

**PSC 2218W
Legislative Politics
Fall 2023**

**TTh 9:35-10:50 am
Phillips B152**

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Or by Zoom (please schedule using [this link](#))

COURSE DESCRIPTION and LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As our semester begins, the U.S. Congress is on the precipice of a potential government shutdown, with divisions amongst House Republicans putting in doubt passage of key spending bills to fund government programs. At times, Congress has managed to be extremely productive in recent years-- responding to the global pandemic, addressing climate change, and revamping America's infrastructure, among other achievements. Still, lawmakers have also stalemated over key public problems, such as reforming immigration, lowering the cost of prescription drugs, and addressing the nation's rising debt. Looming ahead is the question that will occupy Washington -- and us-- this semester: How will Congress get the important stuff done? We will approach this question by examining electoral and institutional forces that shape the dynamics of congressional elections and affect Congress's political will and legislative capacity to solve public problems and represent diverse communities across the U.S.

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. 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*, 19th edition, CQ Press. 2023
2. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd edition, Yale University Press. 2004.

NOTE: The 19th edition of the Davidson textbook will be available as an e-book by the end of September or early October. (The print edition will not be available until November at the earliest). I will post PDFs of the first four chapters of the textbook on Blackboard. You can then purchase or rent the e-version of the 19th edition when it becomes available. I will let you know when it is available!

I also 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 during our daily legislative news chinwag at the start of each class. There are many (free or paid) options out there, but I like these in particular:

- [Punchbowl News](#). The AM newsletter is free.
- [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 (including all the graded components leading up to the final paper drafts). ***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 announce and apply a penalty for missing deadlines, but I hope not to have to do so. (Penalty would be announced before the due date.) FYI: I store grades in an off-line Excel file, rather than on Blackboard.

Note: I do not take attendance in class. However, I will give at least five “pop” writing assignments during class throughout the semester. 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 (105 total points + extra credit opportunities)

1) Pop quizzes (10 points)

I will offer at least **five** pop writing opportunities over the course of the semester. Each quiz is worth two points. By taking all five quizzes, you can earn up to 10 points towards your semester grade. After those five quizzes, you can earn up to two additional extra credit points for any additional pop quizzes that I offer. NOTE: If you know you will be unable to be in class and want to have the opportunity to take the quiz (if there is one) after class, you'll need to email me **before** the start of class that day (9:35 am). class starts at 9:35 am. (No exceptions!) If you do so, I will facilitate your taking the quiz later that day.

2) Contested Senate election paper (45 points)

Write a 1200-word essay that analyzes a contested Senate election race in the 2022 midterms. Your paper will apply the lessons from political science research on Senate elections to explain which candidate won and why. I'll distribute a detailed description of the paper assignment at the beginning of the semester and a grading rubric for each stage of the paper.

Your Senate election paper grade will be determined as follows:

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

3) Blog post -- in the style of The Washington Post's [Monkey Cage](#) (TMC) blog (50 points)

Write a 1200-word blog post in the style of a TMC "Explainer" post (see pp. 3-4 [here](#)). The post will identify an issue or problem in the news related to Congress and/or legislative politics, 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: "Many Democrats want the Senate to ban the legislative filibuster. Here's why that's hard to do." Or, "Congress and the president finally addressed the climate crisis in 2022. This is why it took so long." Or, "Congress hasn't overhauled national immigration laws in decades. Here's why.")

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 post must focus on a legislative, rather than election, outcome.

Your blog post grade will be determined as follows:

5 points	Proposal
15 points	Rough draft
5 points	Participation in peer review of rough draft
25 points	Final draft

IMPORTANT DATES

The papers are *tentatively* scheduled as follows, to be uploaded into Blackboard's Safe Assign software by the time and in the format designated on the assignment handout. Any changes will be announced in class. You are responsible for being aware of any changes.

Senate election analysis

August 29: Assignment distributed
September 12: Rough draft due
September 26: Graded rough draft returned
October 5: Peer edit workshop
October 10: Final draft due
October 24: Graded final draft returned

TMC blog post

October 17: Assignment distributed
October 24: Paper proposal due
November 2: Graded paper proposal returned
November 17: Rough draft due
November 30: Graded rough draft returned
December 7: Peer edit workshop
December 12: Final draft due

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 GWPD 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 24)

Davidson et al, Chapter 1

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

WP: "[Fear, anger and trauma: How the Jan. 6 attack changed Congress](#)" (Jan 3, 2022)

Draپر, "[From Gingrich to McCarthy, The Roots of Governance by Chaos](#)," NYT, Jan. 7, 2023.

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

Congressional districts (August 29, 31, September 5)

Davidson et al, Chapter 3

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

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

Warshaw et. al., "[Districts for a New Decade](#)," *Publius* (Summer 2022)

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

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

Sorkin, "The Supreme Court's Surprise Defense of the Voting Rights Act," *New Yorker* 2023

Congressional elections (September 7, 12, 14, 19)

Davidson et al, Chapter 4

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

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
Algara and Bae, "[Did amateur candidates cost Republicans the Senate?](#)" *WPost* Dec. 2022
Cohn, "[What Really Happened in the Midterms?](#)" *NYTimes*, July 2023

Film (September 21) **Class starts at 9:30 am **

[Knock down the House](#) (Netflix, 82 minutes excluding credits)

Origins and development of Congress (September 22, 28)

Davidson et al, Chapter 2 (pp 15-39)
Smith, Note 5: [Reforming the Filibuster](#)
Smith, Note 17: [Manchin and Sinema](#)

NPR *Throughline* podcast: [Pirates of the Senate](#) (audio)

Congressional Budget Act (October 3)

Smith, Note 10: [Reconciliation](#)
Reynolds, "The Politics of the Budget and Appropriations Process in a Polarized Congress," *Cong Recon* 2021

Peer edit workshop in class (October 5)

Representation: The electoral connection (October 10)

Davidson et al, Chapters 5 and 16 [*assuming Davidson 19th ed. E-book is available*]
Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Part 1
Smith, Note 8: [Diversifying](#)
Smith, Note 26: [An Unpopular Congress](#)

Herndon, "[The Congressional Black Caucus: Powerful, Diverse and Newly Complicated](#)," *NYT* Aug 2021
Swers, "After Dobbs: The Partisan and Gender Dynamics of Legislating on Abortion..." *The Forum* 2023
Flores, "[Most Republicans ignored constituents' opinions on marriage equality](#)," *WP*, Aug. 16, 2022

Fall break -- no class (October 12)

Congressional committees (October 17, 19, 24)

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](#)

Kane, [“‘It’s fast and furious’: New GOP committee chairs face learning curve.”](#) WPost, Jan. 2023

Leaders and parties in Congress (October 26, 🧑🍻, November 2)

Davidson et al, Chapter 6

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

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

Smith, Note 35: [Polarization, Centralization, Factions, and Speaker Kevin McCarthy](#)

[Blanco, et. al. “Meet ‘the Five Families’ that wield power ...”](#) *WashPost*, April 2023

[Huder, “Speaker Nancy Pelosi: A Master of the House”](#) *The Forum* 2023

CNN, [“19 seconds of drama: McCain’s vote”](#) (McCain thumbs down on ACA repeal/replace, 2017)

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

Hulse, [“Chuck Schumer, the ‘happy worrier’ delivers.”](#) *NYT*, August 7, 2022.

“Unorthodox lawmaking” (November 7, 9, 14, 16)

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](#)

Lawrence, [“When America Stared into the Abyss.”](#) *The Atlantic*, Jan. 7, 2019

Davenport & Friedman, [“Five Decades in the Making...”](#) *NYT* Aug. 7, 2022.

Wang, [“Violence Against Women Act set to be renewed...”](#) *WP*, March 9, 2022

Thanksgiving break -- no class (November 21, 23)

Politics of deadlock and deal-making (November 28)

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

Goodwin, [“Thom Tillis emerges as a bipartisan dealmaker...”](#) *WPost*, Jan. 2023

Making public policy: Congress, the president, and the courts (November 30, December 5)

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
Schultz, [“Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy”](#) *The Washington Quarterly* Winter 2018.
Cameron and Kastellec, *Making the Supreme Court*, Oxford U Press 2023, Excerpt TBA

Peer edit workshop (December 7)