The Congress  
Political Science 323  
Fall 2019

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Course Objective—A common belief among the American public is that Congress is hopelessly broken. From the institution’s deference to the executive branch, low approval rating, and its high rates of polarization and gridlock, the conventional wisdom is that Congress is not working as intended. Yet no one can deny that Congress plays the central role in our republican form of government. 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 really broken? If so, why is it broken, and if not, in what ways does Congress actually work?

In this class 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. After completing this course, 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. Please note that a prerequisite for this course is the successful completion of POLI 101 (American Government).

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 with a focus on polarization and gridlock. 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. In the fourth section we 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? And in the final section we will examine congressional elections. We will briefly review how Congress’s elections are structured from an institutional standpoint and discuss Congress’s role as both a representative and responsive branch of government.

Course Format—I have designed this as a “balanced” course and thus what you learn will be determined by a broad mix of assignments and activities: a research paper, monthly memos, two exams, data analysis assignments, in-class discussion, a reflection essay, 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 (2)—Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan. The United States Congress (2019)  

Course Location—This course meets in Maybank room 307 except for two lab sessions that will meet in Education Center room 108.
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 22.5%. 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. A research paper is due at the end of the semester and is worth 20% of your grade. For this paper you are required to formulate a research question, review the literature on your topic, analyze an existing dataset, and hopefully answer your research question. Another paper, also due at the end of the semester, is a short reflection essay worth 10% of your grade. Over the semester you will be asked to write a series of monthly memos that review key current events in Congress and link them to topics from class. You will write three memos in total for 7.5% of your grade. In preparation for the research paper, you will complete three data analysis exercises over the semester. These will count as 7.5% of your grade. Rounding out your grade are a series of quizzes and in-class discussion. Each of these items is worth 5% of your grade.

So, in summary, your grade is determined by: Exam 1: 22.5%, Exam 2: 22.5%, Research Paper: 20%, Reflection Essay: 10%, Memos: 7.5%, Data Analysis Exercises: 7.5%, Quizzes: 5%, Class Discussion: 5%.

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 is no formal 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. In this respect the quizzes and discussion will count as “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 honestly 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 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.

Books: AJS = *The United States Congress* by Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan
McCarty = *Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Readings</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>T 8/20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Part I: From the Articles of Confederation to Article One</strong></td>
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<td>Class Discussion: Thinking About Congress</td>
<td>R 8/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Articles of Confederation and the Framers’ Design</td>
<td>T 8/27</td>
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<td>→ Federalist #10 and #51 (on OAKS)</td>
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<td>→ Zelizer, Chapter 1 (on OAKS)</td>
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<td>Article One: The Congress</td>
<td>R 8/29</td>
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<td>→ Meyerson, Did the Founding Fathers Screw Up? (on OAKS)</td>
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<td>→ Faris, Separation of Powers is a Lie (on OAKS)</td>
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**Objectives**

Why did the Framers abandon the Articles of Confederation? What were its weaknesses? What were the major debates during the Convention as far as Congress’s structure? What are the constitutional powers of Congress? What are the constitutional limits on Congress? What are the strengths and limits of our system of government?

**Constitution Quiz** T 9/3

**Part II: Institutional Development**

The American Congress (a documentary by Ken Burns) T, R 9/3 & 9/5

Congressional Development (a very brief history of Congress and its evolution over time) T, R 9/10 & 9/12

→ AJS, Chapter 2 (pgs. 20-54)

**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? What causes the House and Senate to undergo major institutional change? How do individualism and partisanship explain recent Senate developments? What major internal and external factors explain the operation of House from 1995 to today?
Polarization

→ McCarty, Chapters 2-3 (for Tuesday 9/17)
→ Data Analysis Class (VoteView.com/Member Ideology Database) (for Tuesday 9/17)
→ McCarty, Chapters 5-6 (for Thursday)
→ McCarty, Chapters 8 (for Tuesday 9/24)
→ Data Assignment #1 Due 9/24 (upload to OAKS)

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

→ Mann and Ornstein, Finding the Common Good (on OAKS) (for Thursday)
→ Binder, Polarized We Govern? (on OAKS) (for Thursday)
→ Data Analysis Class (Congressional Bills Project Database) (for Thursday)
→ Adler and Wilkerson, Problem Solving and American Politics (on OAKS) (for Tuesday)
→ Data Assignment #2 Due 10/1 (upload to OAKS)

Objectives
Is Congress gridlocked? If so, what is gridlock?
What were the major developments that caused Congress’s modern dysfunction?
In what ways does Congress work?

Exam 1

Part III. Congressional Organization: Parties and Committees

Parties

→ Parties Discussion (no reading for Tuesday)
→ AJS, Chapter 6 (for Thursday 10/10)
→ Grossman and Hopkins, Asymmetric Politics (for Thursday 10/17)

Objectives
How has the power of the majority party evolved in the House and Senate since the late 1800s?
How, exactly, does the majority influence public policy?
What organizational role do parties play in Congress?
What are the key differences between the Republican and Democratic parties?

Committees

→ AJS, Chapter 5 (for Tuesday)

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?
Part IV. Congressional Rules, Procedures and Decision Making

Pre-Floor Action: Introduction, Cosponsorship and Markup
→ Oleszek, Preliminary Legislative Action (on OAKS)
10/29

Floor Action: Special Rules, UCAs, Amending and Filibusters
→ AJS, Chapter 7 (pgs. 236-254) (for Thursday)
→ AJS, Chapter 7 (pgs. 254-269) (for Tuesday)
→ Sinclair, The Consequences of Unorthodox Lawmaking (for Tuesday) (on OAKS)

Objectives
Why do members sponsor and cosponsor legislation?
Why do we have rules? What purpose do they serve?
How do rules affect policy outcomes?
What role does the Rules Committee play in the modern Congress?
How do the rules of the House and Senate differ? Why do they differ?

Part V. Congressional Elections

Institutional Foundations of Congressional Elections
→ AJS, Chapter 4 (102-128)
11/7

Election Outcomes
→ AJS, Chapter 4 (pgs. 129-148)
→ Golshan and Nilsen, Democrats’ Uphill Battle to Retake the Senate in 2020
→ Data Analysis Class (CCES Database)
11/12

Representation and Responsiveness
→ AJS, Chapter 3 (pgs. 66-73 and 81-101)
→ Reid, Filibuster is Suffocating the Will of the American People (on OAKS)
→ Data Assignment #3 Due 11/14 (upload to OAKS)
11/14

Objectives
What does the Constitution say about congressional elections?
How valuable is incumbency? Has its value changed over time? If so, how and why?
What are some of the main determinants of congressional election outcomes?
How and why do midterm elections differ from presidential elections?
Is Congress a representative institution? If yes, how so, if not, why not?
Is Congress a responsive institution? If yes, how so, if not, why not?

Exam 2
11/19

Research Paper Lab Session (meet in ECTR 108)
11/21 & 11/26

Concluding Thoughts: Reflections on the Course (during final exam slot)
12/5 (12-3pm)