

Congress

Fall 2018

Professor: Miranda Yaver
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Introduction to the Course: This course is a general introduction to American Congress and its role in national policymaking. We will address such questions as, Why are the parties so polarized and what contributes to legislative gridlock? To whom are members of Congress responsive, and what does this mean for representation? Why is Congress so unpopular? What is the role of committees in shaping the legislative agenda? How does Congress interact with other branches to shape public policy? Students will learn and discuss theories of political science and engage in informed discussion of how the theories explain contemporary legislative behavior and policy debates. Readings will be accompanied with data on public opinion and legislative behavior, and engagement with the news. Students will reinforce lectures and readings through active participation in class discussions and writing assignments that engage core political science theories on legislative organization, legislative process, the electoral connection, and policy implementation.

Objectives

- Learn the electoral, institutional, and systemic features of the United States Congress.
- Apply political science theories of policymaking and representation that relate to Congress.
- Learn and apply theories of legislative organization with respect to Congress.
- Demonstrate through exams and writing assignments the ability to think critically about congressional behavior historically and in contemporary controversies.

BOOKS:

We will draw primarily from the following three required books:

- Smith, Steven S., Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen, *The American Congress, 9th Edition*, Cambridge University Press, 2015. (Abbreviated SRVW)
- David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. 2nd Edition, 2004
- Sarah Binder, *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock*. Brookings 2003.

All other readings will be made available online. Students will be expected to come to class having read the material and being prepared to engage in the arguments that they present. Students will be alerted in advance to what readings are recommended rather than required, or are skim-worthy. It is imperative that students check their email regularly, as that is how class announcements will be made.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Three short (5-page) response papers: 15% each

- For three weeks of your choosing, write a discussion of how the political science theories that week apply to current events. You may choose to focus on one reading or multiple readings and how well (or poorly) the political science theories explain the developments in a contemporary political/policy debate. In doing so, you should demonstrate an understanding of the core arguments presented that week, and an ability to broaden the discussion to real-world examples. You *must* cite all sources used.

Midterm: 20%

Final exam: 25%

Attendance and participation: 10%

Papers shall be submitted by the start of class. Papers should be double-spaced in 12 point font with one-inch margins. Exams will be a combination of IDs and short essays, with a study guide distributed one week in advance.

Final Course Grading: The final grade for the course will be assigned based on the following scale:

A: 93+%	A-: 90-92%	B+: 87-89%
B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%	C+: 77-79%
C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%	D+: 67-69%
D: 63-66%	D-: 60-62%	F: > 60%

Policy Regarding Late Assignments: It is imperative that students turn in work at the specified deadlines. Failure to do so will result in a third letter grade reduction per day late unless you have received an extension in advance. Work will not be accepted at all more than one week late unless said extension was granted in advance. All students must sit for the final exam at the assigned day and time, with the only exception of university-approved absences.

All members of the academic community should be able to engage fully in the academic opportunities and services provided, regardless of disability status, and to that end accommodations to this course can be made if necessary. Please feel free to discuss with me any concerns you may have.

Statement on Academic Integrity: It is expected that all students will work in accordance with the student honor code. Thus, plagiarism, cheating, and receiving unauthorized assistance with the work in this course will not be tolerated. Should a student violate academic integrity in this class, the matter will be reported to the university administration. If you have questions about citations of sources, ask prior to submitting the given assignment.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1: Introduction

- *SRVW*, Chapter 1
- Dodd and Oppenheimer, “The House in a Time of Crisis,” in *Congress Reconsidered*, 2013
- Packer, “The Empty Chamber: Just How Broken is the Senate?” *New Yorker*, August 9, 2010
- Stein, “A Staff Survey Shows Just How Broken Congress Is,” *Vox*, August 8, 2017
- Binder, “Deal-making in a polarized Congress,” *The Washington Post*, Oct. 16, 2013
- Binder, “Three reasons you should expect congressional gridlock on gun control,” *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2018

Weeks 2-3: Origins and Development of Congress and the Constitution

- United States Constitution
- *The Federalist 10*, *The Federalist 51*
- *SRVW*, Chapter 2
- Binder, *Stalemate*, Chapters 1-2
- Toobin, “Our Broken Constitution,” *The New Yorker*, Dec. 9, 2013
- Schickler, Eric. 2005. “Institutional Development of Congress.” In *The Legislative Branch*, Edited by Paul J. Quirk and Sarah A. Binder, Oxford University Press.

Week 4: What Do Members Want and Why?

- *SRVW*, Chapter 4
- Mayhew, *Congress*, Chapter 1

- Prokop, “Study: Politicians listen to rich people, not you,” *Vox* 2015
- R. Douglas Arnold. “Can Inattentive Citizens Control Their Elected Representatives?” in *Congress Reconsidered*
- Carson and Jenkins. 2011. “Examining the Electoral Connection Across Time.” *Annual Review of Political Science*. 14:25-46.

Weeks 5-6: Congressional Elections

- *SRVW*, Chapter 3
- McCarty, “The Limits of Electoral and Legislative Reform...” *CA Law Review* 2011
- Prokop, “40 charts that explain money in politics,” *Vox* 2014
- Abramowitz et. al., “Don’t Blame Redistricting for Uncompetitive Elections,” *PS* 2006
- Hill, “Want to change Congress? Change who votes in ‘safe’ Republican or Democratic primaries,” *The Washington Post*, May 4, 2017
- Jacobson, Gary C. 1989. “Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946-1986.” *American Political Science Review* 83: 773-793.
- Cohn. “What to Keep in Mind When Thinking About the Midterms.” *New York Times Upshot* April 26, 2018

Midterm

Week 7: Congressional Committees

- *SRVW*, Chapter 8
- Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde, “Richard Fenno’s Theory of Congressional Committees and the Partisan Polarization of the House,” *Congress Reconsidered* (2013)
- Mayhew, *Congress*, Part 2
- Krehbiel, Shepsle, and Weingast. “Why Are Congressional Committees Powerful?” *Annual Political Science Review* 1987

Week 8: Leaders and Parties in Congress

- *SRVW*, Chapter 5
- Koger, “Filibustering and Parties in the Modern Senate,” in *Congress Reconsidered*

- Anderson, Sarah E., Daniel Butler, and Laurel Harbridge. 2016. “Legislative Institutions as a Source of Party Leaders’ Influence.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(3): 605-631.
- Krehbiel, Keith, “Where’s the Party?” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 23 (1993), pp. 235-266.
- Ansolabehere, Snyder, Stewart. 2001. “The Effects of Party and Preferences on Congressional Roll-Call Voting.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. 26(4): 533-572.
- Draper, “How Kevin McCarthy Wrangles the Tea Party in Washington,” *New York Times* July 13, 2011

Week 9: Interest Group Influence on Congress

- *SRVW*, Chapter 11
- Hall and Wayman, “Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees,” *American Political Science Review*, 1990
- Klein, “Corporations now spend more lobbying Congress than taxpayers spend funding Congress,” *Vox* 2015
- Ladd, “Don’t worry about special interests,” *Vox* 2015

Week 10: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock

- Binder, *Stalemate*, Chapters 3-4, 6
- Binder, *Polarized We Govern*, Brookings Institution 2014
- Koger, *Filibustering: A Political History of Obstruction in the House and Senate* (excerpt).
- Wawro and Schickler. “Legislative Obstruction.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2010
- Davidson Sorkin, “Gorsuch Wins, The Filibuster Loses,” *The New Yorker*, 2017

Week 11: Unorthodox Lawmaking

- *SRVW*, Chapter 7
- Taibbi, “Four Amendments and a Funeral,” *Rolling Stone*, 2005
- Gluck, O’Connell, and Po. “Unorthodox Lawmaking, Unorthodox Rulemaking”, *Columbia Law Review Symposium*

- Sinclair, “Unorthodox Lawmaking, Budget Bills, and Comprehensive Policy Making in the 1990s,” 2000 (working paper)
- Lizza, “Getting To Maybe: Inside the Gang of Eight’s immigration deal.” *The New Yorker* 2013

Week 12-13: Congressional Policymaking in the Separation of Powers System

- *SRVW*, Chapter 9-10, 12
- Mayhew, *Divided We Govern* (excerpt)
- Binder and Maltzman, “Advice and Consent,” in *Congress Reconsidered*
- CFR, *Judging Guantanamo: The Court, Congress, and the White House*, 2009
- Howell and Pevehouse, “When Congress Stops Wars,” *Foreign Affairs* 2007

Final Exam