit course students will analyze the pros and cons associated with these bills and prepare white papers that explain and evaluate the bills that will be presented in an end-of-term forum.

Course Structure: Students will work in small groups (one or two), each of which will focus on one bill (or a package of related bills). All of the students registered for the course will meet several times as a group in early September to develop the work plan for the term, meet again at mid-term for updates and reactions to work-to-date, and again at the end of the term for the forum.

Knowledge and talents that will be developed in the course:

- Becoming familiar with the current status of voting rights in Michigan and elsewhere
- Becoming familiar with the legislative process in Michigan

- Learning to track information about bills in the Michigan legislature through its website
- Learning to translate the legal language of bills into ordinary English to facilitate research
- Researching similar legislation in other states as tracked by the National Conference of State Legislatures and national groups that work to strengthen voting rights
- Working as a member of small team to produce a joint product and to present it in a public forum

The following is a list of issues and associated bills that are currently before the Michigan Legislature.

- Automatic Voter Registration (with Driver's License) (HB 4037)
- Online Registration (SB 56, SB 425, SB 426, SB 427, SB 428, SB 429)
- Early Registration for 16-year-olds (HB 4308)
- Allow 17-year-olds to vote in primaries if they will be 18 by the following November election (SJR 12)
- Easier Absentee Voting for New Voters (HB 4459, SB 507)
- No Reason Absentee Voting (HB 4033, HB 4034, SB 117)
- ResidenceAddress and Voting Address Can Be Different (SB 505, SB 506)
- Emergency Absentee Voting (HB 4035)
- Early Voting (HB 4395)
- Expand List of Qualified Voter ID Cards (HB 4599)

The task list for each team will include:

- Research how the bill would alter current laws pertaining to this issue
- Research the history of legislation on the issue proposed in prior sessions of the legislature

- Interview sponsors (or members of their staff) about the sponsor's reasons for proposing the bill
- Determine national groups or groups within Michigan that favor or oppose the proposed legislation
- Research similar laws or proposed legislation in other states
- Examine the experience of similar laws enacted by other states
- Attend legislative hearings if the bill makes it to that stage
- Write a policy brief summarizing their research and analysis
- Prepare and deliver a 10-minute presentation based on the brief at the end-of-term forum
- Send a copy of their brief to the sponsors of the bill and the chairs of the relevant legislative committee