



PSC 333: The U.S. Congress

209 Graham Building

Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:00-3:15

Spring 2016

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Office Hours: T 1:30 to 3:30, and by appt.

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Course Description

This course will examine the evolution and current place of the most disliked and misunderstood institution in the American political system: the U.S. Congress. The course is divided into four sections. First, we will discuss the "Two Congresses," which constitutes the theme of your primary textbook. Members of Congress must vote on legislation that affects the nation while serving local constituencies with interests as different as rural Mississippi is from Manhattan. As we will see, fulfilling both of these responsibilities is neither simple nor straightforward. Second, we will cover legislative process and organization. In this section of the course we will consider the roles of congressional leaders and parties, the importance of congressional committees, and the crucial functions and very different character of the rules in the House and Senate. Third, we will consider the institutions—the presidency, bureaucracy, interest groups, and courts—that help shape and constrain the behavior of Congress and individual legislators. Finally, we will discuss the electoral connection and analyze the process by which candidates for Congress emerge, raise money, plot strategy, get elected (or not), and reelected (or not).

While we will deal with these aspects of the Congress separately, it is important to keep in mind that the questions we ask are intertwined. While the institution is multi-faceted and legislators perform many seemingly divergent tasks, the different aspects of Congress combine to form a unified whole. Therefore, discussing the rules relates, directly or indirectly, to reelection and vice versa. Among the many questions we will consider: Would the Framers of the U.S. Constitution approve of the modern Congress? What are the competing centers of power and influence in Congress? What are the differences between the House and the Senate and to what varying substantive ends do these differences lead? How has increased partisan polarization influenced Congress? What is conditional party government, and what factors predict its emergence? How extensive is the incumbency advantage in congressional elections? Finally, does Congress deserve the public's disapproval—the public recently expressed greater support for the IRS, the DMV, hemorrhoids, and zombies—or are members of Congress rationally responding to the incentives we, the people, give them? We will read about, discuss, and contemplate political science research that touches on these and many more questions.



Course Goals

By the end of the semester, students should develop/improve important skills related to:

- organizing and writing a series of concise research papers;
- researching primary and secondary source materials for these papers;
- analyzing data drawn from a national survey to determine patterns in public opinion and attitudes about government in general and Congress in particular;
- appreciating the complexity of a job that requires its occupants to make laws that benefit the nation while simultaneously standing for reelection before often quite parochial constituents.

Course Requirements

If you are new to political science and/or have never taken PSC 100, American Politics, you should contemplate whether you are ready for this class. My assumption is that you already know—or can easily brush-up on—the fundamentals. These include the basic responsibilities of and constitutional differences between the House and Senate. See me if you have any questions about your ability to understand the advanced material you will be required to read, interpret, do research on, and write about.

- **Exams & In-Class Activities**

Grades for the course are based on several components. The first two consist of a midterm exam (March 4) and a final exam (May 6 at 12:00), each of which will account for 20% of the overall grade. Students will also attend class and participate in a series of in-class simulations of legislative behavior over the course of the semester. Participation and class activities combine for 10% of the overall grade. Reading quizzes given on randomly selected days will also constitute 10% of each student's overall grade.

You can make up the midterm exam ONLY if you provide me with advanced, written notice of a reasonable excuse (*e.g.*, extracurricular commitment, illness, family issue). Students who miss the midterm and do not notify me in advance will receive a non-negotiable zero. You CANNOT make up the final exam. Incompletes are not available except in *extraordinary*, well-documented circumstances.

- **Research Papers**

In class on Wednesday, January 13, you will be assigned the congressional district that you will research. I hand out your first paper topic Wednesday, January 27. The first two paper assignments will require you to collect and analyze various types of information about your assigned district. For example, students will research the demographic and political characteristics of their districts in order to explain how these factors influence representation. The first two paper assignments will require you to use this and other information to make and support arguments about constituency preferences.



The final two paper assignments will require that you analyze a national survey of political opinions and attitudes. These last paper assignments demand that you analyze and interpret survey data using a computer program (SPSS) available in the campus computer labs. Students with anxiety about computers or statistics should not worry – too much. I will provide instructions explaining how to use the computer program and the survey data. We will also have an orientation session in class on Monday, March 28. The challenge of these final two paper assignments will not be navigating the computer program and survey but, as with the first two assignments, making and supporting strong arguments that answer the assigned questions.

The usefulness of the skills related to doing well on these papers extends beyond pursuing a full-time job in politics. In a legal setting, lawyers must perform research and summarize their findings. In the business world, it is important to understand the attitudes and preferences of one's customers; analyzing surveys is, therefore, an essential part of marketing. Regardless of your career plans, analyzing data and reporting on them correctly and concisely are important *and marketable* skills to have when you reach the “real world.”

Each of the four paper assignments is worth 10 percent of the final grade. Thus, the paper assignments as a whole account for 40 percent of the grade. Students will have the opportunity to revise their first paper if they choose to do so. The grade on revisions is based on the quality of the responses to my comments. Therefore the grade on the optional revision can go up, down, or stay the same. Students are required to turn in their papers at the start of class on the due date noted in the course outline. If a paper is not turned in at the beginning of class, it will be considered late. For each 24-hour period from the start of class that a paper is late, the paper’s grade will be lowered by five points. *I will not accept any papers turned in more than three days after the original due date.*

• Attendance

Please understand that it will be impossible for you to do well in the course without coming to class. There will be numerous in-class assignments, including simulations of legislative behavior, that require your participation for a number of reasons. First, participation earns you credit toward your class participation grade. Coming to class and participating actively is a straightforward way to earn an “A” on this part of the overall grade. Second, the concepts we act out in the simulations and discuss afterward are crucial to your preparation for the midterm and final, and will also help you complete and understand the research papers. If your plan is irregular attendance, either because the material doesn’t particularly interest you, or because you have other obligations, do yourself a favor and think twice before taking this course.

• Required Reading

The following book is required for the course and is available at the university bookstore:

[D&O] Davidson, Roger, Walter Oleszek, and Frances E. Lee. 2011. *Congress and Its Members*, Thirteenth Edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.



I will also post numerous required readings to Canvas. Click on "Modules" and search for additional readings by date. *All readings in the text book and on Canvas are required.*

• Special Needs

If you have any special needs that will affect your ability to learn in this class, please inform me immediately and appropriate steps will be taken to assist you.

• Grading

The overall course grade will be determined as follows:

Assignments & participation	10%
Reading quizzes	10
Midterm exam	20
Final exam	20
Paper assignments	<u>40</u>
	100%

The exams and papers will be graded on a 100-point scale. When computing the final course grade, I will calculate the overall numerical averages and use the following table to convert these averages to letter grades:

Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades	Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades
A+	>=98	C	>=72, <78
A	>=92, <98	C-	>=70, <72
A-	>=90, <92	D+	>=68, <70
B+	>=88, <90	D	>=62, <68
B	>=82, <88	D-	>=60, <62
B-	>=80, <82	F	<60
C+	>=78, <80		

• Cheating & Plagiarism

The university's Academic Integrity Policy, which addresses the consequences of cheating and plagiarism, is available via the web at:

<http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/>

All work in the course is bound by the Academic Integrity Policy. In accordance with this policy, all paper assignments must include appropriate citations for any information drawn from outside sources. The citation style *you must follow* for this and all other political science



classes is either Turabian (Sciences System) or APSR. If you have questions about citation style, make sure to ask me or a Reference Librarian *before* turning in your papers, which all require proper citation. Jackson Library Citation Guides are here: <http://uncg.libguides.com/citation>. I will post more information about citation style on Blackboard.

Please understand that citing properly is a crucial aspect of this class. If you do not follow proper citation style, your grade will suffer. If you choose not to provide citations at all, you are guilty of plagiarism. Handing in someone else's words, ideas, or conclusions as if they were your own will trigger sanctions ranging from a zero on the assignment – your best case scenario – to more dire consequences.

• Classroom Demeanor

Come to class on time. *Turn off and put away* cell phones and anything else that makes annoying noises. And note this helpful pet-peve alert: *plan on remaining in class the full 75 minutes*. In other words, do what you have to do so that you don't have to leave during class without good reason. Sauntering in and out of class is disruptive to other students and disrespectful to me.

Concerning laptops & tablets: The only reason to bring a laptop or tablet to this class is to take notes. All students who use laptops or tablets must sit in the first row of the classroom. Because there are only a couple of available electrical outlets, students using these devices should make sure the batteries are charged sufficiently to last the full class period.

• Communicating with the Instructor

I encourage you to make use of my office hours. You do not need an appointment to come talk to me during these designated time periods. Simply show up at my office (Curry 327) and come in or wait your turn if there is a line. I'm more than happy to answer questions about any aspect of the course. If you cannot make my office hours because of other obligations, I am happy to schedule appointments with you at a mutually convenient time. I schedule appointments via email.

Email etiquette: When emailing me to set up an appointment, please provide your full name, the course number (PSC 333), and the days and times you have available to see me. Given the amount of email I receive from students in all my classes, please include an informative subject line (e.g., "Question about PSC 333" or "Appointment request for PSC 333"). Also, please do me the courtesy, along with anyone else with whom you enjoy a professional relationship, of including a salutation in your email. Appropriate salutations include "Professor Holian", "Dr. Holian", and "Mr. Holian"; inappropriate salutations include "Hey", "Hi", and nothing at all.

I do not respond to unprofessional emails.



- *Deus ex machina*

In literature, the theater—and this course—a *deus ex machina* is any unlikely occurrence or device that magically resolves the difficulties or the seeming hopelessness of the plot—or, in our case, the semester. All the bewildering, inexplicable decisions leading to a story’s climax are wiped away by an improbable intervention at the last moment. If you’ve ever read a book in which the heroine realizes that the horrors visited upon her were all just a dream, or watched a play in which the hero, facing disaster, is saved just before the curtain falls by some unlikely contrivance of the playwright, you’re familiar with this literary gimmick. There will be no such last-second interventions in this class. My responsibilities to you include making my expectations transparent and treating you—and everyone else in the class—fairly. My responsibilities do not include wiping away your bewildering, inexplicable decisions with, for example, last-second offers of extra credit available only to you. Such behavior on my part would be unfair to others in the class who worked hard enough to meet or exceed my expectations. There are no exceptions to this policy. Don’t ask for one.

Course Outline

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
January 11	Introduction to the Course	Syllabus	Member preferences due
January 13	Congress Today	Canvas	Members assigned
January 18	No Class: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday		
January 20	I. The Two Congresses A. The Evolution of Congress	D&O, chs. 1 & 2	
January 25 January 27	B. Legislators’ Goals & Responsibilities	D&O, ch. 5 Canvas	Paper #1 assigned
February 1 February 3 <u>February 8</u>	II. Organization & Process A. Leaders & Parties	D&O, ch. 6 Canvas	<u>PAPER #1 DUE</u>
February 10 February 15	B. Congressional Committees	D&O, ch. 7 Canvas	
February 17 February 22	C. Legislative Process	D&O, ch. 8 D&O, ch. 9 & Canvas	



<u>February 24</u> February 29	D. The Curious Case of the U.S. Senate	Canvas Canvas	<u>REVISION DUE</u> <i>(optional)</i>
March 2	MIDTERM		
March 7 March 9	No Class: Spring Break		
March 14 March 16	III. Constraints on Congress A. The Presidency	D&O, chs. 10 & 15 Canvas	Paper #2 assigned
<i>Tuesday,</i> <i>March 15</i>	 <i>North Carolina Primary Election Day</i> 		
March 21	B. The Bureaucracy	D&O, ch. 11	
<u>March 23</u>	C. Interest Groups	D&O, ch. 13	<u>PAPER #2 DUE</u>
March 28	Computer and data set instruction. (Crucial for completing final two paper assignments.)		Paper #3 assigned
March 30	C. Interest Groups, continued	Canvas	
April 4	D. Budgets and Domestic Policy	D&O, ch. 14	
<u>April 6</u>	E. The Courts	Canvas	<u>PAPER #3 DUE</u>
April 11 April 13 April 18 April 20 <u>April 25</u>	IV. The Electoral Connection	D&O, chs. 3 to 5 Canvas Canvas Canvas	Paper #4 assigned <u>PAPER #4 DUE</u>
April 27	Reading Day In the spirit of the day and to prepare for the final, read D&O, ch. 16.		
May 4	FINAL (12:00 to 3:00)		