

Political Science 311

The U.S. Congress

Spring Semester 2018
Lectures: Mon and Weds 4:30-5:25pm
222 Ingraham Hall
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Discussion sections: Mon 3:30-4:20pm, Tues 11-11:50am, & Thurs 8:50-9:40am

Professor: Barry C. Burden
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Office hours: Weds 9-11am (and by appointment)

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Office hours: Tues 2-3pm and Thurs 10-11am

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.

Course learning outcomes: By the end of the semester, students should be able to convey a working knowledge of how Congress operates, understand its structure in light of history and other institutional developments, and analyze current events in Congress using a contextual understanding of the institution.

This is a traditional 3-credit course that meets credit hour policy standards via two 55-minute lectures and one 50-minute discussion section meeting each week. The prerequisites for the course are sophomore standing and PS 104, PS 184, or PS 217, or permission of the instructor.

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 the course textbook, Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler's *Congress and Its Members* (16th edition, available at the UW Bookstore and online booksellers), as well as other readings. In general, lectures will focus on textbook material and section discussions will focus on applying the other readings in the context of that background.

Several readings are available on the Learn@UW web site: canvas.wisc.edu/courses/86294. All of the readings are posted on the site except for the Constitution and Federalist Papers (which are covered in the first unit of the semester). Lecture slides will also be posted on the course web site following each unit, as will occasional news items, so be sure to visit it regularly.

Given the size of the class, the format will be primarily lectures, with a focus on the textbook. Section meetings will provide an opportunity to analyze lecture material and synthesize with topic readings. You will learn 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*, *The Hill* or Politico.

The final grade will be based on the following:

- midterm exam 1 – February 26 (20%)
- midterm exam 2 – April 4 (20%)
- final exam – May 7 (30%)
- paper assignment – May 2 (20%)
- participation and attendance in section (10%)

The two midterm exams will be comprised of a combination of short answer and multiple choice questions. The final exam will be comprised of short answer and brief essay question. 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 paper assignment will ask you to analyze the prospects of passage for a bill that failed in the current Congress. The project will apply much of the knowledge gleaned over the semester to understanding the fate of one piece of legislation.

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 share how the course is working for you. We expect the classroom to be an inclusive and welcoming environment where each student has the potential to learn.

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. I recommend writing notes by hand and not using a laptop or other electronic device in class.

Introduction and Historical Development

January 24, January 29, & January 31

Congress and Its Members (chapters 1 & 2)

U.S. Constitution

Federalist 51 & 62

Public Opinion and Representational Style

February 5, February 7, & February 12

Congress and Its Members (chapter 5)

Fenno, Richard F., Jr. 1978. "Perceptions of the Constituency." Chapter 1 in *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*.

Draper, Robert. 2010. "Lindsey Graham, This Year's Maverick." *The New York Times Magazine*. July 1.

Incumbency and Elections

February 14, February 19, & February 21

Congress and Its Members (chapters 3 & 4)

Draper, Robert. 2012. "The League of Dangerous Mapmakers." *The Atlantic*. September 19.

★ Midterm exam 1

February 26

Making Decisions

February 28 & March 5

Congress and Its Members (chapters 9 & 13)

Lizza, Ryan. 2013. "Getting to Maybe: Inside the Gang of Eight's Immigration Deal." *The New Yorker*. June 24.

Lipton, Eric. 2013. "Tax Lobby Builds Ties to Chairman of Finance Panel." *The New York Times*. April 6.

Party Leadership

March 7, March 12, & March 14

Congress and Its Members (chapter 6)

Aldrich, John H., and David W. Rohde. 2017. "Lending and Reclaiming Power: Majority Party Leadership in the House Since the 1950s." In *Congress Reconsidered* (11th ed.), ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer.

Draper, Robert. 2011. "How Kevin McCarthy Wrangles the Tea Party in Washington." *The New York Times*. July 13.

Raju, Manu. 2015. "McConnell Meets Senate." Politico.com. January 6.

Committees

March 19, March 21, & April 2

Congress and Its Members (chapter 7)

Kaiser, Robert G. 2013. "Making Sausage." Chapter 14 in *Act of Congress*.

Starks, Tim. 2015. "Changing of the Guard on Oversight Panels." *Roll Call*. February 13.

Note: No class on March 26 & March 28 due to Spring Recess

★ Midterm exam 2

April 4

Legislative Procedures

April 9, April 11, & April 16

Congress and Its Members (chapter 8)

Bartlett, Bruce. 2017. "How Congress Used to Work." Politico.com. April 4.

Packer, George. 2010. "The Empty Chamber: Just How Broken is the Senate?" *The New Yorker*. August 9.

Schill, Dan. 2010. "A 'Hill Speak' Primer: Explaining the Legislative Jargon of Congress." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 43:831-3. (background knowledge, not for discussion)

Budgets and Domestic Policy

April 18, April 23, & April 25

Congress and Its Members (chapter 14)

Allen, Jonathan. 2015. "The Case for Earmarks." Vox.com. June 30.

Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. "20,000 Leagues Under the State." *Washington Monthly*. July/August.

Dealing with the President and Foreign Policy

April 30 & May 2

Congress and Its Members (chapters 10 & 15)

Sher, Bill. 2014. "Trolling the GOP." Politico.com. November 18.

★ Paper due

May 2

★ Final exam

May 7 (7:25pm-9:25pm)