

**PSC 2218W: Legislative Politics**  
**Fall 2018**  
**Professor Sarah Binder**

**MW 9:35-10:50 am, Rome 204**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION and LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

As registered by Gallup in recent opinion polls, fewer than one in five Americans approve of the performance of the U.S. Congress. Critics call recent Congresses dysfunctional, even in light of enactment of major tax cuts in December 2017. With highly contested midterm elections approaching that could break up President Trump's Republican control of Congress, our eyes this semester will be on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue: Why have Republicans struggled to advance their agenda while controlling both Congress and the White House, and why is their hold on power at risk? In this course, we will explore and analyze the forces that shape congressional elections and affect the capacity of Congress and the president to solve major 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. Recall and explain electoral, institutional, and systemic features of the U.S. Congress.
2. Accurately apply political science concepts and theories that relate to the U.S. Congress.
3. Demonstrate the ability to think critically about the U.S. Congress, as evidenced by performance on exams and writing assignments.
4. Demonstrate conventions of writing in the discipline of political science.
5. Apply critical analytical thinking to your writing through drafting and revising, as well as through peer review of your classmates' writing.

Theories of politics and political behavior 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 relevant news to our study of Congress, so I expect students to come to class prepared to raise interesting stories or questions from the week's news. I highly recommend that you read a daily newspaper (e.g. *Washington Post* or *New York Times*) or that you listen to a news program (such as NPR's *Morning Edition* or *All Things Considered*) or that you at least try to consume news by watching *The Daily Show* or reading *Buzzfeed*. Podcasts (such as the *NYT's The Daily*) are also good options. Attention to developments on the Hill will enhance the value of this course for you, but it is no substitute for careful reading and classroom discussion and attendance.

**REQUIRED READINGS/TEXTS**

The required reading consists of two books and numerous readings posted on Blackboard. Both books are available (in paperback) for purchase or rent via the GW Bookstore (or elsewhere). 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, and you are responsible for these readings on course exams.

1. Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, *Congress and Its Members*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition, CQ Press. 2017
2. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Yale University Press. 2004.

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 one's 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 at the end of the semester into a single research paper, you will perform better in the course if you meet each of the deadlines for submitting written assignments.

Note: I do not take attendance in class. However, there will be five very short "pop" writing assignments at the start of class throughout the semester, worth one point each. 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. So, come to class!

### *Assignments:*

- 20% Midterm exam
- 30% Final exam
- 5% "Pop" writing assignments (5 per semester)\*
- 45% Research paper

\*I will offer **six** pop writing opportunities. This allows you to miss one (or to receive one extra point towards your semester grade).

Your research paper grade will be determined as follows:

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

I will distribute the paper assignment early during the semester (as well as grading rubrics for the steps of the research paper). I will also distribute a study guide one week before each exam. The exams will include material covered in the assigned readings and in the lectures. Since the lecture material will not necessarily appear in the readings, missing class will put you at a disadvantage. And since I do not discuss all of the readings in class, skipping reading assignments will also put you at a disadvantage.

## **IMPORTANT DATES**

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

Paper proposal: Wednesday, September 26, 2018  
Midterm exam: Wednesday, October 3, 2018  
Rough draft due: Monday, November 5, 2018 (no extensions!)  
Peer review workshop: Monday, December 3, 2018  
Paper due: Tuesday, December 11, 2018 (make-up class)  
Final exam: TBA when the Registrar posts the final exam schedule

Note: In accord with university policy, the final exam will be given on the designated final exam day/time for this course and not during the last week of the semester.

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

### **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](http://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](http://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 the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information see: [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/](http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/)

### **Mental Health Services 202-994-5300**

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information see: [counselingcenter.gwu.edu/](http://counselingcenter.gwu.edu/)

### **Safety and security**

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

## **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 will 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.

**We will not meet for classes on the following holidays:**

September 3 (Labor Day)  
September 10 (Rosh Hashanah)  
September 19 (Yom Kippur)  
October 8 (Fall break)  
November 21 (Pre-Thanksgiving)

**Introduction (August 27)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 1  
Dodd and Oppenheimer, "Congress in the Age of Trump," *Congress Reconsidered* 2017  
Edwards, "[Can Donald Trump Persuade Americans to Support His Agenda?](#)" Dec. 2016  
Binder and Spindel, "[5 lessons from a Republican year of governing dangerously](#)" Dec 2017  
Wasserman, David, "[Why Even a Blue Wave Could Have Limited Gains.](#)" *NYT* August 2018  
Phillips, "[All the Times the Senate has actually stood up to Trump.](#)" *Washington Post*, August 2018  
Texas A&M, "[Clear and Concise Writing.](#)" Great handout on easy ways to improve your writing

**Congressional districts (August 29, September 5, 12)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 3  
McCarty, "The Limits of Electoral and Legislative Reform..." *CA Law Review* 2011  
Toobin, "[Drawing the Line.](#)" *The New Yorker*, March 6, 2006  
Gonzales, "[Political Battles Still Dog Redistricting in California.](#)" NPR, May 29, 2013  
Roth, "[Will the Court Kill Gerrymandering?](#)" *NY Review of Books*, January 2018  
Liptak, Adam, "Supreme Court Avoids an Answer on Partisan Gerrymandering," *NYT* 2018  
Cohn and Bui, "[How the New Math of Gerrymandering Works.](#)" *NY Times*, Oct. 3, 2017.  
Toobin, "[Do we still need the Voting Rights Act?](#)" *The New Yorker*, May 21, 2012  
Toobin, "[Holder v. Roberts.](#)" *The New Yorker*, February 17, 2014

**Congressional elections (September 17, 24, 26, October 1)**

*Paper proposal due September 26, 2018*

Davidson et al, Chapter 4  
Jacobson, "Donald Trump and the 2018 Midterm Elections," APSA 2018  
Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Chapters 5 and 6), 2016  
Jacobson, "The Triumph of Polarized Partisanship in 2016," *PSQ* Spring 2017  
McGhee, Nyhan, and Sides, "Midterm Postmortem." *The Boston Review*, Nov 2010  
Ansolabehere, Steven, "[Unsafe Seats.](#)" *The Boston Review*, Jan/Feb 2011  
Enten, "[There were no purple\\* states on Tuesday.](#)" *Fivethirtyeight*, Nov. 2016  
Cohn and Kesterton, "[A Democratic Blue Wave.](#)" *NYT*, July 2018.

**Midterm exam in class (October 3)**

**Mid-semester film (October 10)**

"[Can Mr. Smith Get to Washington Anymore?](#)"

*After* watching film, read [Department of Justice Press Release](#) and "[Disgraced ex-senator...](#)"

### **Origins and development of Congress (October 15, 17)**

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

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

### **Representation: The electoral connection (October 22)**

Davidson et al, Chapters 5 and 16

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

Wren, [“The Loneliest Democrat in Trump Country,”](#) *Politico Magazine*, Dec. 2017

### **Congressional committees (October 24, 29, 31)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 7

Mayhew, *Congress*, Part 2

Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde, “Richard Fenno’s Theory of Congressional Committees and the Partisan Polarization of the House,” *Congress Reconsidered* (2013)

### **Politics of deadlock and deal-making (November 5)**

*Rough draft due in class, November 5*

*You must hand in your rough draft before the elections on Nov. 6*

Binder, “Congress and the President: Legislating in Polarized Times,” in *Rivals for Power* (2018)

Binder and Lee, [“Making Deals in Congress,”](#) APSA Task Force (2013)

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

Packer, [“The Empty Chamber: Just How Broken is the Senate?”](#) *New Yorker*, August 9, 2010

### **Leaders and parties in Congress (November 7, 12, 14)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 6

Leibovich, [“This is the way Paul Ryan’s Speakership Ends,”](#) *NYT* August 7, 2018

Lizza, “A House Divided,” *New Yorker*, December 14, 2015

Koger, “Filibusters and Majority Rule in the Modern Senate,” *Congress Reconsidered* (2017)

Swers, “Gender and Party Politics in a Polarized Era,” in Straus and Glassman 2017

### **“Unorthodox lawmaking” (November 19, 26, 28)**

Davidson et al, Chapters 8-9

Taibbi, [“Four Amendments & a Funeral,”](#) *Rolling Stone*, August 10, 2005

Smith, [“The Senate Syndrome”](#) *Issues in Governance Studies*, Brookings Institution June 2010

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

Vogel & Tankersley, [“With Billions at Stake in Tax Debate, Lobbyists Played Hardball,”](#) *NYT* Dec 2017

***Peer review workshop for paper drafts (December 3)***

**Making public policy: Congress, the president, and the courts (December 5, 10, 11)**

*Papers due Tuesday, December 11 (make up, catch up class)*

Davidson, Chapters 10-12, 14-15

Binder and Maltzman, "Is Advice and Consent Broken?" *Congress Reconsidered* (2017)

Zengerle, "[How the Trump Administration is Remaking the Courts](#)," *NYT* August 2018

Klein, "[The Unpersuaded](#)" *New Yorker*, March 19, 2012

Kriner, "Congressional Investigations..." in *Rivals for Power* (2018)

Steinhauer, "[A Congress That Doesn't Want to Weigh In on War](#)," *NYT*, Dec. 9, 2015

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.