

LEGISLATIVE BEHAVIOR: U.S. CONGRESS
Government 307 001 (CRN: 71046)
George Mason University
Tuesday & Thursday 3:00pm – 4:15pm
Planetary Hall 127
Fall 2016

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Office: 232 Robinson Hall-A
Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 1:45pm – 2:45pm, or by appointment
Course Website: Available for enrolled students at <http://blackboard.gmu.edu>

Schar School Main Office: Robinson Hall-A, 201

I. Course Description

This course uses the United States Congress as a model to describe basic legislative processes and behavior. The course focuses on learning and applying analytical tools to questions of legislative and electoral politics. These tools include spatial modeling, reasoning, evidence-based research, data analysis, and others. The substantive topics we will explore include congressional elections, voter participation in elections, lawmaking, congressional committees, the congressional budget process, and congressional parties. In addition to these institutional lessons, we will learn about types of voting, the theoretical problems associated with aggregating votes (such as voting cycles) and how Congress overcomes such problems to create policy.

II. Course Goals

I have three broad objectives for this course. First, I hope to stimulate your **curiosity** about legislative government and politics and provide you with a life-long desire to be an informed, critical and active citizen. Second, I hope students will develop a base level of **knowledge** and understanding about the processes and politics in the U.S. Congress. Third, I hope students will advance their critical thinking, analytic, and writing **skills** and be able to apply theoretical concepts to new problems.

III. Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Style

My teaching philosophy is based on three primary principles.

- First, I believe the gap between undergraduate and graduate coursework in political science is too broad. I therefore introduce advanced theoretical concepts in undergraduate classes so that students understand the true value of studying politics as a science; moreover, should any student choose to pursue advanced or graduate work in political science, they will be well prepared.

- Second, I believe in incorporating current events into classroom lessons. Nothing in science seems concrete until one can “see it with their own eyes.” Reading a daily newspaper and following current events, then applying theoretical concepts to political happenings helps to clarify theoretical concepts and demonstrate their utility.
- Finally, as an instructor and a leader of class discussions on everything from lawmaking to elections, I aim to remain politically neutral and non-partisan. Students should learn to collect and evaluate information on their own. I would not want students who disagree with my political views to hear all course information with a skeptical ear; nor would I want students who tend to agree with my views to accept everything I say at face value. I encourage students to express their views, be critical, and challenge information when it is appropriate.

My teaching style is consistent with my philosophy. I use a Socratic-style in the classroom in which I frequently ask questions and encourage an interactive learning experience. I do my best to learn students’ names, encourage participation, and create, what I hope is, an open learning environment where students feel free to question, comment, and explain how they view course content. Such an environment helps to foster student interaction, thinking, and analytical and creative skills. Moreover, while lectures are important because they help to distribute necessary information and facts, they are not usually the most effective way to learn information. For this reason, we will do a variety of activities in the classroom. Successful performance in this course will include classroom participation and working in and out of class with your peers.

IV. Student Responsibilities

A. *Class Attendance and Participation.* Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. Accordingly, every student is expected to attend class as well as be prepared to ask questions about and comment on the readings. You need to complete the daily reading assignment *prior* to the class meeting. You will be much more successful in this class if you attend regularly, take notes, pay attention, and participate.

B. *Readings.* As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is *your* responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. I will do everything I can to make this task easier for you. You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and take notes on them.

C. *Technology* **The use of laptop computers, tablets (such as iPads), and smart phones is prohibited in class**, except when instructed to do so. The costs associated with electronic distractions, to you and those around you, outweigh the benefits of immediate supplementary classroom information. Students may use specific instructional applications, such as *Blackboard*, only when instructed to do so. However, students may not use laptops or other devices on a general basis in this class. If these restrictions pose a challenge for you, please discuss it with me. For more information on the benefits of taking notes by hand, see [this](#).

D. *Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the George Mason University Honor Code (see <http://honorcode.gmu.edu/>).

There are three simple guidelines to follow with respect to academic integrity: (1) all work you submit must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the expectations for any assignment, ask for clarification. Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment*. Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean's office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else's work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. *If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.*

E. Students with Disabilities. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please let me (the instructor) know and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at (703) 993-2474 or <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All discussions with me regarding disabilities are confidential.

V. Following Political Developments in the Media

Students are required to follow current political events. A familiarity with current happenings in politics, and Congress especially, will facilitate your ability to understand the material. Along with any local papers you may read, I recommend that you read *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post* with frequency. You can sign up to receive daily e-mail news updates from the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* for free on their websites. Additionally, you may want to examine news-magazines for more in-depth coverage of particular issues and events. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, *Roll Call*, *National Journal*, and *The Hill* are particularly informative periodicals. Other options include *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *The Economist*. Useful URLs are provided below.

Recommended News Sources

<i>New York Times</i>	http://www.nytimes.com
<i>Washington Post</i>	http://www.washingtonpost.com
<i>Roll Call</i> *	http://www.rollcall.com/
<i>Congressional Quarterly Weekly</i> *	http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/
<i>National Journal</i> ¹ *	http://www.nationaljournal.com
<i>The Hill</i>	http://www.thehill.com
<i>Politico</i>	http://www.politico.com/
<i>Vox</i>	http://www.vox.com/

Research Resources

House of Representatives	http://www.house.gov	
Senate	http://www.senate.gov	
ProQuest Congressional	http://search.proquest.com/	Enter through library.gmu.edu

* These items require a subscription, which is provided by the University. These sources must be accessed via a GMU Internet connection, or from off-campus via the GMU [SSL VPN](#).

GMU Library Govt Infoguide	http://infoguides.gmu.edu/politics	Excellent source of govt links and resources.
Congressional Research Service Reports (environment)	http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRS/	Reports on specific policies prepared by professional researchers for Members of Congress.
Congressional Research Service Reports (various topics)	http://digital.library.unt.edu/go/vdocs/crs/	Reports on specific policies prepared by professional researchers for Members of Congress.
<i>CQ Researcher</i> *	http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/	In-depth reports about policies on the congressional agenda
Biographical Directory of Congress	http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp	Look up a bio of any member of Congress (throughout history)

For election coverage, I especially recommend the following:

[FiveThirtyEight](#)

[New York Times Special Election coverage](#)

[Pollster](#)

[PredictIt](#) (market)

VI. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

There are four graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+	< 60	F
93-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	63-66	D		
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	60-62	D-		

Problem Set Assignments (40%) There are four assignments, or problem sets, scattered throughout the course. Problem sets are available on Blackboard. Students are encouraged to do work in groups while thinking about the problem sets, but each student must hand in their own original work. Assignments that are obviously copied will receive a failing grade. Due dates of homework assignments are:

Assignment #1 is due Thursday, September 29 (by 11:59pm)

Assignment #2 is due Thursday, October 6 (by 11:59pm)

Assignment #3 is due Thursday, October 13 (by 11:59pm)

Assignment #4 is due Thursday, October 20 (by 11:59pm)

Biographical Sketch (10%) Each student will choose one of the 541 Members of the 114th Congress and write a brief biographical sketch of the legislator, limited to 400-700 words (excluding headers, footers, bibliography, and title material). The essay should include:

- Basic biographical information
- Electoral history
- Committee assignments, leadership postings, and other relevant positions or memberships

- Analysis of reelection
- Major legislative accomplishments or priorities
- Key district characteristics

Students are required to provide in-text parenthetical citations and a complete bibliography of all sources used to produce the essay. I recommend the *Almanac of American Politics*, and *CQ's Politics in America* as excellent sources for this assignment, but I encourage students to find other appropriate sources (Wikipedia is never an appropriate source for an academic assignment). I encourage students to use Zotero for bibliographic citation; instruction will be provided in class for this handy too. This assignment is due on **Tuesday, November 15** (by 11:59pm).

Midterm Exam (20%) This will be an in-class exam covering material from the first half of the course. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and analytical (homework style) questions based on material presented in class and in the readings. A study guide will be posted on-line no later than one-week before the exam. The midterm will be in-class on **Tuesday, October 25**.

Final Exam (30%). This will be an in-class exam covering material from the entire course (comprehensive), though concentrating on material from the last half of the course. The exam will include identifications, short answers, and essay questions (closed book, closed-note) based on material presented in class and in the readings. A study guide will be posted on-line no later than one-week before the exam. The exam will be administered during the regular final exam scheduled time for our class on **Thursday, December 15, 2015 at 1:30pm – 4:15pm**. This is the **ONLY** time to take the exam.

VII. Policies on late work, make-ups and extra credit

- Can I submit an assignment late?* Students may submit an assignment after its due date for a 5% (off the total possible score) penalty per-24-hour period that the assignment is late.
- What if I miss an exam?* Make-up exams are only given in the case of verified illness or family emergency, such as a death in the family. Documentation is necessary to receive a qualified make-up examination. Students who arrive late to an in-class exam may still sit for the exam if no other student has already submitted their exam; once a single student hands-in their exam, no others may begin the exam.
- Do you offer extra credit?* No.
- What can I do if I perform poorly on an assignment?* Students who receive a 72% or less on a homework assignment or essay (not exam) may re-do the assignment for a replacement grade. Re-do assignments are subject to a 5% per day penalty starting from the day graded assignments were returned to students in class (regardless of attendance). Assignments that were originally submitted past the due date are NOT eligible for re-do.

VIII. Texts

The reading assignments are chosen to buttress and expand on the analytic foundation laid in class. **Please notify the instructor about problems obtaining the readings as soon as possible.** The following materials are required and can be found at the campus bookstore.

Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, and Frances E. Lee. 2015. *Congress and Its Members*, 15th ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Mayhew, David R. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.
ISBN 978-0-30010-587-2

Stewart, Charles III. 2011. *Analyzing Congress*, 2nd ed. London: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN 978-039-393-506-6

IX. Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Tues., Aug. 30 INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND THE STUDY OF CONGRESS

PART I: FOUNDATIONS AND TOOLS

Thurs. Sept. 1 **NO CLASS**

Tues., Sept. 6 WHY GOVERNMENT? WHY SCIENCE?
Stewart, pp. xv-xx; 1-10; 58-74
[Noel, Hans. 2010. "Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't," *The Forum: Political Science and Practical Politics*, Vol. 8. No. 3, Art. 12.](#)
[Klein, Ezra. 2010. "10 things we think we know, but really don't."](#)

**Thurs., Sept. 8
& Tues., Sept.
13** HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW
Stewart, Chapter 9
Davidson, et al., Chapter 8

**Thurs., Sept. 15
& Tues., Sept.
20** CONGRESS, THE BUDGET PROCESS, AND THE BUREAUCRACY
Davidson, et al., Chapters 11 & 14
["Policy Basics: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.](#)

Thurs., Sept. 22 HOW WE THINK ABOUT CONGRESS
Stewart, pp. 10-15
Davidson, et al., Chapter 1

**Tues., Sept. 27
& Thurs., Sept.
29** MEDIAN VOTER THEOREM & ONE DIMENSIONAL MODELS
Stewart, Chapter 1 (pp. 15-23)

Tues., Oct. 4 UTILITY CURVES AND IDEAL POINTS

Stewart, pp. 403-407

Poole, Keith. 2001 "NOMINATE: A Short Intellectual History." Available:
<http://voteview.com/nominate/nominate.htm>

Thurs., Oct. 6 VOTING CYCLES, STRATEGIC VOTING & ARROW'S THEOREM
Stewart, pp. 23-25; 34-49 (pp. 25-34 *optional*)

Tues. Oct. 11 **No Class, Monday classes held today**

Thurs., Oct. 13 PIVOTAL POLITICS I & II
& **Tues., Oct 18** Stewart, pp. 74-94

Thurs., Oct. 20 LEGISLATIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS
Ringe, Nils, Jennifer Nicoll Victor, and Wendy K. Tam Cho. 2016. "Legislative Networks" in *Oxford Handbook of Political Networks*, Jennifer Nicoll Victor, Alexander H. Montgomery, and Mark Lubell, eds. [Available on-line](#)

Tues. Oct. 25 MIDTERM EXAM

Part II: Elections and the Electoral Connection

Thurs., Oct. 27 HISTORY OF CONGRESS
Stewart, Chapter 3
Davidson, et al., Chapter 2

Tues., Nov. 1 POLITICAL AMBITION
Stewart, Ch. 4

Thurs., Nov. 3 CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT & GERRYMANDERING
Davidson, et al., Chapter 3
Stewart, Chapter 6 (pp. 205-226)

Tues., Nov. 8 THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION
Mayhew, *entire*

Thurs., Nov. 10 CAMPAIGNING
Davidson, et al., Chapter 4
Davidson, et al., Chapter 5

Tues., Nov. 15 CAMPAIGN FINANCE I & II
& **Thurs., Nov. 17** Stewart, Chapter 6 (pp. 226-245)
Campaign Finance Limits: <http://www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/contriblimits.shtml>
Data Summaries from Campaign Finance Institute:
<http://www.cfinst.org/data/historicalStats.aspx>
History of federal campaign finance from the FEC
http://www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/fecfeca.shtml#Campaign_Finance_Law

Tues., Nov. 22 VOTER TURNOUT
Stewart, Chapter 5
Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler. 2014. *Who Votes Now?* Chapter 1.
Available on Blackboard.

Part III: Congressional Institutions

**Tues., Nov.29
& Thurs., Dec.
1** LOBBYING I & II
Davidson, et al., Chapter 13
Victor, Jennifer N. 2011. “Gridlock Lobbying: Breaking, Creating, and
Maintaining Legislative Stalemate,” in *Interest Group Politics*, 8th ed,
Alan Cigler and Burdett Loomis, eds. CQ Press. Available on
Blackboard and [here](#).

Tues., Dec. 6 POLITICAL PARTIES IN CONGRESS
Stewart, Chapter 7
Davidson, et al., Chapter 6

Thurs., Dec. 8 COMMITTEES IN CONGRESS
Stewart, Chapter 8
Davidson, et al., Chapter 7

Thurs., Dec. 15 **FINAL EXAM 1:30PM – 4:15PM**