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

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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)

Incumbency and Elections
February 14, February 19, & February 21
Congress and Its Members (chapters 3 & 4)

★ Midterm exam 1
February 26

Making Decisions
February 28 & March 5
Congress and Its Members (chapters 9 & 13)

Party Leadership
March 7, March 12, & March 14
Congress and Its Members (chapter 6)
Committees
March 19, March 21, & April 2
*Congress and Its Members* (chapter 7)

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)

Budgets and Domestic Policy
April 18, April 23, & April 25
*Congress and Its Members* (chapter 14)

Dealing with the President and Foreign Policy
April 30 & May 2
*Congress and Its Members* (chapters 10 & 15)

★ Paper due
May 2

★ Final exam
May 7 (7:25pm-9:25pm)