



PSC 333: The U.S. Congress
209 Graham Building
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00-3:15
Spring 2007

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Office Hours: M 1-2:30, R 3:15-4:45, and by appointment

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Course Description

This course will examine the nature of the extraordinary changes that have influenced the U.S. Congress in the modern era. We will study a number of related questions: How do legislators balance serving constituent interests and producing national legislation? What are the competing centers of power and influence in Congress, and what determines which area of influence is dominant? How extensive are incumbent advantages in congressional elections, and why do challengers sometimes overcome them and – far more often – fail to do so? What are the differences between the House and the Senate and to what varying substantive ends do these differences lead?

As we think and talk about these questions, you will analyze public opinion data, as well as research, and write a series of one-page papers on a variety of topics. The usefulness of the skills related to doing well on these papers extends beyond getting an internship or full-time job in politics. In a legal setting, lawyers must perform research for their clients, summarizing their findings. In the business world, it is important to understand the attitudes and preferences of one's customers; analyzing surveys is, therefore, an essential part of market research. Regardless of your career plans, analyzing data and reporting on them concisely is an important skill to have when you reach the "real world."

Finally, recent elections have changed the United States Congress in important – often historic – ways. The 1994 midterm elections brought the Republican Party control of both houses of Congress for the first time since a night at the movies cost 50 cents and Dwight Eisenhower was finishing his second year in the White House. In the 1996 elections, the Republicans held onto narrowed congressional majorities. In the 1998 midterm elections, congressional Democrats maintained their strength in the Senate and gained seats in the House, the first time the president's party had accomplished this feat since 1934. When the dust settled – finally – after the 2000 election, Republicans found themselves in control of the presidency and Congress at the same time for the first time since 1954. This despite having lost 1) the national popular vote for president, 2) two House seats, and 3) four Senate seats. The 50-50 partisan

split in the Senate lasted all of five months, when a single senator resolved to leave the Republican Party to become an Independent. This decision, by a man representing the second smallest state in the country, made the Democrats the Senate majority party. In 2002, the Republicans pulled off an even more impressive feat than the Democrats had in 1998. President Bush's party expanded its majority in the House and recaptured the Senate. After the 2004 elections, Republicans continued in control of a unified federal government. Finally, the 2006 midterm elections returned to historical form as the opposition party Democrats made big gains in each chamber to recapture the majorities in both chambers that they lost in 1994.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester, students should develop/improve important skills related to:

- organizing and writing a series of concise, one-page papers;
- researching primary and secondary source materials for these papers;
- analyzing data drawn from a national survey to determine patterns in public opinion and attitudes about government in general and Congress in particular;
- appreciating the complexity of a job that requires its occupants to make laws that benefit the nation while simultaneously standing for reelection before often quite parochial constituents.

Course Requirements

• Reading

The following books are required for the course and are available at the university bookstore:

Davidson, Roger and Walter Oleszek. 2005. *Congress and Its Members*, Tenth Edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Herrnson, Paul. 2003. *Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington*, Fourth Edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Sinclair, Barbara. 2000. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*, Second Edition. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

In addition, students will be required to read selected articles, assigned in class, from major newspapers and *CQ Weekly*.

• Exams & In-Class Activities

Grades for the course are based on several components. The first two consist of a midterm exam (March 16), which will account for 25% of each student's grade, and a final exam (May 9 at 3:30), which will also account for 25% of the grade. Students will also attend class and participate in a series of in-class activities over the course of the semester. Attendance and class activities will constitute 10% of each student's overall grade.

• Research Papers

In class on **Tuesday, January 24**, each student will be assigned the U.S. Senator whose career and constituency they will research for their papers, along with the first paper topic. During the first half of the semester, three paper assignments will require students to collect and analyze various types of information about their assigned senator. For example, students will have to look through roll call votes cast by their senator. These paper assignments will require students to compare this type of information to the potential preferences of the assigned senator's constituency.

During the second half of the semester, the final three paper assignments will require students to analyze a national survey of political opinions and attitudes, and to apply the insights of their analyses to their assigned senator's reelection campaign. These paper assignments require students to analyze and interpret different aspects of the survey, using a computer program available in the campus computer clusters. Students with anxiety about computers or statistics should not worry. I will provide extensive instructions explaining how to use the computer program and the survey. We will also have an orientation session in class on March 21. The challenge of these assignments will not be using the computer program and survey, but in answering the assigned questions about public attitudes and opinions.

When calculating a student's overall grade at the end of the semester, I will drop the one weekly paper on which the student received his or her lowest grade. Each paper counted toward this component of the grade will account for 8% of the overall course grade. I am using only 5 of the 6 papers in an attempt to add flexibility to the course requirements. During the semester, emergencies may arise that prevent a student from turning in a paper or from doing a thorough job. Failure to turn in a paper will merit a zero, but this grade will be dropped. Of course, if a student receives two zeros, only one will be dropped, and so forth.

Each student will be required to turn in their paper at the start of class one week after the assignment is handed out. If a paper is not turned in at the beginning of class, it will be considered late. For each 24-hour period (from the start of class) that a paper is late, the paper's grade will be lowered by ten points (for example, from a 90 to an 80, or from a 75 to a 65).

Finally, you will find the following three sources *extremely* helpful in completing your research assignments. All are available in the Jackson Library or via the library's web site.

<i>Almanac of American Politics</i>	JK271 .A530 2006 edition in Reference Room Previous editions in 5 Tower
<i>CQ's Politics in America</i>	JK1010 .P64 2006 edition in Reference Room Previous editions in 5 Tower

CQ Weekly

Available via UNCG's Journal Finder at journalfinder.uncg.edu/uncg. Type "CQ Weekly" into the text box and click the "Search" button.

• Grading

The overall course grade will be determined as follows:

In-class assignments & participation		10%
Midterm exam	25	
Final exam	25	
Paper assignments	<u>40</u>	
	100%	

The midterm, final, and paper assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale. When determining final course grades, I will calculate the overall numerical averages and use the following table to convert them to letter grades:

Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades	Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades
A	>92	C	>72, <77
A-	>=90, <=92	C-	>=70, <=72
B+	>=87, <90	D+	>=67, <70
B	>82, <87	D	>62, <67
B-	>=80, <=82	D-	>=60, <=62
C+	>=77, <80	F	>60

• Attendance

While I do not take attendance, please understand that it will be impossible for you to do well in the course without coming to class. There will be numerous in-class assignments, including simulations of legislative behavior, that require your participation for a number of reasons. First, participation earns you credit toward your class-participation grade. Coming to class and participating actively in class discussion and on these assignments is a relatively easy way to earn an "A" on 10% of the overall grade. Second, the concepts we act out in the simulations and discuss afterward are crucial to your preparation for the midterm and final, and will also help you complete and understand the research assignments. If your plan is irregular attendance, do yourself a favor: drop the course. Otherwise, plan on living with a lousy, possibly failing, grade.

- **Special Needs**

If you have any special needs that will affect your ability to learn in this class, please inform me immediately and appropriate steps will be taken to assist you.

- **Cheating & Plagiarism**

The university's Academic Integrity Policy, which addresses the consequences of cheating and plagiarism, is available via the web at www.uncg.edu:80/reg/Policy/HonorPolicy.html

All work in the course is bound by the Academic Integrity Policy. In accordance with this policy, all paper assignments must provide appropriate citations for any information drawn from outside sources included in the paper. If you have questions about the appropriate format for citations, make sure that you ask me before turning in the paper. You can also visit the Writing Center (101 McIver) for additional assistance with citations. All work for the course must be completed individually, with each student responsible for his or her own work. Study together if you wish, but think for yourselves.

- **Miscellaneous**

You can make up the midterm exam ONLY if you provide me with advanced, written notice of a reasonable excuse (*e.g.*, extracurricular commitment, illness, family issue). Students who miss the midterm and do not notify me in advance will receive a non-negotiable zero. You CANNOT make up the final exam. Incompletes are not available.

Finally, come to class on time. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and anything else that makes annoying noises, when you reach class, and plan on remaining in class the full 75 minutes. In other words, do what you have to do so that you don't have to leave during the class period. Such behavior is disruptive to the class and disrespectful to me.

Course Outline

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
January 9	I. Introduction to the Course	Syllabus	
January 11 January 16	A. The Evolution of Congress	D&O, chs. 1 & 2	
January 18	B. Legislators' Goals & Responsibilities	D&O, ch. 5	Senator choices due
January 23 January 25	II. Internal Organization of Congress A. Leaders & Parties	D&O, ch. 6	Paper #1 assigned
January 30 February 1	B. Congressional Committees	D&O, ch. 7	Paper #1 due

February 6 February 8 February 13	III. The Legislative Process A. Rules and Procedures	D&O, ch. 8 S, chs. 1-6	Paper #2 assigned Paper #2 due
February 15	B. Roll-Call Voting	D&O, ch. 9	
February 20 February 22	IV. Constraints on Congress A. The President & the Bureaucracy	D&O, chs. 10 & 11	Paper #3 assigned
February 27	B. The Courts	D&O, ch. 12	Paper #3 due
March 1	C. Interest Groups	D&O, ch. 13	
March 1	No Class		
March 6 March 8	Spring Break		
March 13	C. Interest Groups, continued	Handouts	
March 15	MIDTERM EXAM		
March 20	Mandatory computer and data set instruction. (Important for completing final paper assignments.)		Paper #4 assigned
March 22 March 27	V. Budgetary Politics	D&O, ch. 14 S, chs. 10 & 11	Paper #4 due
March 29 April 3	VI. Congress & National Security	D&O, ch. 15	
April 5	VII. The Electoral Connection A. Rules of the Game	D&O, ch. 3 H, ch. 1	Paper #5 assigned
April 10	B. The Decision to Run	H, ch. 2	
April 12	VIII. Campaign & Party Organizations	H, chs. 3 & 4	Paper #5 due
April 12	No Class		
April 17	IX. Money in Campaigns	H, chs. 5 & 6	
April 19	X. Campaign Strategy A. The Selection of Strategies	D&O, ch. 4 H, chs. 7 & 8	Paper #6 assigned
April 24	B. Voting & Winning	H, chs. 9 & 10	
April 26	XI. Reform & the Two Congresses	H, ch. 11 D&O, ch. 16	Paper #6 due
May 2	Reading Day		
May 8	FINAL EXAM (3:30-6:30)		