Rollins College

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Syllabus for Congress

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POLITICAL SCIENCE 381: CONGRESS AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the policy process by studying the U.S. Congress. We will confront a variety of questions including: How does contemporary political science explain and understand Congress? How and by whom is legislation shaped? What external forces (elections, interest groups, the public, the presidency, for example) shape political decision-making within Congress? How is Congress organized and how well-suited is that organization to efficient and effective policy making? How well does the institution collectively (or its members individually) meet democratic standards of leadership, accountability, and representation? What reforms are needed if any, and with what effect? In short, the basic aim will be to introduce you to the complexity of congressional policy making and to stimulate a reflective, critical approach to the institution. What is good or bad about Congress and the policies it produces? How might it be improved? How has Congress changed through history? Why did it change the way it did? Why does Congress and its individual members behave as they do?

COURSE GRADE:
Midterm: 25%
Final Exam: 25%
Outlines & Bibliographies 5% each
Essays 15% each
Attendance and Participation: 10%

ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION: You are required to attend class. I will take attendance on a regular basis. If you come late, please see me after class. While regular attendance is expected, by itself it does not guarantee a perfect participation grade. Discussion is a central component of this class. You should come to each class meeting prepared to talk about the arguments made by the section’s authors and about your response to them. A guide to my expectations for class participation can be found at the end of the syllabus.

LATE PAPERS: After the first 24 hours after a deadline, late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter per day. No late papers will be accepted after the class following a deadline.

READINGS: Your most important responsibility in the course will be the careful and reflective reading of the assignments listed on the outline that follows. Throughout the term, we will also want to pay close attention to the activities of the current president and congress. Such activities will offer useful points of reference in lecture and should inform a number of discussions. You should, therefore, stay abreast of such matters by reading a good national newspaper or newsmagazine.
EXAM: There will be one midterm and a final, all will be taken in class. The midterm will be given on **February 23**.

ESSAYS: Students will write two essays of approximately 10-15 pages. We will hold a library orientation in early October. The first essay will investigate one Senate or two House races occurring this fall; students must select the race from a list provided by me on **January 26**. A bibliography and a brief outline must be submitted by **February 15**. Submit your essay on **March 23**.

These essays must include:

- Background information on the state or district, including political and demographic data.
- Background information on the candidates. If one of the candidates is an incumbent, please assess his/her strength in the constituency.
- A discussion of the major issues and events of the campaign.
- The primary sources of campaign funding for the candidates.
- The roles played by outside actors, such as interest groups and party committees.
- Assessments of the campaign commercials aired by the candidates (often available on the Web) and of the media coverage of the campaign.
- A discussion of polling data on the race.
- Assessments of the relevant importance of national and local factors.

The second essay will discuss the passage of a major piece of legislation passed (or defeated) during the last several decades. Topics must be picked in consultation with me by **February 2**. A bibliography and a brief outline must be submitted by **March 6**. Submit your essay on **April 27**.

These essays must include:

- The subject matter of the legislation.
- The policy discussions that gave rise to the legislation.
- Any previous laws on the same subject.
- The primary sponsors of the legislation.
- The roles played by party and committee leaders, if any.
- The roles played by the president and other executive branch officials, if any.
- Media coverage of the legislative process, if any.
- How the legislation passed through committee.
- Any activity on the floors of the House and Senate.
- Any activity in conference committee.
- Whether the president considered vetoing the legislation – if he did, whether there was an effort to override the veto.
- An assessment of what this process tells us about how Congress functions.
Required Books:

Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer. Congress Reconsidered (9th edition)
Roger Davidson, Walter Oleszek and Frances Lee, Congress and Its Members (12th edition)
Barbara Sinclair. Unorthodox Lawmaking (3rd edition)
Paul Herrnson, Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington (5th edition)
Costas Panagopoulos and Joshua Schank. All Roads Lead to Congress: The $300 Billion Fight Over Highway Funding.

Note: The dates listed below are for your convenience only. The instructor reserves the right to change the class schedule as needed.
Readings:

*Introduction: Congress as an Institution (January 12-14)*

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, chs. 1-2

(available on-line at [http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html](http://memory.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html))

*Congress Today (January 19-21)*

Sinclair, ch. 1

Barbara Sinclair, "The New World of U.S. Senators.” In Dodd and Oppenheimer.

Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer, “Upheaval in the House: Partisan Alternation and Institutional Adaptation.” In Dodd and Oppenheimer.

Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, “Is Congress Still a Broken Branch?” In Dodd and Oppenheimer.

*Congressional Elections: The Emergence of Candidates (January 26-28)*

Herrnson, chs. 1-2

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, chs. 3-4

*Congressional Elections: Voters and Campaigns (February 2-9)*

Herrnson, chs. 3-9 & 11


*Congressional Elections: How Elections Shape Congress (February 11-18)*

Herrnson, ch. 10

Tracy Sulkin, “Promises Made, Promises Kept.” In Dodd & Oppenheimer


**MIDTERM: February 23**

*Congress and the Public, Organized and Otherwise (February 25-March 2).*

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, chs. 5 & 13


*Parties and Party Leaders. (March 4-25)*

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, ch. 6

Sinclair, ch. 6

Panagopoulos and Schank, ch. 1

Eric Schickler and Kathryn Pearson. “The Transition to Democratic Leadership in a Polarized House.” In Dodd and Oppenheimer

Steven Smith and Gerald Gamm "The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress." In Dodd and Oppenheimer.


*The Committee System (March 30)*

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, ch. 7


Panagopoulos and Schank, ch. 2
The Floor (April 1-6)

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, chs. 8-9

Sinclair, chs. 2-5

Panagopoulos and Schank, chs. 3-6

Making Public Policy (April 8-15)

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, chs. 14-15

Sinclair, chs. 7-12


Congress and the Executive and Judicial Branches (April 20)

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, chs. 10-12


Congress and Political Change. (April 22-27)

Davidson Oleszek & Lee, ch. 15

Sinclair, ch. 13

Joseph Cooper. "From Congressional to Presidential Preeminence: Power and Politics in Late Nineteenth Century America and Today.” In Dodd and Oppenheimer.

Daniel Lipinski. “Congressional Careers From The Inside: A Political Scientist as Congressman.” In Dodd and Oppenheimer.

# Expectations for Class Participation

## A Daily Guide

<table>
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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
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| A / A-  | Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed readings exceptionally well, relating it to other readings, course material, discussions, experiences, etc.  
|         | Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of reading material.                                                                            |
|         | Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds thoughtfully to other students’ comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material, etc.  
|         | Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement.                                                                                             |
| B+ / B  | Demonstrates good preparation: knows reading facts well, has thought through implications of them.                                          
|         | Offers interpretations and analysis of reading material (more than just facts) to class.                                                    
|         | Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students’ points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion. 
|         | Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.                                                                                             |
| B- / C+ | Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic reading facts, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them.          
|         | Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from reading), without elaboration or very infrequently.                                 
|         | Does not offer to contribute to discussion, but contributes to a moderate degree when called on.                                             
|         | Demonstrates sporadic involvement.                                                                                                       |
| C / D   | Present.                                                                                                                                
|         | Tries to respond when called, but does not offer much.                                                                                   
|         | Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.                                                                                   |
| F       | Absent.                                                                                                                                  |