POLI 323
The Congress
Fall 2020

Instructor: Dr. Jordan Ragusa  Location: Online (via OAKS)
Office: JC Long Building  Meetings: Asynchronous
Room: 206  Office Hours: By appointment (via Zoom)
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Course Description
A common belief among the American public is that Congress is hopelessly broken. From the institution’s
dererence to the executive branch, low approval rating, and its high rates of both polarization and gridlock,
the conventional wisdom is that Congress is not working as the Framers intended. Yet no one can deny
that Congress plays the central role in our system of government. It is no accident, after all, that the very
first article of the Constitution details the powers and functions of the legislative branch. How are we to
reconcile these facts? Is Congress really broken? If so, why is it broken, and if not, how does Congress
actually work?

Course Overview
In this course there are four sections. First, we will cover Article I of the Constitution and then summa-
rize Congress’s institutional development since 1789. In this section the goal is to equip students with a
basic understanding of why the Framers designed Congress the way they did (rejecting alternatives) and
how subsequent historical developments shape the modern Congress’s performance. Second, we will review
congressional organization and identify the sources of Congress’s operation. In particular, we will address
important theoretical questions about how Congress organizes itself, focusing on two key structures: parties
and committees. In the third section, we will review congressional campaigns and elections and critically
examine the dynamics of election outcomes. Note that this section was timed to occur right before the
November election. Fourth, we will cover representation, congressional rules, and decisionmaking. Although
much has changed since 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? So, the class overview looks as follows:

Creation and Change.............8/25 to 9/13
Legislative Organization........9/14 to 10/4
Congressional Elections ........10/5 to 11/1
Representation and Rules .....11/1 to 11/15

Key Dates

Exam #1 .................. 10/5
Exam #2 .................. 11/16
Research Proposal Due ............ 11/24
Research Paper Due ............. 12/11

Course Format
Due to COVID-19 and the challenges with conducting this class in a hybrid format, I made the difficult
decision to make this course “online exclusively.” In other words our class will be online and asynchronous,
meaning there are no set meeting times, your learning will be self-paced, and the content will be delivered
digitally. Each unit will be delivered on a weekly basis. Specifically, each week’s modules will open at noon
on Monday and everything will be due by 11:59pm that Sunday. In general the weekly modules will consist
of a mix of readings, lecture videos, quizzes, and assignments. But ultimately how, and when, you com-
plete the week’s requirements is up to you. Please check OAKS every few days—including the grade-book
feature—and expect 7-10 hours or work per week.
No matter what this semester brings, this class will utilize a broad range of assignments, activities, and learning strategies. Over the semester you will write a quantitative research paper, examine campaign finance data, create a portfolio analyzing the race in South Carolina’s first congressional district, complete a mix of readings, write short reaction essays, take two exams, and participate in online discussions. During lecture I make frequent use of video, charts and figures, and discussion. Students have diverse learning styles and my hope is that this course reflects this fact.

Netiquette

Netiquette combines the word “net,” slang for the internet, and “etiquette,” and it refers to how you ought to conduct yourself in this course. Netiquette is especially important in a class like this where students are required to interact with one another in a digital environment. Keep in mind that it is easy to misinterpret someone’s intent online without the usual non-verbal communication in face-to-face interaction. In short, please treat everyone with respect, give them the benefit of the doubt, and, if you must, disagree respectfully. Lastly, good netiquette includes providing thoughtful feedback to your classmates. My role as your professor is to facilitate a number of conversations online, yet it is your job to maintain those conversations, build a class community, and learn from one another’s internship experiences.

Continuity of Learning and Interruption of Instruction

Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances. Although the course is online exclusively, the unprecedented nature of this semester may require some changes to the syllabus to ensure the continuity of learning. Any changes in the course format or delivery will be communicated by email. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

Recording of Classes

As noted above, the class will be conducted asynchronously, so there are no set class meetings. As such, there will be no class recordings (other than recorded lectures of myself). Office hour sessions will not be recorded either.

POLI Objectives

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 (4) 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).

Required Readings

Each day’s required reading(s) can be found below. Standalone texts such as journal articles, book chapters, and newspaper articles will be made available on OAKS. We will also read the following books which you should purchase.


Graded Items

A plurality of your grade, 45% in total, will be determined by two examinations. Exams will be given online in OAKS and will be a mix of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. Each exam is scheduled for a Monday between 3pm-9pm and you will have 1 hour and 15 minutes from the time you begin. Exams will be open notes/readings and no proctoring service will be used. A quantitative research paper is due at the
end of the semester and is worth 20% of your course grade. For this paper you are required to formulate a research question, propose a hypothesis, and analyze election data. Paper instructions will be provided later in the semester. A portfolio analyzing the election in South Carolina’s 1st congressional district compromises 10% of your grade. Note that this portfolio will be scaffolded during the congressional elections section. In other words, you will work on various aspects of the portfolio over the course of about a month. Finally, a range of short assignments (reading responses, quizzes, online discussion posts, etc.) will be due throughout semester. Note that the quizzes will be 10 questions and you will have 10 minutes to complete them. Like the exams, they will be open notes/readings. Collectively, these short assignments comprise 25% of your overall course grade.

**Grade Distribution**

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<td>Exam #1</td>
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<td>Exam #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>SC-1 Portfolio</td>
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**Grade Policy**

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**Student Responsibilities**

Attendance will not be taken this semester (this class is asynchronous, after all). Nonetheless, if you are feeling ill, even just a little, please do the socially responsible thing and stay home. If an illness causes you to miss an assignment, I will trust your explanation, will not request any documentation, and will make reasonable accommodations for make-up work. However, it is imperative that you communicate with me in a timely manner. Reasonable accommodations will only be given with prompt communication. In addition, please know that keeping up with the assignments is absolutely crucial to earning a good grade in this course. You cannot simply review the material a day or two before the exam and expect to earn a good grade.

**Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when suspected, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved. Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to misunderstanding and confusion will be handled by the instructor. The instructor designs an intervention or assigns a grade reduction to help prevent the student from repeating the error. The response is recorded on a form and signed both by the instructor and the student. It is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This status indicator will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. For any questions please consult the Student Handbook. When in doubt, feel free to reach out to me as well.

**Center For Student Learning**

The Center for Student Learning, or CSL, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources in support of students. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, peer academic coaching, and supplemental instruction. All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on the CSL website. Note: I will offer you a 2.5% bonus on the research paper if you meet with an advisor in the Writing Lab for help with your paper.
Students With Disabilities

The Center for Disability Services, better known as the SNAP Office, assists students with disabilities. SNAP provides a number of services including academic advisement and exam assistance. Any student eligible for and needing accommodations because of a disability is asked to speak with me during the first two weeks of class or as soon as they have been approved for services so that reasonable accommodations can be arranged.

COURSE SCHEDULE

What follows is each week’s class content. Modules for the week will open on Monday at noon and all required readings and assignments should be completed by Sunday at 11:59 pm. Check OAKS for assignment instructions and standalone readings. Please review each week’s learning objectives before working on the modules and when preparing for the exam. If you can answer these questions, you should do well in this course.

Congress: Creation and Change

Introduction
Reading(s)
→ None
Assignment(s)
→ Watch the course introduction video (Module 1)
→ Complete the syllabus quiz (Module 1)
→ Complete the “Congress word” discussion post (Module 2)
→ Complete the normative foundations essay (Module 2)
Objective(s)
→ What are the course policies, requirements, objectives and structure?

From the Articles of Confederation to Article One
Reading(s)
→ Madison “Federalist no. 10” (Module 3)
→ Zelizer “From the Old Congress to the New” (Module 3)
→ Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan Chapter 2 (pages 20-24)
→ Meyerson “Did the Founding Fathers Screw Up” (Module 4)
Assignment(s)
→ Complete the Federalist no. 10 reading response (Module 3)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 3)
→ Complete the Week 2 quiz (Module 3)
→ Complete the Meyerson discussion post (Module 4)
Objective(s)
→ Why did the Articles of Confederation fail? 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 checks on Congress?
→ What are the strengths and limits of our system of government?
Congress’s Development and the History of Polarization

Week 3 (9/7 – 9/13)

Reading(s)
→ Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan Chapter 2 (pages 25-54)
→ McCarty Chapter 2 (all)
→ Binder “Polarized We Govern?” (Module 5)

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 5)
→ Complete the Week 3 quiz (Module 5)
→ Complete the ideology poll (Module 5)

Objectives(s)
→ What have been the major changes since 1787 in the operation of the Congress?
→ What causes the House and Senate to undergo institutional change?
→ What is polarization? And is Congress more polarized today than in the past 30 years?
→ Is polarization unusual in our nation’s history? In what periods was polarization high and low?

Congress’s Organization: Polarization, Parties and Committees

What Causes Polarization?

Week 4 (9/14 – 9/20)

Reading(s)
→ McCarty Chapter 3, 5 & 6 (all)

Assignment(s)
→ Complete the Week 4 quiz (Module 6)
→ Submit a polarization question to the discussion board (Module 6)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 7)
→ Complete the member ideology analysis (Module 7)

Objectives(s)
→ What factors have caused Congress’s recent polarization? What is the evidence for these factors?
→ Can polarization be a power for good? What are the benefits of polarization?

Parties

Week 5 (9/21 – 9/27)

Reading(s)
→ Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan Chapter 6 (pages 196-210)
→ Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan Chapter 6 (pages 210-228)
→ Grossman and Hopkins “Asymmetric Politics”

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the polarization Q&A video (Module 8)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 8)
→ Complete the Week 5 quiz no. 1 (Module 8)
→ Complete the organizational theory essay (Module 9)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 9)
→ Complete the Week 5 quiz no. 2 (Module 9)

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

Committees

Week 6 (9/28 – 10/4)

Reading(s)
→ Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan Chapter 5 (all)

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 10)
→ Complete the Week 6 quiz (Module 10)

Objectives(s)
→ 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?
Congressional Elections

Constitutional Requirements, State Law and Social Context

Reading(s)
→ Jacobson and Carson Chapter 2 (all)

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 12)
→ Watch the vote by mail and voter fraud videos (Module 12)
→ Complete the Week 7 quiz (Module 12)
→ Complete the “SC-1 portfolio” district profile essay (Module 13)

Objectives(s)
→ In what ways does the Constitution regulate congressional elections?
→ How does the Constitution shape representation in the House and Senate?
→ Does gerrymandering affect congressional election outcomes? If so, how?

Voters and Candidates

Reading(s)
→ Jacobson and Carson Chapter 5 (pages 155-178)
→ Jacobson and Carson Chapter 3 (all)
→ Lawless and Fox “The Gender Gap in Political Ambition” (Module 15)

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 14)
→ Listen to the NPR story on Republican women running in 2020 (Module 14)
→ Complete the Week 8 quiz (Module 14)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 15)
→ Complete the “SC-1 portfolio” demographic analysis (Module 15)

Objectives(s)
→ Who turns out to vote in Congressional elections?
→ How do partisanship, information, and issues shape voting behavior in congressional elections?
→ How valuable is incumbency? Has its value changed over time? Why is incumbency valuable?

Congressional Campaigns

Reading(s)
→ Jacobson and Carson Chapter 4 (all)
→ Sulkin “Promises Made and Promises Kept”

Assignment(s)
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 16)
→ Complete the Week 9 quiz (Module 16)
→ Complete the OpenSecrets.org discussion post (Module 16)
→ Complete the parent poll (Module 16)
→ Complete the “SC-1 portfolio” campaign analysis (Module 17)

Objectives(s)
→ 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?
→ What is the role of parties and outside groups in congressional campaigns?
Election Outcomes  
Week 10 (10/26 – 11/1)  
Reading(s)  
→ Jacobson and Carson Chapter 6 (pages 193-221)  
→ Hunt “Where Does the Race for Control of Congress Stand?” (Module 18)  
Assignment(s)  
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 18)  
→ Complete the Week 10 quiz (Module 18)  
→ Watch the lecture video (Module 19)  
→ Complete the “SC-1 portfolio” voter analysis (Module 19)  
Objectives(s)  
→ 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?  

Representation, Rules and Roll-Calls  

Representation  
Week 11 (11/2 – 11/8)  
Reading(s)  
→ Jacobson and Carson Chapter 7 (259-278)  
→ Swers “The Difference Women Make” (Module 20)  
Assignment(s)  
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 20)  
→ Complete the Week 11 quiz (Module 20)  
Objectives(s)  
→ Is there evidence of policy congruence between members and voters?  
→ What is substantive representation? What is descriptive representation? How do they differ?  
→ What is the difference between representation and responsiveness?  

Rules, Procedures, and Roll-Call Behavior  
Week 12 (11/9 – 11/15)  
Reading(s)  
→ Adler, Jenkins, and Shipan Chapter 7 (all)  
Assignment(s)  
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 21)  
→ Complete the Week 12 quiz (Module 21)  
→ Complete the legislative history essay (Module 22)  
Objectives(s)  
→ Why do members sponsor and cosponsor legislation? What explains how members vote?  
→ Why do we have rules? What purpose do they serve?  
→ What role does the Rules Committee play in the modern Congress?  
→ How do the rules of the House and Senate differ?  

Exam 2 (see module 23 for instructions)  

Week 13 (11/16)  
Research Projects  

Introduction to SPSS and the CCES Dataset  
Week 13 (11/16 – 11/22)  
Reading(s)  
→ None  
Assignment(s)  
→ Watch the lecture video(s) (Module 24)  
→ Complete data analysis assignment (Module 24)  
→ Complete the end of semester essay (Module 25)  
Objectives(s)  
→ Familiarize yourself with statistical software and basic data analysis
Research Proposal  Week 14 (11/23 – 11/24)
   Reading(s)
      → None
   Assignment(s)
      → Research proposal due 11/24 before break (Module 26)
   Objective(s)
      → Start brainstorming your research paper

Thanksgiving Break (No Class)  W (11-25)

Paper Lab Sessions  Week 15 (11/30 – 12/6)
   Reading(s)
      → None
   Assignment(s)
      → Schedule a 15 minute Zoom meeting (Module 26)
   Objective(s)
      → Complete your research paper

Reading Day (No Class)  M (12-7)

Research Papers Due  F (12-11)