

Congress and Legislative Policy

PS 4140

Instructor: L. Marvin Overby

Office: 305 Professional Building
Voice: 882.2130; e-mail: overby@missouri.edu

Teaching Assistant: Agnes Simon

Office: 206 Professional Building
Voice: 884.2691; e-mail: asc37@mizzou.edu

Course Description

This course focuses on the United States Congress ... a unique, important, oft vilified, and usually misunderstood institution. In attempting to understand why the modern Congress acts (or, often, fails to act) as it does, we will explore a series of related topics. After taking an overview of the contemporary institution and placing it in both theoretical and historical context, we will examine the dynamics and implications of congressional elections, internal congressional organization and operations (focusing on committees and party leaders), congressional policy making, the implications of bicameralism, and the interaction of the Congress with other national political actors and institutions. You should end the semester with both a better understanding of and appreciation for this uniquely American legislature.

Texts (all required)

Davidson, Roger H. and Walter J. Oleszek. 2006. *Congress and Its Members*. Washington: CQ Press. Tenth edition.

Dodd, Lawrence C. and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. 2005. *Congress Reconsidered*. Washington: CQ Press. Eighth edition.

Jacobson, Gary C. 2004. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. New York: Longman. Sixth edition.

Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sinclair, Barbara. 2000. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*. Washington: CQ Press. Second edition.

Grading

After taking class participation into account, I will calculate your semester grades as follows:

Weekly quiz average = 25%

Essay assignment = 15%

Midterm examination = 30%

Final examination = 30%

You may check your grades whenever you like via the Blackboard website (blackboard.missouri.edu).

Unless otherwise noted, the weekly quizzes will be given at the end of Friday's class each week; you will be responsible for all course materials covered that week (in readings, in lectures, in discussions). The quizzes are designed to give you an added incentive to stay current with the readings, to pay close attention in class, and to aid you in preparation for the examinations. I will drop your three lowest quiz grades before computing your quiz average. Missed quizzes will be graded as a 0 unless you have a valid (and documented) excuse; missed quizzes may not be made up. Each quiz will contain an extra credit

question drawn from current events. The first quiz will be given on **September 1st**.

The essay assignment will address a topic assigned in class. It will be due *by the beginning of class* on **November 6th** (the assignment will be made, and posted on the Blackboard site, the previous week). Papers should be approximately five pages in length. They *must* be typed, double-spaced, and use reasonable (*e.g.*, one inch) margins. Since you will be graded on both style and substance, you should pay close attention to matters of composition, and your papers should be free of grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Papers submitted after the assigned deadline will be reduced one letter grade for each day (or partial day) they are late. (N.B. Things get lost. You are *required* to keep copies of your papers in case there is any question concerning whether or not an assignment has been turned in.)

The two examinations will consist primarily of essay and identification questions. The final will be comprehensive. The midterm will be held in class on **Friday, October 13th**; the final will be held from 1:00-3:00 p.m. on **Thursday, December 14th**. **You must bring blank blue books for both examinations.**

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct — defined as appropriating the words, ideas, or work of others and using them as your own through cheating or plagiarism — is something that I will not tolerate. I will prosecute cases of suspected academic misconduct to the fullest extent of University policy, and that can mean expulsion from the University. I advise you to consult relevant sections of the *M Book* for further information.

Attendance, Policies, etc.

While attendance is not obligatory, you will get much more out of this course (including, I would wager, a higher grade) if you attend class regularly, do the week's reading in advance of class, participate in class discussions, and pay attention to both the instructor and your classmates.

Since this class is being coordinated through Blackboard, you should check the class website regularly (*i.e.*, at least once a week) for announcements. You should feel free to use the discussion board feature in Blackboard to post any questions you may have about what we have covered in the course, or to make comments about course-related topics.

Turn off your cell phones and/or pagers *before* class begins. If you come to class late, or plan to leave early, please sit towards the back of the classroom to minimize distractions to other students.

If you have a disability and need academic accommodations, it is your responsibility to notify me as soon as possible. Please see me privately after class within the first two weeks of the course. You must also register with the Office of Disability Services, especially if you are requesting any kind of class or testing accommodations. I will make every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate your needs.

The following rules apply for grade appeals:

- a) Generally speaking, grades must be appealed within a week of an assignment's return; after that time, I reserve the right to refuse to reconsider a grade.
- b) Unless otherwise noted, all grade appeals must go through the TA; I will become involved only if she cannot resolve the issue.
- c) On appeal, a grade may go down as well as up. If, after further review, the TA or I decide

that an assignment deserves a *lower* grade than we originally assigned it, we will deduct points.

- d) Grades on quizzes may be appealed verbally. However, grades on papers and tests must be appealed in writing, and the written appeal must spell out *in detail* why a higher grade is warranted.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Week 1 (August 21st - 25th) — Administrivia and Introduction

Themes: Theoretical background

Readings: Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. xxi-xxx and 55-75

Week 2 (August 28th - September 1st) — Introduction, continued

Themes: Historical overview

The “two Congresses”

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapters 1 and 2

N.B.: First quiz given at end of class on Friday, September 1st.

Week 3 (September 4th - 8th) — Congressional Elections I

Themes: Social and political contexts

Recruitment and emergence

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 3; Jacobson, chapters 1-3

Week 4 (September 11th -15th) — Congressional Elections II

Themes: Campaigns, voters, and “mother’s milk”

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 4; Jacobson, chapters 4 and 5; Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. 77-134

Week 5 (September 18th -22nd) — Congressional Elections III

Themes: Local politics, national pulses

Readings: Jacobson, chapter 6; Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. 135-157

Week 6 (September 25th -29th) — Electoral Connection I

Themes: Electoral politics and representative government

Individual rewards v. collective responsibilities

Readings: Mayhew, all

Week 7 (October 2nd - 6th) — Electoral Connection II

Themes: Mayhew revisited

Readings: Jacobson, chapter 7; Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 5; Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. 159-179

Week 8 (October 9th - 13th) — Midterm Examination

Monday: Catch-up

Wednesday: Review

Friday: Midterm Examination (bring blue books)

N. B.: No quiz during week 8.

Week 9 (October 16th - 20th) — Inside Congress I

Themes: Committees and subcommittees in Congress

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 7; Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. 249-295

Week 10 (October 23rd - 27th) — Inside Congress II

Themes: Parties in Congress

Congressional leadership

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 6; Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. 181-248

Week 11 (October 30th - November 3rd) — Dance of Legislation I

Themes: How a bill become a law ... in theory

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapters 8 and 9

N. B.: Essay assignment posted on blackboard by Monday, October 30th.

Week 12 (November 6th -10th) — Dance of Legislation II

Themes: How a bill becomes a law ... in practice

Readings: Sinclair, all

N. B.: Essay assignment due *at beginning of class* on November 6th.

Week 13 (November 13th -17th) — Congress in the Political System I

Themes: Congress and organized interests

Influence or access

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 13

Week 14 (November 20th - 22nd) — **No class — Thanksgiving Recess**

Week 15 (November 27th - December 1st) — Congress in the Political System II

Themes: Congress and bureaucracy

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 11

Week 16 (December 4th - 8th) — Congress in the Political System III

Themes: Congress, presidents, and the presidency

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, chapter 10; Dodd and Oppenheimer, pp. 319-393

Final Examination — Thursday, December 14th, 1:00-3:00 p.m. (bring blue books)