

**The Congress**  
**Political Science 323**  
**Fall 2016**

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114 Wentworth Street, Room 106  
Office Hours: MW 1pm-4pm | TR 2pm-4pm (or by appointment)  
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Course Meetings  
MWF (12:00pm-12:50pm)  
Maybank room 316

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Course Objective—Mark Twin once commented that “there is no distinctly American criminal class—except Congress.” Unfortunately, this sentiment is shared by many Americans. Like recent Congresses, the current 114<sup>th</sup> Congress is among the least popular of *all time* and is on pace to produce little meaningful legislation. Yet no one can deny that Congress plays *the* central role in our republic. It is no accident, after all, that the very first article of the Constitution details the powers of Congress. How are we to reconcile these two basic facts? Is Congress simply broken? If so, why is it broken and does Congress ever work?

The overarching goal of this course is to provide you with a broad understanding of Congress as both a representative institution as well as a policymaking body. This theme—the “two Congresses”—is central to this course. But this is only one of a few themes we will explore throughout the semester. For example, early in the semester we will discuss whether Congress is a “broken branch” and examine why congressional approval is so low. We will return to this theme at the very end of the semester when you present a research proposal for reforming Congress. We will also pay close attention to congressional elections (given the timing of this class) and the themes of congressional organization and development. With this in mind, there are four specific learning objectives in this class. Students should be able to (1) demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of Congress, (2) evaluate Congress’s dual roles as a policy-making body and a representative institution, (3) analyze and critically assess the effects of recent Congressional elections, and (3) articulate and defend critical arguments about the organization of Congress.

In this class there are five sections. The first section will review the U.S. Constitution and the design of our nation’s legislative branch. In this section the goal is a general understanding of why the Founding Fathers designed Congress the way they did (rejecting alternative designs) and the tradeoffs inherent in those decisions. The second section will summarize a few hundred years of Congress’s institutional development. Although this section is a brief overview of a range of important topics, the goal is to understand how Congress evolved since 1787 and how those changes shape the modern Congress’s operation. The third section will review congressional organization and explore the sources of congressional decision-making. We will address key theoretical questions about how Congress organizes itself before focusing on two key organizational structures: parties and committees. The fourth section will cover congressional elections and campaigns. Note that this section was timed to occur right before the election. In this section the goal is to understand Congress’s role as a representative institution and critically examine the dynamics of election outcomes. The fifth and final section will cover congressional rules and procedures. Although much has changed since the days of *School House Rock*, the central question remains the same: How does a bill become a law and why do rules and procedures matter for legislative outcomes?

Course Format—I have designed this as a “balanced” course. What this means is that what you *learn* will be structured and assessed by a variety of requirements: a semester-long analytical writing assignment (the blog), two exams, a group research project, in-class discussion, a service learning project, and a range of quizzes and in-class activities. I make frequent use of video, charts and figures, lecture, and discussion. Students have diverse learning styles and my hope is that this course reflects this.

Required Texts (4)—Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler. *Congress and Its Members*, 2015, (15<sup>th</sup> ed.).

Dodd and Oppenheimer. *Congress Reconsidered*, 2012, (10<sup>th</sup> ed.).

Theriault. *Party Polarization in Congress*, 2008.

Jacobson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 2012, (8<sup>th</sup> ed.).

Course Location—This course meets in Maybank room 316.

OAKS— This course will rely on the OAKS reserve system. The primary purpose of OAKS is to provide students access to a handful of additional readings and other course material in the most efficient manner possible. All additional readings are clearly noted on the syllabus.

Grades—A plurality of your grade will be determined by two examinations, each worth 17.5%. These exams will be given in class and are closed notes. The second exam is *not* comprehensive. Exam material will come from the required readings and class lecture. There is also a semester-long blog project that counts for 15% of your final grade. For this assignment students are expected to apply the topics covered in this course to current congressional issues and events. You will be required to author original content as well as comment on other students' posts. You will notice that there is no formal term paper in this course; the blog is your major writing requirement for the semester. A second writing assignment of the semester is a congressional elections analysis. For this assignment you are to follow a particular congressional race and discuss the characteristics of the district, describe the two candidates running including their platforms, and predict the eventual winner. This project is worth 10% of your grade. You will also have a group research project due toward the end of the semester. For this project, worth 10% of your final grade, you will collaborate in groups of three to four and research congressional reforms. Based on your research, you will then give a 10 to 15 minute presentation advocating a particular congressional reform(s). The remainder of your grade will be decided by a Constitution quiz (5%), a voter registration service-learning project (5%), pop quizzes scattered throughout the semester (10%), and your individual classroom discussion (10%). The quizzes are intended to test your understanding of the required readings while the discussion is intended to reward those students who come to class prepared to discuss the day's topic.

So, in summary, your grade is determined by: Exam 1: 17.5%, Exam 2: 17.5%, Blog: 15%, Election Analysis: 10%, Reform Project: 10%, Voter Registration Project, 5%, Constitution Quiz: 5%, Pop Quizzes: 10%, Discussion 10%.

I abide by the following grading scale: A = 93+, A- = 90-92.9, B+ = 87.5-89.9, B = 83-87.4, B- = 80-82.9, C+ = 77.5-79.9, C = 73-77.4, C- = 70-72.9, D+ = 67.5-69.9, D = 63-67.4, D- = 60-62.9

Student Responsibilities—You will notice that there will be no “de jure” attendance taken. However, your presence in class is absolutely crucial to earning a good grade in this course. On the one hand, you cannot simply review the required readings a day or two before the exam and expect to earn a good grade. On the other hand, if you miss an in class quiz or class discussions your grade will drop quickly. Thus, the quizzes and discussion will count as a “de facto” attendance grades. There will be one, and only one, “bonus quiz” given during the semester. That quiz will take the place of your lowest quiz grade.

Due Dates—Assignment and exam dates are firm. If you are unable to turn an assignment in during class, I reserve the right to deduct 2% from your grade for every hour that it's late. If an illness or other circumstance forces you to be absent, your first responsibility is to your own health or condition. However, you are still required to fill out an [absence memo](#) with Student Affairs (that is if you missed an assignment or exam). Moreover, you should contact me immediately. Special circumstances will only be given if there is a documented and compelling reason for your absence and you alert me promptly.

Academic Honesty— As with any course at the College of Charleston, you are required to do your own work and abide by the academic honesty guidelines. Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. For any questions please consult the [Student Honor Code](#).

Center for Student Learning—The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, peer academic coaching (PAC), and supplemental instruction (SI). All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the [CSL website](#).

Students with Disabilities— The [Center for Disability Services](#) assists students with disabilities. They provide a number of services including academic advisement and exam assistance. Please feel free to discuss any concerns with me.

### Course Overview

→ denotes the required reading(s) which are to be read prior to the start of the day or week (though see any notes). I will assume you have read, and understood, the material to be discussed each day. Note that these readings will be the subject of the unannounced quizzes. I advise you to review the objectives listed before, during, and after class. If you can answer these questions or topics you should do well on the exams (and more importantly, understand something about Congress).

Core books: DOLS (Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler) = *Congress and Its Members*  
Dodd & Oppenheimer = *Congress Reconsidered*  
Jacobson = *Politics of Congressional Elections*  
Therault = *Party Polarization in Congress*

### Dates/Location

#### Introduction and Course Overview

W  
8/24

#### Part I: Constitutional Beginnings: Article One

- DOLS, Chapter 2 (pages 15-19)
- Zelizer, Chapter 1
- Federalist #10 and #51  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed10.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp)  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed51.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp)
- DOLS, Chapter 2 (pages 19-27)
- Meyerson, Did the Founding Fathers Screw Up?

F, M, W  
8/26-8/31

Notes: read DOLS pages 15-19 and Zelizer Chapter 1 for Friday the 26<sup>th</sup>, read Federalist #10 & #51 and DOLS pages 19-27 for Monday the 29<sup>th</sup>, and read Meyerson for Wednesday the 31<sup>st</sup>.

#### Objectives

- Why did the Framers abandon the Articles of Confederation? What were its weaknesses?
- What were the major theoretical and institutional debates during the Convention?
- What are the constitutional powers of Congress? What are the constitutional limits on Congress?
- What are the strengths and, most importantly, limits of our system of government?

**No Class (APSA Conference)** F  
9/2

**Constitution Quiz** M  
9/5

## Part II: Institutional Development

**The American Congress (a video by Ken Burns)** W, F  
9/7 & 9/9

**Congressional Development (a very brief history of Congress and its evolution)** M, W  
9/12 & 9/14  
→ DOLS, Chapter 2 (pages 28-39)  
→ DO, Chapter 1 (by Sinclair)(pages 1-14 & 19-24)  
→ DO, Chapter 2 (by Dodd and Oppenheimer)(all)

Notes: Read DOLS Chapter 2 for Monday and two DO chapters for Wednesday.

### Objectives

What have been the major changes (since 1787) in the operation of the House and Senate?

Has institutional change been the same for both chambers? What are the differences?

How do individualism and partisanship explain recent Senate developments?

What major internal and external factors explain the operation of House from 1995 to today?

**Voter Registration Services Learning Project (mandatory class)** F  
9/16

**Polarization** M, W, F  
9/19-9/23  
→ Theriault, Chapters 2 & 4-7  
→ Herrnson, Why the United States Does Not Have Responsible Parties

Notes: read the Theriault Chapter 2 for Monday, Theriault Chapters 4, 5 & 6 for Wednesday, and Theriault Chapter 7 and the Herrnson article for Friday.

### Objectives

Is Congress more polarized today than in the past 30 years?

Is polarization unusual in our nation's history? In what periods has polarization been high and low?

What factors have caused Congress's recent polarization?

Can polarization be a power for good? What are the benefits of polarization?

**Gridlock** M, W  
9/26 & 9/28  
→ Mann and Ornstein, Finding the Common Good in an Era of Dysfunctional Governance  
→ Matthews, Justin Trudeau Isn't Magic  
→ Binder, Polarized We Govern?

### **Blog Post # 1 Due 9/26**

Notes: read Mann and Ornstein and Matthews for Monday and Binder for Wednesday.

### Objectives

Is Congress gridlocked?

What were the major developments that caused Congress's modern dysfunction?

Why does the public dislike Congress? Is disapproval "natural" in our system?

### **Exam 1**

F  
9/30

### **Part III. Congressional Organization: Parties and Committees**

#### **Parties**

→ Parties Discussion and Simulation (no reading for Monday)

→ DO, Chapter 7 (by Smith and Gamm)

→ DOLS, Chapter 6

M, W, F  
10/3-10/7

Notes: Read DO Chapter 7 for Wednesday and DOLS Chapter 6 for Friday.

### Objectives

How has the power of the majority party evolved in the House and Senate since the late

How, exactly, does the majority influence public policy?

What organizational role do parties play in Congress?

#### **Committees**

→ DOLS, Chapter 7

→ DO, Chapter 8 (by Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde)

M, W, F  
10/10-10/14

#### **Blog Post # 2 Due 10/14**

### Objectives

What are the competing theories of committee organization?

How has the power and role of committees changed since the 1950s?

How are members selected to committee? What characteristics matter?

How do committees embody the "two Congresses" theme?

### **Part IV. Electoral Institutions and Congressional Elections**

#### **Electoral Institutions and Voters**

→ Jacobson Ch. 2

→ Jacobson Ch. 5 (pages 120-144 and 154-160)

M, W, F  
10/17-10/21

Notes: Read Chapter 2 for Monday and Chapter 5 for Wednesday.

### Objectives

What does the Constitution say about congressional elections?

How does the Constitution shape representation in the House and Senate?

Does gerrymandering affect congressional elections? If so, how?

Who votes in Congressional elections?

How do partisanship, information, and issues shape voting behavior in congressional elections?

**Congressional Candidates** M, W  
→ Jacobson Ch. 3 (pages 29-59) 10/24 & 10/26

Objectives

How valuable is incumbency? Has its value changed over time? If so, how and why?  
Why, exactly, is incumbency valuable?

**Congressional Campaigns** F, M  
→ Jacobson Ch. 4 (pages 64-67 & 91-119) 10/28 & 10/31

→ Open Secrets, Top 10 Things Every Voter Should Know About Money in Politics

<https://www.opensecrets.org/resources/dollarocracy/index.php>

→ DO, Chapter 6 (by Bernhard and Sulkin)

Objectives

What is the role of money in Congressional elections? Has the role of money changed?  
What is the candidate's role in a campaign? What are common campaign strategies?  
How does money shape dynamics inside Congress?  
What is the role of parties and outside groups in congressional campaigns?

**Congressional Election Outcomes** W,F  
→ Jacobson Ch. 6 (pages 161-184) 11/2-11/4

→ Cohen, What Are the Chances the Democrats Retake the House?

→ Millstein, Will Republicans Lose the Senate in 2016?

**Midterm Analysis Due Friday 11/4**

Notes: please read the Jacobson chapter for Wednesday at the Cohen and Millstein articles for Friday. On Friday we will do a class exercise simulating the 2016 congressional election.

Objectives

What are some of the main determinants of congressional election outcomes?  
Specifically, how and why do midterm elections differ from presidential elections?  
How do the above factors shape the strategic decision to run for Congress?

**No Class (Fall Break)** M  
11/7

**Election Day (Go Vote!)** T  
11/8

**Election Debrief and Discussion** W  
11/9

**Part V. Congressional Rules, Procedures and Decision Making**

**Theory and Practice: Why Study Congressional Rules?** F  
→ Rules Discussion | Guest Lecture By CofC President Glenn McConnell 11/11

<p><b>Pre-Floor Action in the House and Senate: Introduction, Cosponsorship and Markup</b>  → DOLS, Chapter 8 (pages 205-224 and 229-232)</p>	<p>M, W  11/14, 11/16</p>
<p><b>Floor Action in the House and Senate: Special Rules, UCAs, Amending and Filibusters</b>  → DOLS, Chapter 8 (pages 224-229 and 232-243)  → DO, Chapter 9 (by Koger)</p>	<p>F, M  11/18, 11/21</p>
<p><b>Blog Post # 3 Due 11/21</b></p>	
<p><u>Objectives</u>  How do rules affect policy outcomes?  What role does the Rules Committee play?  How do the rules of the House and Senate differ? Why do they differ?</p>	
<p><b>No Class (Thanksgiving)</b></p>	<p>W, F  11/23 &amp; 11/25</p>
<p><b>Final Thoughts? The Two Congresses and the Future of Congress</b>  → Open Discussion (no readings)</p>	<p>M  11/28</p>
<p><b>Exam 2</b></p>	<p>W  11/30</p>
<p><b>Reform Project Lab Time (mandatory classes)</b>  Notes: You will meet in groups and finalize your group presentations.</p>	<p>F, M  12/2 &amp; 12/5</p>
<p><b>Reform Project Presentations! (final exam period)</b></p>	<p>W  12/7  12:00-3:00pm</p>