

**PSC 2218W
Legislative Politics
Fall 2021**

**MW 9:35-10:50 am
Monroe 114**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION and LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As our semester begins, Congress continues to struggle to legislate: Polarized and near-parity parties, internal party divisions, limited organizational resources, a new president, and a former president with a death grip on his Congressional party complicate lawmakers' ability to "get to yes." These challenges raise doubts about Congress's and the president's capacity to address the challenges of the day, including government funding, climate change, the global pandemic, voting rights, infrastructure, investigating the attacks of January 6th, rising national debt, and now the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan. Our eyes this semester will be on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue as we explore electoral and institutional forces that shape the dynamics of congressional elections and affect the political will and institutional capacity of Congress to solve public problems.

The electoral context sets the stage for our study of Congress—the oldest popularly elected legislature in the world and the most powerful one. After completing this writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) course, you should be able to:

1. Analyze and write critically about electoral and institutional features of the U.S. Congress.
2. Apply political science concepts and theories to the study of the U.S. Congress.
3. Demonstrate conventions of writing in the discipline of political science.
4. Communicate critical and analytical thinking through drafting and revising written work, as well as through peer review of classmates' writing.

Political science theories can help us to interpret and explain contemporary politics, so throughout the course we will keep a collective eye on events in Washington and elsewhere related to legislative politics and Congress. We will start each class session with a discussion of news that is relevant to our study of Congress, so I expect you to come to class prepared to raise stories or questions from the week's news. I highly recommend that you read a daily newspaper, subscribe to a Congressional newsletter (a few suggestions listed below), or listen to a news podcast (such as the *NYT's The Daily*, several produced by *CQ Roll Call* or others). Attention to developments on the Hill will enhance the value of this course for you. But it is no substitute for careful reading, classroom discussion, and attendance.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

The required reading consists of two books and numerous readings posted on Blackboard. Both books will be available (in paperback or e-versions) for purchase or rent via the GW Bookstore (or elsewhere). *The new Davidson et. al. edition (18th edition, 2022) is scheduled to ship (digitally and hard copies) on Sept. 7. I will*

provide copies of the first couple of chapters until the new edition is available. I highly recommend that you purchase or rent the new edition; relying on the 17th edition will put you at a disadvantage. On occasion, I will post additional readings on Blackboard, or I will circulate them by email. These reading assignments will be announced in class or by email. You are responsible for making sure that I have a working email address for you at the beginning of the semester.

1. Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, Schickler, and Curry: *Congress and Its Members*, 18th edition, CQ Press. 2022
2. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd edition, Yale University Press. 2004.

If you are interested in keeping up to date on what's happening on Capitol Hill, I recommend that you consider subscribing to a morning newsletter or a "substack" on Congress. You are encouraged but not *required* to do so. These are good sources of relevant news stories to raise in class during our daily legislative news chit chat at the start of each class. There are lots of options out there, but I like these in particular:

- [Punchbowl News](#). The AM newsletter is free.
- [Early Returns](#) (Jonathan Bernstein). Free daily newsletter/column.
- [Regular Order](#) (Jamie Dupree). Monthly \$8 subscription.
- [Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics](#) (Steven Smith, WashU). Free and excellent.

Note: This is a 3-credit, lecture-based course. Federal regulations for 3-credit courses include 2.5 hours/week of direct instruction (in-class) and 5 hours/week of independent learning (out of class).

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS and CLASS POLICIES

Your grade in this course will be based on the assignments listed below. To achieve a passing grade in the course, you must complete and hand in each of the assignments. ***It is not possible to submit extra assignments to raise your grade (unless I have offered that opportunity to every student in the course).*** You are responsible for keeping a hard copy backup of any written assignments. Political science majors must receive a grade of C- or better in order to count the course towards their required credit hours in the major. Because the writing assignments cumulate over the semester into two different paper assignments, you will perform better in the course if you meet each of the deadlines for submitting written assignments. I reserve the right to impose a penalty for missing deadlines, but I hope not to have to do so.

Note: I do not take attendance in class. However, I will give six "pop" writing assignments at the start of class throughout the semester, so I encourage you to come to class. Also, students who attend class regularly (and do the reading) will get more out of the course and will have a better chance of doing well on the assignments.

Assignments (100 points total, 102 points with extra credit)

1) Pop quizzes (10%)

I will offer **six** pop writing opportunities over the course of the semester. Each are worth two points. By taking all six quizzes, you can earn up to two extra credit points towards your semester grade. If you arrive in class AFTER I have distributed the quiz, you cannot earn the point ☹.

2) Blog post -- in the style of The Washington Post's [Monkey Cage](#) blog (45%)

Write a 1000-word blog post in the style of a Monkey Cage (TMC) "[Explainer](#)" post. The post will identify an issue or problem in the news about Congress, and draw from political science research to "explain" to non-academic readers what they need to know to understand the politics of the matter. (For example: "Democrats

want to ban the legislative filibuster. Here’s are five things you need to know.”) I’ll distribute a detailed description of the paper assignment early in the semester and a grading rubric for each stage of the paper. You can familiarize yourself with previously published TMC posts via the TMC Congress topic guide [here](#).

Your blog post grade will be determined as follows:

- 5% Proposal
- 10% Rough draft
- 5% Participation in peer review of rough draft
- 25% Final draft

3) Political science “naturalist” paper (45%)

Choose an interesting question or puzzle about a pattern of legislative events or behavior and use a principle of legislative politics to answer it. This is a 750-word assignment. I will distribute a more detailed paper assignment in the semester and a grading rubric for each stage of the paper.

Your political science “naturalist” paper grade will be determined as follows:

- 15% Rough draft
- 5% Participation in peer review of rough draft
- 25% Final draft

IMPORTANT DATES

The papers are *tentatively* scheduled as follows. All written assignments are due in class, except as noted. Any changes will be announced in class. You are responsible for being aware of any changes.

Blog post

Paper proposal due: Wednesday, September 15
Rough draft due: Monday, October 11
Peer review workshop: Wednesday, October 27
Paper due: Monday, November 1

Political science naturalist paper

Rough draft due: Wednesday, November 17
Peer review workshop: Wednesday, December 8
Paper due: On date assigned by Registrar for final exam

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Campus Commitment & Policy

I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the campus commitment [policy](#). By coming back to campus, students, staff, and faculty are agreeing to this policy. In our classroom environment, the section “Care for Others” is especially important, including the requirement for students to be masked in class.

GW Writing Center

The GW Writing Center facilitates collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations about student writing. Working alongside peer mentors, student writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. You are encouraged (but not required) to use the Writing Center at any stage of writing, from brainstorming to final editing. Although appointments are not required and drop-ins are welcome, they recommend that you reserve a time slot at <https://gwu.mywconline.com>.

University policy on observance of religious holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays.

Academic integrity code

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services in Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information see: <http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu>.

Counseling and Psychological Services 202-994-5300

GW's Student Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information see <http://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>.

Safety and security

In an emergency: call GYPD 202-994-6111 or 911. For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook: <http://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook>. In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out: <http://go.gwu.edu/shooterprep>. Stay informed: <http://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course schedule outlines the topics we will cover in class and the reading assignments for each topic. I will at times get ahead or behind the printed schedule. Thus, you may want to adjust your reading pace accordingly. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus as the semester progresses. You are responsible for any changes to the assigned readings. All of the readings on the syllabus (except for the required books) are available on-line via Blackboard (<http://blackboard.gwu.edu>). Once logged onto the course on Blackboard, follow the links to "Syllabus," and you should see separate links for each of the readings. If you have any trouble accessing the on-line pieces, please let me know as soon as possible.

Introduction (August 30)

Davidson et al, Chapter 1

NYT: "[A Day of Rage: An In-Depth Look at How a Mob Stormed the Capitol](#)" (video)

Toobin, "[Our Broken Constitution](#)," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 9, 2013

Texas A&M, "[Clear and Concise Writing](#)." Great handout on easy ways to improve your writing

Congressional districts (September 1, 8, 13)

No class September 6 (Labor Day)

Davidson et al, Chapter 3

McCarty, "How Does Electoral Law Affect Polarization?" Ch. 6, *Polarization* 2019

Smith, Note 18: [Why 435?](#)

Washington Post staff. "[How congressional redistricting works in your state](#)," August 2021.

Liptak, "[Supreme Court Bars Challenges to Partisan Gerrymandering](#)," *NYT*, June 27, 2019

Mutnik, "[How Screwed is Adam Kinzinger?](#)," *Politico*, August 2021

Rakich, "[Where America Lost And Gained Population Could Help Democrats In Redistricting](#),"

Fivethirtyeight.com, August 2021

Toobin, "[Holder v. Roberts](#)," *The New Yorker*, February 17, 2014

Brownstein, "[The Democrats' New Voting-Rights Obstacle](#)," *The Atlantic*, July 2021.

Corasaniti, "[How A Defunct Federal Provision Helped Pave the Way for New Voting Restrictions](#)," *NYT* Aug 2021

Congressional elections (September 15, 20, 22, 27)

Davidson et al, Chapter 4

Jacobson, "The Presidential and Congressional Elections of 2020" *PSQ* 2021

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Chapters 5 and 6), 10th ed. 2020

Smith, Note 6: [Party and Incumbency](#)

Rakich, "[How Much Was Incumbency Worth in 2018?](#)" Fivethirtyeight Dec. 2018

Brownstein, "[Democrats' Real Liability in the House](#)," *The Atlantic*, Nov. 2020

Film (September 29)

****Class starts at 9:20 am**

[Knock down the House](#) (Netflix)

Origins and development of Congress (October 4, 6)

Davidson et al, Chapter 2 (pp 15-39)

Smith, Note 5: [Reforming the Filibuster](#)

Smith, Note 17: [Manchin and Sinema](#)

CQ Roll Call: [Filibuster](#) (video)

Congressional Budget Act (October 11)

Smith, Note 10: [Reconciliation](#)

Reynolds, “The Politics of the Budget and Appropriations Process in a Polarized Congress,” *Cong Recon* 2021

Representation: The electoral connection (October 13)

Davidson et al, Chapters 5 and 16

Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Part 1

Smith, Note 8: [Diversifying](#)

Smith, Note 26: [An Unpopular Congress](#)

Osnos, “[The Man Who Controls the Senate.](#)” *The New Yorker*, June 2021.

Herndon, “[The Congressional Black Caucus: Powerful, Diverse and Newly Complicated.](#)” *NYT* Aug 2021

Johnson & Kane, “[Not Ocasio-Cortez, not O’Rourke...](#)” *Washington Post*, August 10, 2019

Conroy, “[How A Record Number Of Republican Women Will And Won’t Change Congress.](#)” 538 Nov ‘20

Bade, “[Freshman Rep. Wild turns grief from partner’s suicide into a new purpose.](#)” *WPost* Sept 2019

Congressional committees (October 18, 20, 25)

Davidson et al, Chapter 7

Mayhew, *Congress*, Part 2

Smith, Note 2: [Beneath the Surface](#)

Smith, Note 27: [Motivation and Capacity](#)

Smith, Note 22: [From Subcommittee Government to Party Government](#)

Savage and Fandos, “[The House v Trump.](#)” *NYT* August 2019

Peer editing workshop in class (October 27)

Leaders and parties in Congress (November 1, 3, 8)

Davidson et al, Chapter 6

Smith, Note 21: [Congressional Parties](#)

Smith, Note 9: [Professional Partisan](#)

Fong, “[How Nancy Pelosi overcame her opposition...](#)” *WPost Monkey Cage*, Jan 4 2019

Page, [“Inside Nancy Pelosi’s War With AOC and the Squad,”](#) *Politico Magazine*, April 2021
Swers, “From the Republican Revolution to the Tea Party Wave,” from *The Right Women* 2018
CNN, [“19 seconds of drama: McCain’s vote”](#)
Hulse, [“Chuck Schumer Has Found a Way to Get It Done. So Far.”](#) *NYT*, August 2021.
Green, [“Why Liz Cheney didn’t survive the second effort to oust her from leadership,”](#) *WPost* May 2021

“Unorthodox lawmaking” (November 10, 15, 17)

Davidson et al, Chapters 8-9
Smith, Note 20: [House Special Rules](#)
Smith, Note 14: [Regular Order](#)
Smith, Note 23: [Unanimous Consent in the Senate, Part 1](#)

Taibbi, [“Four Amendments & a Funeral,”](#) *Rolling Stone*, August 10, 2005
Grunwald, [“The Victory of ‘No’,”](#) *Politico Magazine*, December 2016
DeBonis & Werner, [“How Republicans pulled off the biggest tax overhaul in 30 years,”](#) *WPost*, Dec 2017

Politics of deadlock and deal-making (November 22)

Binder, “The Struggle to Legislate in Polarized Times,” *Congress Reconsidered* (2021)
Binder and Lee, [“Making Deals in Congress,”](#) APSA Task Force (2013)

Lizza, [“Getting to Maybe,”](#) *New Yorker*, June 24, 2013

Making public policy: Congress, the president, and the courts (November 29, December 1, 6) *(No class Thanksgiving break, November 24)*

Davidson, Chapters 10-12, 14-15
Smith, Note 28: [Where Did the Vetoes Go?](#)
Kriner and Schickler, “Congressional investigations in a polarized era...” *Cong Reconsidered* 2021
Goldgeier and Saunders, [“The Unconstrained Presidency,”](#) *Foreign Affairs*, Sept-Oct 2018
Schultz, [“Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy”](#) *The Washington Quarterly* Winter 2018.
Masket, [“Will Afghanistan Bring Biden Down? Not Likely.”](#) *Politico Magazine*, August 2021.
Klein, [“The Unpersuaded”](#) *New Yorker*, March 19, 2012

Peer editing workshop in class (December 8)