

University of Notre Dame
Political Science 30005
The United States Congress
Spring 2024

DeBartolo Hall, Room 217
MW 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM

Instructor: Rachel Porter (rachel.porter@nd.edu)
TA: Emily Anderson (eander26@nd.edu)

Office hours:

M 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM (Porter)
TTH 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Anderson)

2057 Jenkins Nanovic Halls
2040 Jenkins Nanovic Halls

This course is a comprehensive introduction to the workings of the contemporary U.S. Congress. We will examine who runs for and who wins seats in Congress, the lawmaking processes in the House and Senate, and the roles of parties and leaders in the two chambers. The purpose of this course is to examine two fundamental questions: (1) what do members of Congress do and why and (2) how do the individual and collective actions of members of Congress explain national policy? We will examine the process of legislating as well as the role of political parties, leaders, and interest groups. Throughout the semester, we will debate the common criticism that “Congress is broken” and consider its effectiveness as an institution. Is policymaking too partisan? Is the public’s disapproval of Congress justified?

Required Texts

1. “Congress Explained: Representation and Lawmaking in the First Branch”; Casey Burgat and Charles Hunt. Sage Publishing, 2022; 9781071841495

Recommended Texts

2. “Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign,” Frances E. Lee
3. “The American Congress Reader,” Steven S. Smith et al.
4. “Congress Overwhelmed: The Decline in Congressional Capacity and Prospects for Reform,” Timothy LaPira et al.

Assignments

Schedule of Graded Assignments

50% Midterm Exam & Final Exam (one exam worth 35%, the other worth 15%)
50% Paper 1 & Paper 2 (one paper worth 35%, the other worth 15%)

Midterm & Final Exam: Both exams will be in class and consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay question formats. We will discuss test format in detail prior to the exam dates.

Paper #1: Each student will write an 8–9-page (double-spaced) paper analyzing the campaign of a current congressional candidate. Students will apply class concepts to assess candidate campaign

strategy, and to tie these strategic choices back to broader themes of congressional politics. Further information on this assignment will be provided in class and handouts. Paper #1 is due in class by 9 a.m. on March 20th. I do not accept electronic submissions.

Paper #2: Each student will write an 8–9-page (double-spaced) paper describing and analyzing a reform to the U.S. Congress. Students will apply class concepts to discuss whether the bill will succeed or fail in moving through the House and, subsequently, the Senate. Further information on this assignment will be provided in class and handouts. Paper #2 is due in class by 9 a.m. on April 24th. I do not accept electronic submissions.

Course Expectations & Policies

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. If changes are made, students will be informed through email and verbally in class, and a new syllabus document will be posted.

Class Attendance Policy

Considering these uncertain and unprecedented times, I do not have a hard and fast attendance policy. However, I would highly suggest attending class as frequently as possible.

Class Slides

I do not provide online copies of slides used in class. If you have an excused absence, I will send copies of slides used in class.

Honor Code

This class follows the binding Code of Honor at Notre Dame. The graded work you do in this class must be your own. In the case where you collaborate with other students make sure to fairly attribute their contribution to your project. AI composition software (like ChatGPT) may not be used for assignments in this course unless specifically stated in the assignment. Using these tools without my permission puts your academic integrity at risk. When this use has been permitted, the content generated or significantly modified by technology means must be properly attributed.

Inclusiveness

The University of Notre Dame is committed to social justice. I share that commitment and strive to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. In this class we will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, economic class, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration. Students who fail to uphold this commitment to inclusivity will be expelled from class.

Communication

I am very happy to meet with students outside of class time. Whether it be to discuss concerns about the course, remediation with the material, or simply to engage further with the topic, please

feel free to stop by JNH 2057 during my office hours. If you are unable to meet during my office hours, which are listed at the top of this syllabus, please email me to set up a time to talk. Email is the best mode of communication with which to reach me. While I do my best to respond to emails as quickly and thoroughly as possible, please expect a response within 24 hours and plan accordingly. Office hours are an important resource that should be utilized to improve understanding of materials or ask more personalized questions.

Extensions

I will provide a 48-hour extension on all written assignments when requested, no questions asked. Students must submit a request in writing via email before the assignment deadline. I will not provide extensions or alternative dates for scheduled exams unless an appropriate excuse is provided (emergency, university event, or medical issue). Documentation will be required.

Accessibility

Any student who has a documented disability and is registered with Sara Bea Accessibility Services should speak with the professor as soon as possible regarding accommodations. Students who are not registered should contact the Sara Bea Accessibility Services as soon as possible since accommodation typically needs to be arranged well in advance.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

* indicates that reading only covers specific pages

Date	Concept	Required Readings & Assignments
Jan 17	Introduction & Expectations	
Jan 22	Foundations & Basics	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 1 (skim) & 2
Jan 24	Theories of Representation	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 3, pp 53-67 * - Katherine Schaeffer. "The changing face of Congress in 8 charts." <i>Pew Research Center</i> . February 7, 2023 - George Ingram and Annababette Wils. "Misrepresentation in the House of Representatives." <i>Brookings</i> . February 22, 2017
Jan 29	Theories of Constituencies	- Richard F. Fenno. Summary of: <i>U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies</i> . In <i>The American Congress Reader</i> , pp. 51-57 *
Jan 31	Incumbency	- David Mayhew (1974). Summary of <i>Congress: The Electoral Connection</i> . In <i>The American Congress Reader</i>
Feb 5	Elections: Emergence	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 4, pp 87-98 * (next page) - David W. Rhode. "Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition." In <i>The American Congress Reader</i>
Feb 7	Elections: Fundraising	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 4, pp 106-110 * - Maggie Koerth. "How Money Affects Elections." <i>FiveThirtyEight</i> . September 10, 2018. - OpenSecrets. "What is Dark Money?"
Feb 12	Elections: Success	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 4, pp 110-122 * (next page)

		- Morris Fiorina. (2016). The (Re)Nationalization of Congressional Elections. <i>The Hoover Institution</i>
Feb 14	Political Parties: Evolution	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 5, pp. 127-146 *
Feb 19	Political Parties: Organization	- John Aldrich and David Rhode. "The Logic of Conditional Party Government: Revisiting the Electoral Connection" (skim) - Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins. Summary of: <i>Setting the Agenda</i> . In <i>The American Congress Reader</i> (skim)
Feb 21	Political Parties: Power	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 5, pp. 154-163 * - <i>Insecure Majorities</i> , Chapter 2
Feb 26	Paper #1 – Introduction	
Feb 28	No Class – Conference	
Mar 4	Review	
Mar 6	Midterm Exam	
Mar 11	No Class – Spring Break	
Mar 13	No Class – Spring Break	
Mar 18	Policymaking I	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapter 7, pp. 207-233 *
Mar 20	Policymaking II	- Reynolds, M. E. 2020. "What Is the Senate Filibuster, and What Would It Take to Eliminate It?", Brookings Institution. - Mitch McConnell. "The Filibuster Plays a Crucial Role in our Constitutional Order." <i>New York Times</i> . August 22, 2019. - Harry Reid. "The Filibuster is Suffocating the Will of the American People." <i>New York Times</i> . August 12, 2019. - Paper #1 Due
Mar 25	Capacity: Challenges	- <i>Congress Overwhelmed</i> , Chapter 3
Mar 27	Capacity: Committees	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapters 6, 167-182, 191-204 *
Apr 1	No Class – Holiday	
Apr 3	Paper #2 – Introduction	
Apr 8	Capacity: Staff	- <i>Congress Overwhelmed</i> , Chapter 5
Apr 10	Congress & The President	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapter 9, pp. 285-295, 309-321
Apr 15	Spatial Models of Policymaking	- Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen. An Introduction to the Spatial Theory of Legislating. In <i>The American Congress Reader</i>
Apr 17	Spatial Models of Policymaking	
Apr 22	Congress & The Bureaucracy	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapter 10, pp. 327-345*
Apr 24	Congress & Interest Groups	- <i>Congress Explained</i> , Chapter 11, pp. 369-387 - Jeffrey Lazarus. "Which Members of Congress become lobbyists? The ones with the most power. Here's the data." <i>The Washington Post</i> , January 15, 2016. - Paper #2 Due
Apr 29	Review	
May 1	Final Exam	

