

**PSC 2218W: Legislative Politics  
Fall 2019**

**MW 9:35-10:50 am, Phillips 111**

Professor Sarah Binder  
Office (Binder): 467 Monroe  
Email: [binder@gwu.edu](mailto:binder@gwu.edu)  
Office hours: Mondays 11am-12:30 pm

Writing TA: Colin Emrich  
Office (Emrich): Hall of Government 409  
Email: [cemrich51@gwmail.gwu.edu](mailto:cemrich51@gwmail.gwu.edu)  
Office hours: by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION and LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

As our semester begins, Congress continues to struggle to legislate, with polarized parties, a divided Congress, and a divisive president in re-election mode. Continued stalemate leaves the public and politicians deeply skeptical about Congress and the president's capacity to solve major problems. 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 legislate.

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, explain, and write critically about electoral and institutional features of the U.S. Congress.
2. Accurately 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. Demonstrate critical and analytical thinking in 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 you 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*), listen to a news program (such as NPR's *Morning Edition*), or at least try to consume news by watching *The Daily Show*. Podcasts (such as the *NYT's The Daily*, several produced by *CQ Roll Call*, or *Congress: Two Beers In*) 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 the midterm exam.

1. Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler, *Congress and Its Members*, 17<sup>th</sup> edition, CQ Press. 2019
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 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 at the end of the semester into two papers, 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, I will give six 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***

#### ***Pop quizzes (5%)***

I will offer **six** pop writing opportunities over the course of the semester (worth one point each). Because the pop assignments are worth five percent of your grade, if you take all six quizzes, you will receive one extra point towards your semester grade. If you arrive in class **AFTER** I have distributed the quiz, you cannot earn the point. ☹

#### ***Midterm exam (30%)***

The exam will include material covered in the assigned readings and in the lectures for all of the weeks up to the midterm. 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. I will distribute a study guide to the class one week before the midterm exam.

#### ***Political science “naturalist” paper (20%)***

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 500-word assignment. I will distribute a more detailed paper assignment early in the semester and a grading rubric for both stages of the paper.

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

- 10% Rough draft
- 10% Final draft

#### ***Research paper (45 %)***

You will produce a research paper (roughly 8-12 pages) that analyzes a particular facet of legislative behavior. I *might* offer an alternative assignment that requires you to write a research-based, 1000-word blog

post. Either way, I'll distribute a detailed description of the paper assignment early in the semester. 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

## **IMPORTANT DATES**

The midterm exam and 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.

### Exam

Midterm exam: Wednesday, September 25

### Research paper (roughly 8-12 pages)

Paper proposal due: Wednesday, October 2  
Rough draft due: Monday, November 11  
Peer review workshop: Monday, December 2  
Paper due: Tuesday, December 10

### Political science naturalist paper (500 words)

Rough draft due: Monday, November 25  
Final draft due: Tuesday, December 17

## **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.

### **Introduction (August 26)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 1

Dodd and Oppenheimer, "Congress in the Age of Trump," *Congress Reconsidered* 2017

Stolberg, "[Nancy Pelosi, Icon of Female Power, Will Reclaim Role as Speaker](#) ...." *NYT* Jan 2 2019

Edwards, "[Can Donald Trump Persuade Americans to Support His Agenda?](#)" Dec. 2016

Stolberg, "[McConnell Promised to End Senate Gridlock. Instead, Republicans Are Stuck in Neutral](#)," *NYT* August 3. 2019.

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

### **Congressional districts (August 28, September 4, 9)**

*No class September 2 (Labor Day)*

Davidson et al, Chapter 3

McCarty, "The Limits of Electoral and Legislative Reform..." *CA Law Review* 2011

Lublin, "[Eight white majority districts elected black members...](#)" *WP*, Monkey Cage, Nov 2018

Toobin, "[Drawing the Line](#)," *The New Yorker*, March 6, 2006

Roth, "[Will the Court Kill Gerrymandering?](#)" *NY Review of Books*, January 2018

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

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 11, 16, 18, 23)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 4

Jacobson, "[Extreme Referendum: Donald Trump and the 2018 Midterm Elections](#)," *PSQ* 2019

Jacobson and Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (Chapters 5 and 6), 2016  
Peters et al, "[Midterm Election Results: 4 Key Takeaways](#)," *NYT* Nov 7, 2018  
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  
Rakich, "[How Much Was Incumbency Worth in 2018?](#)" *Fivethirtyeight* Dec. 2018

### **Midterm exam in class (September 25)**

*No class September 30 (Rosh Hashanah)*

### **Mid-semester film (October 2)**

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

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

### **Origins and development of Congress (October 7, 14)**

*No class October 9 (Yom Kippur)*

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

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

### **Representation: The electoral connection (October 16)**

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

Lu and Collins, "[Year of the Woman? Indeed: Record Gains in the House](#)," *NYT* Nov 16, 2018

Bernstein, "[One Good Reason Not to Loathe DC? Ayanna Pressley](#)" *Boston Magazine*, June 2019

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

### **Congressional committees (October 23, 28, 30)**

*No class October 21, Fall break*

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)

Kriner and Schickler, "[What can House Democrats accomplish...](#)" *WP*, Monkey Cage, Nov 28, 2018

Fandos, "[Democrats Start Investigative Gears, but Slowly](#)," *NYT*, January 9, 2019

Pascrell, "[Why is Congress so dumb?](#)" *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2019

Savage and Fandos, "[The House v. Trump: Stymied Lawmakers Increasingly Battle in the Courts](#)," August 2019 (NYT).

### **Leaders and parties in Congress (November 4, 6, 11)**

Davidson et al, Chapter 6

Leibovich, "[This is the way Paul Ryan's Speakership Ends](#)," *NYT* August 7, 2018  
Fong, "[How Nancy Pelosi overcame her opposition...](#)" *WP Monkey Cage*, Jan 4 2019  
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  
CNN, "[19 seconds of drama: McCain's vote](#)"

### **"Unorthodox lawmaking" (November 13, 18, 20)**

Davidson et al, Chapters 8-9  
Willis, "[As Pelosi Takes Over, an Attempt to Revive the 'Lost Art' of Legislating](#)," *NYT* Jan. 2, 2019  
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

### **Politics of deadlock and deal-making (November 25)**

*(No class November 27, Thanksgiving break)*

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  
Stolberg, "[McConnell Promised to End Senate Gridlock. Instead, Republicans Are Stuck in Neutral](#)," *NYT* August 3, 2019. (Re-read from week 1)

### **Peer editing workshop in class (December 2)**

### **Making public policy: Congress, the president, and the courts (December 4, 9, 10\*)**

*\*make up day*

Davidson, Chapters 10-12, 14-15  
Phillips, "[All the Times the Senate has actually stood up to Trump](#)," *Washington Post*, Dec 13, 2018  
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.