

**PSC 2218W: Legislative Politics
Spring 2019
Professor Sarah Binder**

MW 9:35-10:50 am, Corcoran 103

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COURSE DESCRIPTION and LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As our semester begins, the federal government is partially closed—exceeding past records for the longest shutdown ever. President Trump has refused to sign spending bills into law until Congress funds the president’s campaign pledge to build a border wall along the nation’s southern border. The last Republican Congress never made the wall a priority, and the new Democratic House majority insists on opening the government before discussions of border security. The parties and branches will eventually find a way through this impasse and enact the seven remaining spending bills required to re-open the government. But these and other stalemates leave the public and politicians deeply skeptical about Congress and the president’s capacity to solve major problems (let alone be in the same room together). 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 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 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* and several produced by *CQ Roll Call*) 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*, 16th edition, CQ Press. 2017
2. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd 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 each stage 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 (especially if I decide to offer any additional extra credit in-class pop writing assignments). 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.

Midterm exam: Wednesday, February 13, 2019
Paper proposal due: Friday, February 15, 2019
Rough draft due: Monday, April 1, 2019
Peer review workshop: Monday, April 24, 2019
Paper due: Wednesday, May 1, 2019
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.

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 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/

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/

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 (January 14)

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

Edsell, “[The Lobbyists Blocking Nancy Pelosi and Her New Majority](#),” *NYT* Jan 10, 2019

Binder, “[The Shutdown is just the finale....](#)” *Washington Post*, Monkey Cage, Dec 2018

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

Congressional districts (January 16, 22, 28)

No class January 18 (MLK 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

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 (January 30, February 4, 6, 11)

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

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

Lemann, “Claire McCaskill’s Toughest Fight,” *New Yorker*, Oct 29, 2018

Midterm exam in class (February 13)

No class February 18 (Presidents’ Day)

Paper proposal due Friday, February 15, 2019

(fine to hand it in at midterm!)

Mid-semester film (February 20)

“[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 (February 25, 27)

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

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

Representation: The electoral connection (March 4)

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

Congressional committees (March 6, 18, 20)

No class March 11, 13 (Spring 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

Leaders and parties in Congress (March 25, 27, April 1)

Rough draft due in class, April 1

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

“Unorthodox lawmaking” (April 3, 8, 10)

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 (April 15)

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

Making public policy: Congress, the president, and the courts (April 17, 22, May 1)

Peer editing workshop in class, April 24

Papers due Wednesday, May 1

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.