Political Science 426: The U.S. Congress

Fall Semester 2015
Tues & Thurs 11:00am-11:50am
6012 Social Sciences

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Description

This course introduces students to analysis of the United States Congress. The subject matter covers many aspects of Congress – from political parties to redistricting to roll call voting to the committee system. The course emphasizes how elections connect what happens in Washington with what happens back in the district, or what the textbook calls the “two Congresses.” We will examine how the goals of members, particularly reelection, shape the organization of the institution and the policies it produces.

Requirements

Students are expected to do all of the assigned reading and be engaged members of the class. Keeping up with the reading is the only way to get the most out of the course and perform well on exams. Required readings are found in Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler’s Congress and Its Members (15th edition), which is available at the UW Bookstore and from most online booksellers. The miscellaneous readings are available on the Learn@UW web site. Lecture slides will be posted on the course web site after each unit is complete.

Given the size of the class, the format will be primarily lectures, with a focus on the textbook. Sections will provide an opportunity to analyze lecture material and synthesize with topic readings. You will learn more, enjoy the course more, and incidentally earn a higher grade if you are intellectually engaged with the lectures and participate actively in section discussions.

We will often spend the first part of class discussing congressional news. Students should be monitoring current events as they relate to Congress during the semester. It is helpful to monitor a newspaper such as the New York Times or a beltway publication such as The Washington Post,
Some news items will be posted on the course web site.

The final grade will be based on: two midterm exams comprised of short answers and brief essays (each worth 25% of grade), a final examination (35%), in class “spot checks” (5%), and performance in discussion sections (10%). The exams will cover all of the material in the readings, section discussions, and lectures. The exams are not technically cumulative, but reviewing material from earlier portions of the course will be helpful.

The final grading scale is based on the following thresholds: A (93%), AB (88%), B (83%), BC (78%), C (70%), and D (60%).

Other Considerations

Your success in this class is important to us. All students are strongly encouraged to visit office hours if only to introduce yourself and let us know how the course is working for you.

If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance, please contact us early in the semester so that we can consider accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities.

We reserve the right to modify the syllabus timeline or specific readings as needed. In addition, the schedule may change if guest speakers or other opportunities become available.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes using someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution. We will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students.

Please only use electronic devices in class for referencing course materials, taking notes, and occasionally tracking down online items that are necessary for our discussions. Everything else should be quieted and stowed away for later use.
Note: No class meeting on first day due to APSA Annual Meeting (9/3)

Introduction and Historical Development (9/8 & 9/10)
Congress and Its Members (chapters 1 & 2)
U.S. Constitution, Federalist 51 & 62 (find them!)

Public Opinion and Representational Style (9/15, 9/17, & 9/22)
Congress and Its Members (chapter 5)

Incumbency and Elections (9/24, 9/29, 10/1*, & 10/6)
Congress and Its Members (chapters 3 & 4)
“Taking on the Kennedys” film

★ Exam 1 (10/8) ★

Making Decisions (10/13 & 10/15)
Congress and Its Members (chapters 9 & 13)

Party Leadership (10/20, 10/22, & 10/27)
Congress and Its Members (chapter 6)

Committees (10/29, 11/3, & 11/5)
Congress and Its Members (chapter 7)
★ Exam 2 (11/10) ★

Legislative Procedures (11/12, 11/17, & 11/19)
*Congress and Its Members* (chapter 8)

Budgets and Domestic Policy (11/24, 12/1, & 12/3)
*Congress and Its Members* (chapter 14)

Dealing with the President and Foreign Policy (12/8 & 12/10)
*Congress and Its Members* (chapters 10 & 15)

Conclusions (12/15)
*Congress and Its Members* (chapter 16)

★ Final Examination (12/23 12:25pm-2:25pm) ★