

PSCI 3041: The American Congress

Spring 2020 • Tue/Thu 8:00-9:15 am • HLMS 267

Professor: Nancy Billica

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:30-10:30 am; 2:30-3:30 pm | Thursdays 9:30-10:30 am; 1:00-2:30 pm

COURSE 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, as well as evaluation of the contemporary institution. What is working, what is not, and why? 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.

How are laws really made today? How do legislative rules affect policy outcomes? Why is Congress so unpopular today? What legislative reforms would help “fix” Congress? Where does money matter in Congress? The goal of this course is to help us come to a deeper understanding of the complexities of congressional politics beyond the superficial coverage they get in the media and how they apply to modern American politics today.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- gain knowledge of the constitutional powers of Congress, the evolution of those powers over time, and how the power of Congress is shaped by other actors and forces in the political system.
- learn about the dual and competing roles of representation and lawmaking, both in theory and in contemporary practice.
- conduct primary resource research on Congress, including investigation of: individual members and their roles and responsibilities; the funding of congressional campaigns; and legislative proposals and processes.
- practice critical thinking, analytical discussion, and writing skills.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE ASSESSMENT & ASSIGNMENTS

Date Due	Assignments	Grading
Thurs, Feb 20	Assignment A: Analysis of representation & congressional elections. Guidelines on Canvas, and due to Canvas before class.	20%
Thurs, Mar 5	In-class midterm exam; review sheet to Canvas 1 week prior	25%
Tues, Mar 17	Assignment B: The power of the purse. Guidelines on Canvas, and due to Canvas before class.	5%
Thurs, Apr 16	Assignment C: Congressional decisions & public law analysis. Guidelines on Canvas, and due to Canvas before class.	20%
Sat, May 2, 11:59 pm	Take-home final assignment, two parts. Instructions for the first part assume semester-long review of current developments in Congress, with specific requirements for summary and discussion available on Canvas early in the semester. Requirements for the second part, a final essay, posted to Canvas one week before the due date.	30%

COURSE READINGS

Readings are drawn from two required books, and additional selections as listed on the class schedule.

- Roger Davidson *et al.*, *Congress and Its Members* (CQ Press, 17th or 16th edition). Henceforth referred to as *CAIM*.
- Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer, eds., *Congress Reconsidered* (CQ Press, 11th edition, 2017). Henceforth referred to as *CR 2017*. Note that earlier editions of this text do not include the specific readings assigned for this class. Thus, you should be using the 11th edition.

RESEARCH & WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignments will involve use of a variety of source materials for examining key questions related to the US Congress. Goals: To guide and motivate individual research and investigation; to stimulate critical thinking and writing; and to spark class discussion and learning from shared findings.

Student research will be the subject of in-class discussion (be prepared to share what you are finding) as well as in-depth individual inquiry. The writing assignments focus on different questions involving the powers and responsibilities of Congress, including both representation and lawmaking. Assignment A focuses on campaign and election issues (choice of several options), with implications for representation in Congress. Assignment B will have the whole class focusing on the congressional responsibility over issues of spending and the federal budget. Each student will be assigned to research and represent a particular member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and that knowledge will shape in-class discussion of federal budget and appropriations decisionmaking. Assignment C requires assessment of congressional decision making, including evaluation of what influences voting decisions and review of a particular measure recently enacted into law.

Detailed assignment guidelines are posted to Canvas. Be sure to review assignment requirements early and allow yourself sufficient time to fully and successfully complete the work.

MIDTERM EXAM (Thursday, March 5th):

The midterm will cover the whole range of course concepts considered in class, including lectures, readings and discussion. Note that the lecture material will not necessarily appear in the readings, and not all readings will be discussed in class. Thus, good preparation means being in class and completing all of the assigned readings. The exam will include a mixture of multiple choice and short answer questions (to motivate mastery of key information and concepts), and at least one essay designed to stimulate synthesis and critical analysis. A review sheet will be posted to Canvas approximately one week before the exam.

TAKE-HOME FINAL ASSIGNMENT (due to Canvas Saturday, May 2nd, no later than 11:59

pm): This final assignment will have two separate components: (a) The first will focus on review and application of course concepts from across the semester – an essay prompt (with choice) that will be posted to Canvas approximately one week before the due date. (b) The second is an assignment that spans the semester through selection of current event news items for review and discussion. Requirements for this part will be available on Canvas early in the semester with the expectation that you will be selecting current event news items related to Congress for review and assessment throughout the semester.

CLASS ATTENDANCE & ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to be in regular attendance and actively engaging with the material. Regular attendance means arriving on time, remaining for the entire class session, and avoiding unnecessary absences. Active engagement means being attentive and fully participating in all aspects of classroom activity, including asking and answering questions in the classroom and regularly participating in group discussions. Discussion and sharing of findings from individual research assignments is also expected. No points for just making it to class, but points lost for more than 2 classes missed.

Class & University Policies & Expectations

- **Classroom etiquette:** The basic rule is one of respect. The goal is to create a community where all feel free to participate in classroom discussion and are open to the ideas and contributions of others. We should expect to disagree with each other on at least some issues of debate, but discussion and disagreement must be expressed in a manner that recognizes the dignity of all and is open to learning from other perspectives. Disrespectful language and/or behavior will not be tolerated.
- **Use of technology in the classroom:** Laptop computers and other electronic devices distract from the classroom learning environment and thus are not to be routinely used in class without the prior consent of the instructor.
- **Assignment submissions and due dates:**
 - Students are responsible for ensuring that assignments are successfully submitted to Canvas on time and in accessible format (.doc, .docx or .pdf). Be sure to check your document after submission to see that it is readable and that the correct document was uploaded. Back-up copies of assignments may be submitted via email if you're not sure Canvas is working.
 - Assignments are due on the due dates. Students with legitimate, documented reasons for missing an exam or assignment deadline should consult with the professor *prior to* the due date for alternative arrangements and exemption from late penalties.
 - In the absence of a pre-approved exception or documented emergency, late penalties apply, with deductions, as follows: Same day, after class begins: -10%; next day: -20%; each day thereafter, an additional 10% deduction, with papers 4 or more days overdue accepted at 50% credit.
- **Grading:** While most assignment grades will be posted on Canvas, the complete set of grading records will be maintained by the professor (and may not be fully reflected on Canvas). This includes any deductions related to class attendance and participation.
- **Accommodation for Disabilities:** If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) under the Students tab on the Disability Services website.
- **Classroom Behavior:** Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).
- **Honor Code:** All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course

instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu); 303-492-5550). Students who are found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

- **Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation:** The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, exploitation, harassment, dating or domestic violence, and stalking), discrimination, and harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

- **Religious Holidays:** Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please let me know as soon as possible of any schedule conflicts – before missing class or assignments. See [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Schedule of Class Lecture Topics, Readings & Assignments

*** Class schedule subject to change ***

Note: Readings listed as “CAIM” refer to the text, *Congress and Its Members* (Davidson, et al); readings listed as “CR 2017” refer to the text, *Congress Reconsidered*, 11th ed., 2017 (Dodd & Oppenheimer, eds.)

Week	Dates	TOPICS & ASSIGNMENTS
1	Jan 14, 16	Introduction & overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 1 ▪ Sarah Binder, “Congress’s 2019 looks startling in the rear-view mirror. Here are 4 key takeaways,” <i>Washington Post</i>, Monkey Cage, December 30, 2019; on Canvas.
2	Jan 21, 23	Congress and the Constitution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 2 ▪ Jeffrey Toobin, “Our Broken Constitution,” <i>The New Yorker</i>, December 1, 2013; on Canvas Take a look at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ U.S. House of Representatives, homepage with links to: members, leaders, committees, and legislative activity, https://www.house.gov/ ▪ U.S. Senate, homepage with links to: Senators, committees, legislation & records, https://www.senate.gov/

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Congress.gov, a service of the Library of Congress providing the most current information on legislation and public laws and links to members & committees, https://www.congress.gov/ ▪ Nelson Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” <i>American Political Science Review</i> Vol. 62, No. 1 (March 1968), available on Canvas ▪ Scan the many links on “House History,” available by the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives at http://history.house.gov/Institution/ -- including the “Origins & Development: From the Constitution to the Modern House” link ▪ Read the U.S. Senate “Origins and Development” essay, from the U.S. Senate Historical Office, available at http://www.senate.gov/history/instdev.htm.
Week 3	Jan 28, 30	<p>Assessing Congressional powers & current controversies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 15 ▪ Kriner, Chap 17, CR 2017, “Congress, Public Opinion, and the Political Costs of Waging War” ▪ Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Impeachment and the Constitution,” CRS report R46013, November 20, 2019, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46013 ▪ Molly Reynolds, “Improving congressional capacity to address problems and oversee the executive branch,” Brookings Institution, Big Ideas Report, December 4, 2019, on Canvas. <p>Suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Casey Burgat, “The House asked members for their ideas to make Congress work better. This is what they suggested,” Brookings Institution, September 21, 2018, available here. ▪ Podcast, Radiolab, “60 Words,” January 7, 2020, https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab ▪ Podcast from National Public Radio, “Impeachment: A Daily Podcast,” from WNYC Radio, multiple episodes, https://www.npr.org/podcasts/767280204/impeachment-a-daily-podcast
Week 4	Feb 4, 6	<p>Representation in Congress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 5 ▪ Jordan, et al, Chap 5, CR 2017, “Constituency Representation in Congress” ▪ Hero & Preuhs, Chap 6, CR 2017, “Black-Latino Relations in Congress” ▪ A.W. Geiger, et al, Pew Research Center, “The Changing Face of Congress in 6 Charts,” February 15, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/15/the-changing-face-of-congress/ <p>Take a look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Govtrack.us, to identify and track individual members of Congress and their records, https://www.govtrack.us/start
Week 5	Feb 11, 13	<p>Selection of representatives: campaigns & elections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 3 ▪ Erikson & Wright, Chap 3, CR 2017, “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections” <p>Suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Podcast from Mother Jones, “The Political Fight that Will Shape 2020 – and Beyond,” available here. ▪ Try out the “Redistricting Game” from the USC Annenberg Center, available at http://www.redistrictinggame.org/resourceguide.php.

Week 6	Feb 18, 20	<p>Congressional campaigns & elections, cont'd</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 4 ▪ Jacobson, Chap 4, CR 2017, “Partisanship, Money, and Competition” <p>Suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ballotpedia, providing objective information on American politics at all levels of government, including campaign & election reports, https://ballotpedia.org/Legislative_Branch ▪ Cook Political Report, non-partisan newsletter analyzing US campaigns & elections, http://www.cookpolitical.com ▪ Opensecrets.org, Center for Responsive Politics, independent research group tracking money in US politics & its effects on elections & public policy, http://www.opensecrets.org/ ▪ Vote Smart, providing unbiased information on candidates and elections, https://votesmart.org/ <p><u>DUE Thursday, Feb 20 (submit to Canvas before class): Assignment A, analysis of representation & congressional elections</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be prepared to share and discuss interesting findings and lingering questions arising from your research
Week 7	Feb 25, 27	<p>Leaders & parties in Congress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 6 ▪ Sinclair, Chap 1, CR 2017, “The New World of U.S. Senators” ▪ Aldrich & Rohde, Chap 2, CR 2017, “Lending and Reclaiming Power” ▪ Smith & Gamm, Chap 7, CR 2017, “The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress”
Week 8	Mar 3 Mar 5	<p>Organization of Congress</p> <p><u>In-class Midterm Exam: Thursday, Mar 5</u></p>
Week 9	Mar 10, 12	<p>Committees in Congress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 7 ▪ Volden & Wiseman, Chap 11, CR 2017, “Legislative Effectiveness and Problem Solving in the U.S. House of Representatives” ▪ Hanson, Chap 12, CR 2017, “The Endurance of Nonpartisanship in House Appropriations”
Week 10	Mar 17, 19	<p>Power of the Purse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 14 <p><u>DUE Tuesday, Mar 17 (submit to Canvas before class): Assignment B, class discussion notes, analysis of congressional responsibility over issues of spending and the federal budget</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be prepared to share, discuss and debate from the perspective of your assigned member of the Senate Appropriations Committee <p>Check out at least one of the following for building knowledge of current federal budget, deficit spending, the public debt, and challenges facing Congress in planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal Budget Challenge, https://www.federalbudgetchallenge.org/pages/overview. This is an on online exercise to consider options for addressing the federal budget, from Next 10 (https://www.next10.org/about) ▪ The Debt Fixer, from Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, http://www.crfb.org/debtfixer/

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal Balancing Act: An Interactive Budget Simulation, Bipartisan Policy Center, http://usa.v1.abalancingact.com/ ▪ Congressional Budget Office (CBO), Budget and Economic Data, https://www.cbo.gov/about/products/budget-economic-data ▪ US Government Accountability Office (GAO), America's Fiscal Future, https://www.gao.gov/americas_fiscal_future?t=fiscal_forecast
SPRING BREAK		
11	Mar 31, Apr 2	Legislative rules & procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chap 8, 9 ▪ Koger, Chap 13, CR 2017, "Filibusters and Majority Rule in the Modern Senate"
12	Apr 7, 9	Causes & consequences of legislative gridlock <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Binder, Chap 8, CR 2017, "Legislating in Polarized Times" ▪ Dodd & Schraufnagel, Chap 9, CR 2017, "Moderate Polarization and Policy Productivity in Congress" <p>Optional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ragusa, Chap 10, CR 2017, "An Examination of Congressional Efforts to Repeal the Affordable Care Act"
13	Apr 14, 16	Challenges to lawmaking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Derek Willis & Paul Kane, "How Congress Stopped Working," <i>ProPublica</i>, November 5, 2018, available here. ▪ Philip Wallach & James Wallner, "Congress is Broken. But Don't Blame Polarization," <i>Real Clear Policy</i>, June 8, 2018, available here. ▪ Kosar, et al., "Restoring Congress as the First Branch," R Street Policy Study No. 50, January 2016; on Canvas. <p><u>DUE Tuesday, Apr 14 (submit to Canvas before class): Assignment C, Congressional decisions & public law analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be prepared to share and discuss interesting findings and lingering questions arising from your research
14	Apr 21, 23	Congress & policymaking in a separation-of-powers system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CAIM, Chaps 10 & 11 ▪ Cooper, Chap 15, CR 2017, "The Balance of Power Between the Congress and the President"
15	Apr 28, 30	Reassessing Congress
Take-home FINAL ASSIGNMENT: due to Canvas no later than 11:59 pm on Saturday, May 2		