

Political Science 3041: The American Congress
Spring 2011
Tuesday/Thursday, 8:00 – 9:15 am
HLMS 199

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Description

This course provides a broad survey of the legislative branch of American government. We will focus on the constitutional and historical context of the modern Congress, including tension between Congress' competing representation and lawmaking functions. We will also examine the specifics of the representation and lawmaking processes. Here we will not only ask about the "nuts and bolts" of these processes, but also why the rules are designed as they are and why various members act as they do.

Course Reading

There are two required books, and additional required readings available online as listed on the syllabus.

Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, **Congress and Its Members**, 12th ed. CQ Press 2010

Walter Oleszek, **Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process**, 8th ed. CQ Press, 2011

Students should expect additional reading assignments as the semester progresses, particularly as new developments in Congress occur. It is expected that students will keep abreast of congressional affairs in the daily news, and a long list of internet sources on Congress is available on the course blackboard.

Course Requirements

2 take-home quizzes (10% each)	20%
Quiz 1 distributed on Feb. 1 st , due in class on Feb 8 th	
Quiz 2 distributed on Mar 29 th , due in class on Apr 5 th	
Research portfolio (consisting of 4 assignments), due Apr 14 th	30%
In-class midterm exam, Feb. 24 th	25%
Final exam (Mon, May 2 nd , 7:30 pm – 10:00 pm)	25%

Class Policies & Expectations

- **Policy on Use of Electronic Devices in Class:** Laptop computers can be very distracting to both the users and other students. Many students complain every semester when those around them are using their computers for non-class purposes. In order to support a quality classroom experience for all, the use of electronic devices, including laptops, for non-class-related purposes is prohibited. A failure to comply with the restrictions on laptop use can result in a student losing the privilege of using the laptop in class for the remainder of the semester.
- **Attend class, pay attention, do the readings and be open-minded.** The class is designed to build on both lecture and reading materials; exams will cover both, and doing one is not a substitute for the other.
- **Contact the course instructor and/or TA with any questions or concerns.** Individual meetings are valuable to all concerned. It is highly recommended that you meet one-on-one at some point during the semester to discuss progress on the required research portfolio.
- **Academic honesty.** All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Information on the Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/>

Students with Disabilities

Any student eligible for and needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a disability should let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met.

Information on Disability Services: <http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices>

Religious Observances

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Let me know as soon as possible any schedule conflicts due to religious observances. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_religh.html

Behavioral Standards

As noted above, both students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities. See university policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Discrimination & Harassment

The University of Colorado at Boulder policies on Discrimination and Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Amorous Relationships (found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/discrimination.html>) apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>.

PSCI 3041, The American Congress

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

I. Introduction to the Study of Congress

Jan 11 Course introduction

Jan 13 Dual roles of Congress: representation & lawmaking

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 1
- The U.S. Constitution, available at <http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>

Jan 18 Studying Congress

II. Constitutional Roots and Historic Development

Jan 20 Constitutional history & framework

Jan 25

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 2

Jan 27 Congressional history & development

Feb 1

Take-home quiz distributed

- Oleszek, Chap. 1
- Nelson Polsby, "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives, first published in *American Political Science Review* Vol. 62, No. 1 (Mar. 1968), available at http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=nelson_polsby
- Scan through the many links on "House History," made available by the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives at http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/house_history/index.html – especially the "House Historical Timeline" and "House Firsts and Milestones"
- Read the U.S. Senate "Origins and Development" essay, from the U.S. Senate Historical Office, available at http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Origins_Development.htm

III. Congress, Representation and Elections

Feb 3 Representation & congressional apportionment

Feb 8

Take home quiz due

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 3
- Try out the "Redistricting Game" from the USC Annenberg Center, available at <http://www.redistrictinggame.org/index.php?pg=resourceguide>

Feb 10 Congressional elections & incumbency

Feb 15

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 4

Feb 17 Financing congressional campaigns

Feb 22 Hill styles and home styles

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 5

Feb 24 **MIDTERM EXAM**

IV. The Organization of Congress

Mar 1 Leaders and parties

Mar 3

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 6

Mar 8 Committees in Congress

Mar 10

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 7

V. Congress and Lawmaking

Mar 15 Overview of the lawmaking process

- Oleszek, Chap. 3

Mar 17 Rules & procedures

- Davidson, Oleszek & Lee, Chap. 8

SPRING BREAK

Mar 29 House lawmaking procedures

Take-home quiz distributed

Mar 31

- Oleszek, Chaps. 4 & 5

Apr 5 Senate lawmaking procedures

Take-home quiz due

Apr 7

- Oleszek, Chaps. 6 & 7

Apr 12 Resolving House-Senate differences

- Oleszek, Chap 8

V. Congress in the American Political System

Apr 14 Congress, the president and administration

Research portfolio due

Apr 19

- Davidson & Oleszek, Chap. 10 & 11
- Oleszek, Chap. 9

Apr 21 Congress and the courts

- Davidson & Oleszek, Chap. 12

Apr 26 Congress and organized interests

- Davidson & Oleszek, Chap. 13

Apr 28 Congressional budget process and domestic policy

Oleszek, Chap. 2

Davidson & Oleszek, Chap. 14

FINAL EXAM: Mon, May 2nd, 7:30 pm – 10:00 pm

Congressional Research Portfolio

The U.S. Congress holds a critically important position in American public decision making. The make-up, functioning and decisions of the U.S. Congress matter – a lot. The intent of this set of assignments is to give students the opportunity to learn about, use and interpret publicly available information on Congress.

Four basic issues will be examined:

- A. Members, districts and representation
- B. Funding campaigns
- C. Member voting decisions
- D. Legislative case study

Each is to be the subject of a separate short paper. The research portfolio, consisting of the four short research papers, is due in class on Thursday, 14 April. Portfolios will be graded on research (demonstrating that all relevant information was located and used); analysis (appropriately interpreting the information and developing an argument using that information); and presentation (paying attention to the details of careful writing, including style and editing for errors).

There are many sources of information on Congress, individual members of Congress, law making and other related concerns. Many of these information sources are listed with links in a document available on the course Blackboard: “Resources for Researching Congress.” This is a good place to start for tracking down information needed to complete the portfolio assignments, but you are certainly not limited to these sources.

A. Members, Districts and Representation

Members of Congress are elected to represent citizens, and are accountable to their constituents in making policy decisions. This assignment requires your assessment of both district and member characteristics before discussing issues of representation. You may select any House district and member elected from that district so long as the member has served that district at least one full term in office prior to the 112th Congress.

1. Characteristics of the congressional district. Review major economic interests, social composition of the constituency and the political and ideological character of the district, including:

- a) geographic location and features of the district
- b) location of large cities and economic regions
- c) racial, ethnic, religious and other demographic blocs politically relevant in the district
- d) major industries
- e) major occupations of the residents, including education and income levels
- f) district party composition and recent electoral history
- g) other relevant features of the district and/or constituency

2. Profile of the incumbent U.S. House member. Overview of the incumbent’s personal and professional history as well as their positions and achievements within the House, including:

- a) incumbent’s party affiliation, when was s/he first elected to the House, and what was her or his political background prior to be elected to the House?
- b) incumbent’s personal background, including education, profession, family and other relevant information
- c) incumbent’s congressional history, including committee assignments, caucus affiliations, positions of authority in the House, and legislative interests and sponsorships.

- d) any other information of relevance regarding the incumbent and the incumbent's political and policy positions.

3. Competing models of representation. In deciding whether to follow the delegate or trustee model of representation, a member of Congress considers many factors, such as public opinion, party politics, the demographic and economic characteristics of the district, and the member's own political ideology and personal values, among others. For each issue listed here, decide whether the member you have profiled would be likely to adopt a delegate or trustee model of representation. Be sure to explain your position in each case:

- a) foreign policy
- b) gay marriage
- c) federal highway construction funds
- d) Social Security
- e) identify an issue on which the incumbent would likely vote according to the delegate model of representation and an issue on which he or she would likely follow the trustee model

B. Funding Campaigns

The readings in Davidson, Oleszek & Lee suggest a number of (sometimes contradictory) ideas about how various groups decide to contribute money to members of Congress and congressional candidates. In this assignment you will examine the sources of funding for 2010 U.S. Senate campaigns. You should draw on the Davidson, Oleszek & Lee text to identify interesting issues of discussion in reviewing campaign funding ("Campaign Resources" in the chapter on *Making It: The Electoral Game*, and the chapter on *Congress and Organized Interests*).

1. Senate campaign descriptions: Choose three current members of the U.S. Senate who were elected in 2010 and gather some basic information about those members, their top election competitors and their states. You'll want to know things like how long the member has been in the Senate, party affiliation, what region of the country each is from, population (large vs. small state), and other information that seems particularly relevant. This should be a brief overview of the Senators (and their competitors and campaigns) – approximately one paragraph for each.

2. Sources of campaign financing. Discuss and compare sources and amounts of funding for each of the three campaigns, for both winners and competitors – including PAC contributions, individual contributions and candidate self-financing. Evaluate contributors, industry, sectors, PACs, geography, outside spending and other data – providing some summary discussion under each of these categories as well as specific examples for each of the three Senate campaigns. Note that all of this information is available from the Center for Responsive Politics (<http://www.opensecrets.org/>). For comparison purposes, you might want to provide a summary table that places data for each of the three campaigns side-by-side.

3. Evaluating campaign financing and spending. How much was spent by the two candidates in each of the three contests under examination? To what extent do the amounts collected and spent by the various candidates match your expectations? Explain. Be sure to discuss your expectations, which might include: the role of money in "buying" influence, incumbency, party affiliation of the candidate and the electorate, and other factors. To the extent that the election outcomes might have differed from your expectations, what additional conclusions and/or questions could be raised with respect to funding campaigns?

C. Member Voting Decisions

Members of Congress make a number of crucial policy decisions at various points in the legislative process – drafting bills, deliberating in committee, etc. No decision is more visible or consequential for the member than the roll call vote on the floor. Davidson, Oleszek & Lee describe the varied influences on members' roll call decisions (see the Chapter on *Deliberation in Congress*, especially the section on "Determinants of Voting"), and they also describe interest group roll-call "ratings" and floor-vote lobbying of individual members (see the chapter on *Congress and Organized Interests*, especially the section on "Groups and the Electoral Connection"). Although Davidson, Oleszek & Lee portray party affiliation and constituency considerations as crucially important in voting, there is evidence that group attention is important, too: one member commented on the roll-call scores by saying that "You'll hear this as you walk into the chamber: 'This is going to be a scored vote. The environmentalists are going to score this vote, or the AFL-CIO is going to score this vote.'" In this assignment, you will consider members' vote decisions and the influence that interest groups may have on those decisions.

After reviewing Davidson, Oleszek & Lee's description of roll-call scores, choose three different interest groups that rate members on the basis of voting. Some examples of groups that rate members of Congress based on roll-call voting records are listed in the document available on the course Blackboard: "Resources for Researching Congress" (look under the "Interest Group Ratings of Congressional Members" section -- note that you are not limited to the interest group scores listed here). Obtain information on how the groups choose roll call votes to score and which roll calls were scored in the most recent year available. Then, peruse the scores from the most recent year available. While looking at the scores, note whether the scores seem to cluster at extreme values (the numbers represent % agreement with the group), near the middle, or whether they are dispersed across the spectrum. Note the scores of some members with whom you are familiar – are you surprised by their scores, or do they fit your expectations?

When you have gathered all of the needed information about voting scores for your groups, think back to the original question about voting and groups' influence. Discuss the following:

- a) Briefly summarize Davidson, Oleszek & Lee's arguments about voting, and offer some thoughts of your own on how much influence interest groups might have and why they would or would not have influence.
- b) Describe the groups you chose, their rating process, and the contour of their ratings in the most recent year. Is the group doing well when you look at the scores overall? Are members sharply divided over that group's issue? Or are the members fairly clustered around a moderate position on the issue?
- c) Discuss what your observations suggest to you about how groups influence voting. If the ratings are high or low overall – or if particular kinds of members vary from the average – does this finding suggest anything to you about how successful the group is? Or do you think that other factors (party, constituency) still appear to be most important? What are the limitations of drawing conclusions from the patterns of the scores about whether group tactics are successful?

D. Legislative Case Study

You will be doing a legislative case study, focusing on a public law of interest to you enacted sometime in the last three Congresses – 109th (2005-06), 110th (2007-08), or 111th (2009-10).

Using Thomas, the Library of Congress legislative database (<http://thomas.loc.gov/>), search the public laws enacted by Congress. Select a law that looks substantial and interesting. You might want to pick a law that got press coverage. Though there are many sources of information for the details of legislation (including Thomas), it will be easier to write about a legislative issue if you can find some newspaper or other articles

that put the bill in a broader context. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance in selecting an appropriate public law. Be sure to document your research steps and information sources.

1. Public law summary: Start your legislative case study with a summary of the contents of the public law, including:

- a) the public law number, title, and brief description of the purpose;
- b) a brief description and/or listing of the major titles and sections contained with the law;
- c) approximate page length of the entire public law;
- d) and a listing of the titles (by title number and subject) of the *United States Code (USC)* amended by this public law.

Note that many public laws are quite lengthy – some exceeding 1,000 pages. If this is the case for the law you have chosen to study, then summarize the overall contents and list only the most important sections.

2. Congress as an institution: Was the bill submitted in both the House and the Senate? To which committee(s) and subcommittee(s) was the bill referred? Were hearings held? Did any procedural rules affect the bill's development or fate? Did the bill survive in both chambers? Were the two versions identical, and if not, was it referred to a conference committee? For all of these questions, ask "why?" and "so what?"

3. Congress as a collection of politicians: Who introduced the bill? Why? (Consider committee membership, party, geographic region, constituency interests, the members personal interests.) Did that member find any cosponsors, either at the outset or as the legislation made its way through the process? Was the bill partisan, or bipartisan? If hearings were held, who did the supporters and opponents bring in to testify? If the bill came to vote(s) who voted how? Again, why and so what?

4. Congress as a governing legislature: Look at the legislative *process* again, more closely, and look for clues. Is the coalition of cosponsors a standard grouping of members, or an unusual one? What is the basis for their alliance? Is this bill a competitor with an alternative bill sponsored by a competing alliance? What governmental agencies -- and interest groups -- sent representatives to testify at the hearing(s)? What else relevant was going on as the bill went through the process? Again, why and so what?

5. Presidential action. Obtain a copy of the president's statement, if any, and summarize the comments made upon signing the bill into law. (Presidential documents are available through the Government Printing Office at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wcomp/index.html>.) If the bill was vetoed, describe those steps and any related presidential comments.