

PSCI 3041: The American Congress

Fall 2021 • Tue/Thu 11:10 – 12:25

CLRE 207

Professor: Nancy Billica | nancy.billica@colorado.edu

Office hours:

Tue/Thu 1:00 to 2:00 pm in Ketchum 214; Wed 2:00 to 4:00 pm via Zoom

Or email for appointment

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 factors affecting representation; individual members and their districts; and the issues and processes of lawmaking.
- practice critical thinking, analytical discussion, and writing skills.

READINGS

Readings are drawn from one required book and additional materials available as listed, either on the Canvas class page or the internet. Students should also plan to regularly read the news for current developments in Congress, which will be discussed in class on an ongoing basis.

- Roger Davidson *et al.*, *Congress and Its Members* (CQ Press, 17th or 16th edition). Henceforth referred to as *CAIM*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Date Due	Assignments	Grading
See schedule for due dates	Reading-based Quizzes A total of 9 short quizzes across the semester; lowest score dropped. Quizzes taken on Canvas, drawing on required readings.	16%
Thu, Sept 16 Thu, Oct 14 Thu, Nov 11	Three Analytical Writing Assignments Analytical writing 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. Requirements posted to Canvas at least two weeks in advance of due date; be sure to allot plenty of time to complete multiple parts. (20 percent each)	60%
Tue, Dec 14	Final Assignment – a two-part assignment: A. News Log: semester-long project following developments in Congress and requiring ongoing review and analysis. B. Essay Response: specific requirements posted to Canvas at least one week in advance of due date.	24%

CLASS 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. As a class, we are all called to be open to the ideas and contributions of others and to thereby cultivate better knowledge and understanding. 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.
- **Class communications:** Good communications are fundamental. Your professor will strive for clear and timely communications on the class schedule, materials, and assignments, and any changes to these as we proceed. This also means that students should feel free to ask questions and offer up comments on an ongoing basis. We should all plan to maintain clear and timely communications on changes in status due to illness or other issues. Specifically, plan to email as soon as possible to alert your professor about class absence or the need for assignment extensions or accommodations.
- **Class attendance & participation:** Students are expected to be in regular attendance and actively engaged. 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. More than four absences will result in a loss of points towards the final grade. All absences are treated the same regardless of circumstance. You do not need to provide a note or explanation for missed class. For extreme circumstances resulting in more than four absences (for hospitalization, quarantine, bereavement, etc.), please discuss with your instructor.
- **Canvas:** Plan to regularly check the class Canvas page for updated information, including announcements, schedule reminders and adjustments, assignment links, readings, and other supplemental materials.

- **Grades:**
 - What grades are not:** They are not a reward or punishment; they are not a measure of effort; they do not represent the essence of who a student is as a person; they do not define what a student can or cannot achieve.
 - What grades are:** They are a tool that is generally used for two interrelated purposes:
 1. *To assess academic performance during the study of a particular subject or skill.* During this course, students have the responsibility for learning the subject or skill and for demonstrating that they have achieved that learning.
 2. *To provide information for students so they can make decisions about changes they may need to make in order to demonstrate they have achieved that learning.* Learning the subject is what matters, and grades are used to show to what degree students have shown that they have learned the subject.
- **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:
 - Submitted within 24 hours of the due date: -10%
 - For each additional day late: add an additional -10%
 - Assignments submitted 5 or more days overdue accepted at 50% credit
- **Public Health & Safety Requirements:** The expectation is that the Covid-19 pandemic will be under control and that campus life will be relatively free of restrictions. However, we are operating in conditions of continued uncertainty. Things could change. We will follow all guidelines announced by the university for maintaining public health and safety. Any necessary changes in scheduling or classroom practices will be announced as soon as possible.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

- **Classroom Behavior:** Both students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote or online. 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. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution policies](#).
- **COVID-19 Requirements:** As a matter of public health and safety due to the pandemic, all members of the CU Boulder community and all visitors to campus must follow university, department and building requirements and all public health orders in place to reduce the risk of spreading infectious disease. **Students who fail to adhere to these requirements will be asked to leave class, and students who do not leave class when asked or who refuse to comply with these requirements will be referred to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.** For more information, see the “Policy on classroom behavior” and the related “Student Code of Conduct”, outlined below. If you require accommodation because a disability prevents you from fulfilling these safety measures, please follow the steps in the “Accommodation for Disabilities” statement on this syllabus.

As of Aug. 13, 2021, **CU Boulder has returned to requiring masks in classrooms and laboratories regardless of vaccination status.** This requirement is a temporary precaution during the delta surge to

supplement CU Boulder's COVID-19 vaccine requirement. Exemptions include individuals who cannot medically tolerate a face covering, as well as those who are hearing impaired or otherwise disabled or who are communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or otherwise disabled and where the ability to see the mouth is essential to communication. If you qualify for a mask-related accommodation, please follow the steps in the "Accommodation for Disabilities" statement on this syllabus. In addition, vaccinated instructional faculty who are engaged in an indoor instructional activity and are separated by at least 6 feet from the nearest person are exempt from wearing masks if they so choose.

Students who have tested positive for COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for or had symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home. In this class, if you are sick or quarantined, be sure to alert the professor as soon as possible about absence due to illness or quarantine. Because of FERPA student privacy laws, students do not need to state the nature of their illness when alerting the professor. "Doctor's notes" are not needed to verify illness or medical appointments.

For more information and updates: <https://www.colorado.edu/covid-19>

- **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, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.
- **Preferred Student Names and Pronouns:** CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.
- **Honor Code:** All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code academic integrity policy. Violations of the Honor Code may include, but are not limited to: 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 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 on the [Honor Code website](#).
- **Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation:** The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or protected-class discrimination or harassment by or against 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 email cureport@colorado.edu. Information about OIEC, university policies, [reporting options](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#). Please know that faculty and graduate instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, stalking, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about their rights, support resources, and reporting options.
- **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. In this class, plan to communicate your status as soon as possible via email to your professor so that any assignment extensions may be adopted.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

PSCI 3041

FALL 2021 CLASS SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS

*** subject to change ***

Note: Readings listed as “CAIM” refer to the text, *Congress and Its Members* (Davidson, et al, any edition); other readings available on Canvas or on the internet.

Week 1 (Aug 24 & 26): Introduction & overview of the contemporary Congress

Readings

- CAIM, Chapter 1
- Casey Burgat, “[The House asked members for their ideas to make Congress work better. This is what they suggested.](#)” Brookings Institution, September 21, 2018.
- Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Membership of the 117th Congress: A Profile,” Updated May 12, 2021; on Canvas. Scan through for interesting facts about the current membership of Congress.
- Brookings Institution, “Vital Statistics on Congress: Date on the U.S. Congress, Updated February 2021,” <https://www.brookings.edu/multi-chapter-report/vital-statistics-on-congress/>. Scan through the data to consider current status and trends in the contemporary Congress.

Recommended

- Mark Warren, “Help, We’re in a Living Hell and Don’t Know How to Get Out,” *Esquire*, Oct 15, 2014; on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Class opinion poll responses due to Canvas, Fri, Aug 27, 11:59 pm

Week 2 (Aug 31 & Sept 2): Studying Congress, starting with the Constitution. Why Congress? Why *this* Congress?

Readings

- CAIM, Chapter 2
- *Article I, US Constitution Annotated*, analysis and interpretation of the US Constitution, Congress.gov, <https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/article-1/>
- Jeffrey Toobin, “Our Broken Constitution,” *The New Yorker*, December 1, 2013; on Canvas

Recommended

- James Madison (1788), “Federalist 48: These Departments Should Not be so Far Separated as to Have No Constitutional Control Over Each Other,” explaining the rationale and mechanisms for checks and balances, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed48.asp
- 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/>
- 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/>

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #1; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Sept 3, 11:59 pm

Week 3 (Sept 7 & 9): Assessing Congressional powers & current challenges

Readings

- CAIM, Chapter 13
- Sarah Binder, “4 reasons the GOP wouldn’t vote for a Jan. 6 commission,” *Washington Post* (Monkey Cage analysis), May 28, 2021; on Canvas.

- Trudy Ring, “U.S. House Adopts Gender-Neutral Language for Rules Document,” *The Advocate*, January 6, 2021; on Canvas.
- Ari Drennen and Sally Hardin, “Climate Deniers in the 117th Congress,” *Center for American Progress*, March 2021; on Canvas.

Recommended

- Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Salaries of Members of Congress: Recent Actions and Historical Tables,” Updated January 26, 2021; on Canvas.
- Nelson Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” *American Political Science Review* 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>.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #2; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Sept 10, 11:59 pm

Week 4 (Sept 14 & 16): Representation in Congress

Readings

- Katherine Schaeffer, Pew Research Center, “The Changing Face of Congress in 7 Charts,” March 10, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/10/the-changing-face-of-congress/>
- Kathryn Crespin, “U.S. House districts are colossal. What’s the right size?” Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia, November 15, 2017; on Canvas.

Recommended

- Hertel-Fernandez, Mildemberger & Stokes, “Legislative Staff and Representation in Congress,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 113 (Feb. 2019); on Canvas.
- Govtrack.us, to identify and track individual members of Congress and their records, <https://www.govtrack.us/start>
- Center for American Women and Politics, “Women in the U.S. Congress 2021,” Rutgers University, <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-us-congress-2021>.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Analytical Writing Assignment #1; due on Canvas no later than Thu, Sept 16, 11:59 pm

Week 5 (Sept 21 & 23): Allocating representation, redistricting & gerrymandering

Readings

- CAIM, Chapter 3
- Michael Li, “The Redistricting Landscape, 2021–22,” Brennan Center for Justice, February 11, 2021; on Canvas.

Recommended

- For fun: Chris Kirk, “Can You Solve *Slate*’s Gerrymandering Jigsaw Puzzle?” http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/map_of_the_week/2013/08/gerrymandering_jigsaw_puzzle_game_put_the_congressional_districts_back_together.html
- Try out the “Redistricting Game” from the USC Annenberg Center, available at <http://www.redistrictinggame.org/index.php>

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #3; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Sept 24, 11:59 pm

Week 6 (Sept 28 & 30): Congressional campaigns & elections

Reading

- CAIM, Chapter 4
- Maggie Koerth, “How Money Affects Elections,” *FiveThirtyEight*, September 10, 2018; on Canvas.
- Gary Jacobson, “It’s Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 77 (July 2015); on Canvas.
- Watch: CQ Roll Call elections analyst Nathan L. Gonzales lays out the Senate midterm map “battleground” (using every war idiom he’s got):
https://www.rollcall.com/2021/07/01/previewing-the-2022-battle-for-the-senate/?utm_source=morningheadlines&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletters&utm_content=07/02/2021

Recommended

- 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/>

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #4; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Oct 1, 11:59 pm

Week 7 (Oct 5 & 7): The role of the representative

Reading

- CAIM, Chap 5
- Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Roles and Duties of a Member of Congress: Brief Overview,” November 9, 2012; on Canvas.

Recommended

- Kathy Goldschmidt & Bradley J. Sinkaus, “Job Description for a Member of Congress,” Congressional Management Foundation, 2018; on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #5; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Oct 8, 11:59 pm

Week 8 (Oct 12; no class on Thursday, Oct 14): Leaders & parties in Congress

Readings

- Sarah Binder, “Why is Manchin such a thorn in the Democratic Party’s side?” *Washington Post* (Monkey Cage analysis), June 10, 2021; on Canvas.
- Smith & Gamm, “The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress,” Chap 7 in *Congress Reconsidered*, 12th ed. (2021); on Canvas.

Recommended

- Lee Drutman, “Why The Two-Party System Is Effing Up U.S. Democracy,” *FiveThirtyEight*, June 16 2021; on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Analytical Writing Assignment #2; due on Canvas no later than Thu, Oct 14, 11:59 pm

Week 9 (Oct 19 & 21): Organization of Congress

Reading

- CAIM, Chapter 6

Recommended

- American Political Science Association (APSA), “Report of the Task Force Project on Congressional Reform,” Research Partnerships for Critical Issues,” October 29, 2019; on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #6; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Oct 22, 11:59 pm

Week 10 (Oct 26 & 28): Committees in Congress

Reading

- CAIM, Chapter 7
- Geoffrey Lorenz, “Prioritized Interests: Diverse Lobbying Coalitions and Congressional Committee Agenda Setting,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol 82 (Jan. 2020); on Canvas.

Recommended

- E. Scott Adler, “Enhancing Committee Productivity through Consensus Building,” Testimony before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, July 20, 2021; on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #7; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Oct 29, 11:59 pm

Week 11 (Nov 2 & 4): Legislative Rules & Procedures

Reading

- CAIM, Chapter 8
- Congressional Research Service, “Introduction to the Legislative Process in the U.S. Congress,” Updated November 24, 2020; on Canvas

Recommended

- Congressional Research Service (CRS), “House Rules Changes Affecting Floor Proceedings in the 117th Congress (2021-2022),” May 13, 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R46790.pdf>
- Charles Tiefer, “The obscure, unelected Senate official whose rulings can help – or kill – a bill’s chance to pass,” *The Conversation*, 24 May 2021, <https://theconversation.com/the-obscure-unelected-senate-official-whose-rulings-can-help-or-kill-a-bills-chance-to-pass-159686>.
- Jesse Richman, “The Electoral Costs of Party Agenda Setting: Why the Hastert Rule Leads to Defeat,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 77 (Oct 2015); on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #8; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Nov 5, 11:59 pm

Week 12 (Nov 9 & 11): Legislating & Changing Rules

Reading

- Sarah Binder, “The Struggle to Legislate in Polarized Times,” Chapter 9 in *Congress Reconsidered*, 12th ed, edited by Lawrence Dodd, Bruce Oppenheimer & C. Lawrence Evans (CQ Press, 2021); on Canvas.
- Christopher Hickey & Zachary Wolf, “Why Washington Gets So Little Done: Congress is at the Mercy of one Senate Rule, The Filibuster,” CNN, Updated June 2, 2021; on Canvas

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Analytical Writing Assignment #3; due on Canvas no later than Thu, Nov 11, 11:59 pm

Week 13 (Nov 16 & 18): Congressional Decision Making

Reading

- CAIM, Chapter 9

- Craig Volden & Alan E. Wiseman, “Members of Congress are specializing less often. That makes them less effective.” *Washington Post* (Monkey Cage analysis), Sept 17, 2021; on Canvas.

Recommended

- Derek Willis & Paul Kane, “How Congress Stopped Working,” *ProPublica*, November 5, 2018, available [here](#).
- Philip Wallach & James Wallner, “Congress is Broken. But Don’t Blame Polarization,” *Real Clear Policy*, June 8, 2018, available [here](#).
- Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Lifting the Earmark Moratorium: Frequently Asked Questions,” updated December 3, 2020; on Canvas
- David Wessel, “What is Reconciliation in Congress?” Brookings Institution, February 5, 2021; on Canvas.
- Kosar, et al., “Restoring Congress as the First Branch,” R Street Policy Study No. 50, January 2016; on Canvas.

ASSIGNMENT DUE

- Reading Quiz #9; due on Canvas no later than Fri, Nov 19, 11:59 pm

T H A N K S G I V I N G B R E A K

Week 14 (Nov 30 & Dec 2): Congress & the Executive

Reading

- CAIM, Chapters 10 & 11

Recommended

- Molly Reynolds, “Improving congressional capacity to address problems and oversee the executive branch,” Brookings Institution, Big Ideas Report, December 4, 2019, on Canvas.
- Congressional Research Service (CRS), “Congress’s Authority to Influence and Control Executive Branch Agencies,” Updated May 12, 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45442.pdf>

Week 15 (Dec 7 & 9): Congress & policymaking – final assessment

No assigned readings

Recommended

- Take a look at the work and issues under consideration by the bipartisan Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, U.S. House of Representatives, <https://modernizecongress.house.gov/>

FINAL ASSIGNMENT due to Canvas no later than 11:59 pm on Tuesday, December 14th
(assignment to be posted to Canvas at least one week in advance of the due date)