

PSCI 3041: The American Congress
Mon/Wed/Fri 9-9:50 am, HLMS 211
Spring 2018

Instructor: Nancy Billica, Ph.D.

Office: Ketchum 122

Office hours: Mon 1:30-2:30 pm; Wed 10:30-11:30 am; and by appointment

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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. 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.

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.
- develop critical thinking, analysis and writing skills.

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, 16th, 15th or other recent edition). Henceforth referred to as *CAIM*.
- Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer, eds., *Congress Reconsidered* (CQ Press, 11th edition). Henceforth referred to as *CR*.

Requirements & Grading

Date Due	Assignments	Grading
	Class attendance & active participation	10%
Monday, Mar 5	Midterm exam Review sheet posted to Canvas one week before the exam	20%
Monday, Mar 12	Assignment A: representation & election analysis Guidelines on Canvas; submit paper electronically to Canvas	22.5%
Friday, Apr 20	Assignment B: legislative analysis Guidelines on Canvas; submit paper electronically to Canvas	22.5%
Saturday, May 5 4:30 – 7:00 pm	Final Exam Review sheet posted to Canvas one week before the exam	25%

Class & University Policies & Expectations

- **Attendance & Participation:** It is assumed that all students are enrolled with the goal of gaining maximum value from the course and will thus 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 (more than 2 absences will negatively affect your grade). Active engagement means being attentive, asking and answering questions in the classroom and regularly participating in group discussions. Please also plan to visit me in office hours to discuss course-related matters, real-world political developments, and life generally.
- **Use of technology in the classroom:** As learning is our top priority, the use of laptops, tablets and phones will be allowed only for purposes of enhancing the classroom experience. Multitasking with technology diminishes personal learning outcomes. Further, inappropriate use of technology distracts from the learning community, with negative effects on those around you. Repeated misuse of technology will negatively affect your attendance and participation grade.
- **Late assignment policy:** All assignments are due on the scheduled due dates. Students with legitimate reasons for missing an exam or assignment deadline may consult with the professor prior to the due date for alternative arrangements and exemption from late penalties. Credible excuses for all but emergencies are communicated *prior to* missed deadlines. Emergencies require documentation.
In the absence of a pre-approved exception or documented emergency, late penalties apply, with deductions as follows:

Same-day, after class (until midnight):	- 5%	3 days after due date	- 30%
Next day	- 10%	4 days after due date	- 40%
2 days after due date	- 20%	5 days + after due date	- 50%
- **Student conduct:** All communications and interactions will be conducted with courtesy and respect. 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. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. For more information, including specific requirements and the consequences for their violation, see **university policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#)**.
- **Students with disabilities or special needs:** Students needing accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning difference should contact me privately to discuss needs – before assignments are due. If you qualify for accommodation, please submit a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner explaining your required accommodations so that your needs can be addressed. Guidelines can be found on the [Disability Services website](#), including dealing with temporary medical conditions.
- **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 assignments or exams. 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.
- **Discrimination, harassment & misconduct:** CU Boulder is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment for all. Information on discrimination, harassment and misconduct, including campus resources available to assist individuals with such issues, can be found in the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) – [OIEC website](#).
- **Honor Code:** All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [academic integrity policy](#) of the institution. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access, clicker fraud, resubmission, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code Council. Additional information regarding the academic integrity policy can be found at honorcode.colorado.edu.

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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” refer to the text, *Congress Reconsidered* (Dodd & Oppenheimer, eds.)

Week	Dates	TOPICS & ASSIGNMENTS
1	Jan 17, 19	<p>Introduction & overview</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 1</p>
2	Jan 22, 24, 26	<p>Historic & institutional foundations of Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 2 CR, Chap 7 The US Constitution, https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution</p> <p>Suggested readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nelson Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” first published in <i>American Political Science Review</i> Vol. 62, No. 1 (March 1968), available on Canvas ▪ Scan through the many links on “House History,” made 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.
3	Jan 29, 31; Feb 2	<p>Assessing the modern Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CR, Chaps 8, 9 & 10</p> <p>Take a look at:</p> <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/ ▪ 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/
4	Feb 5, 7, 9	<p>Selecting representatives</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 3 CR, Chap 3</p> <p>Suggested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Try out the “Redistricting Game” from the USC Annenberg Center, available at http://www.redistrictinggame.org/resourceguide.php. ▪ Listen to one or more episodes in the “Gerrymandering Podcast,” FiveThirtyEight, https://fivethirtyeight.com/tag/gerrymandering-podcast/

Week	Dates	TOPICS & ASSIGNMENTS
5	Feb 12, 14, 16	<p>Congressional elections</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 4 CR, Chap 4</p> <p>Take a look at:</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/
6	Feb 19, 21, 23	<p>Representation in Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 5 CR, Chap 5 & 6</p> <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
7	Feb 26, 28; Mar 2	<p>Leaders & parties in Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 6 CR, Chap 2</p>
8	Mar 5 Mar 7, 9	<p><u>Midterm exam</u>: Monday, Mar 5</p> <p>Committees in Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 7 CR, Chaps 11 & 12</p>
9	Mar 12, 14, 16	<p>Legislative rules & procedures</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 8 CR, Chap 13</p> <p>Take a look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List of legislative resources and links from Congress.gov, https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/Resources+A+to+Z ▪ C-Span, broadcasting of congressional committee hearings, floor debate, and other congressional activities http://www.c-span.org/ <p><u>DUE Monday, Mar 12</u>: Assignment A, representation & election analysis</p>

Week	Date	TOPICS & ASSIGNMENTS
10	Mar 19, 21, 23	<p>Decision making in Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 9</p> <p>Take a look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Congressional roll call votes, https://www.congress.gov/roll-call-votes
SPRING BREAK		
11	Apr 2, 4, 6	<p>Congress & the president</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 10 CR, Chap 15</p>
12	Apr 9, 11, 13	<p>Congress, the bureaucracy & the courts</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chaps 11 & 12 CR, Chap 16</p>
13	Apr 16, 18, 20	<p>Congress, organized interests & lobbying</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 13</p> <p>Take a look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opensecrets.org, independent research group tracking money in US politics & its effects on elections & public policy, http://www.opensecrets.org/ <p><u>DUE Friday, Apr 20: Assignment B, legislative analysis</u></p>
14	Apr 23, 25, 27	<p>Congress & policymaking</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chaps 14 & 15</p> <p>Take a look at:</p> <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/
15	Apr 30; May 2	<p>Reassessing Congress</p> <p>Rdg: CAIM, Chap 16</p>
FINAL EXAM: Sat, May 5, 4:30 – 7:00 pm		