**Political Science 2120**

**U.S. CONGRESS**

**Fall, 2015 MWF 12:30 – 1:20 p.m. Bartley Hall 1064**

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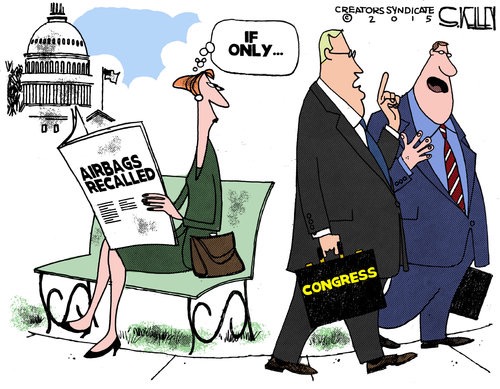
*Mark Twain:*

*“Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.”*

*“It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress.”*

*“I never can think of Judas Iscariot without losing my temper. To my mind Judas Iscariot was nothing but a low, mean, premature, Congressman”*

*Will Rogers: “There ought to be one day - just one - when there is open season on senators.”*



**GOALS**

This is a course for those seeking an understanding of the U.S. Congress – its members, structure, operations, power, and relationships with other government institutions. It presumes you have had PSC 1100 or the equivalent. The objectives are (1) to help you understand how the Congress functions and why it produces (or fails to produce) the policies that it does, (2) to help you develop the ability to make judgments about congressional performance and, more broadly, the political system’s strengths and weaknesses, and (3) to assist you to enhance your ability to read accurately and critically, interpret statistical data, argue cogently, and write clearly. When you have completed this course, you (a) should be able to demonstrate your knowledge of basic facts and concepts concerning the operations of the U.S. Congress and its role in the broader political system; and (b) should be able to show that you understand the key issues and problems of our national legislature, including some reform proposals. The responsibility for learning rests on your shoulders and entails collaboration and dialogue.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS**

Readings: It will be assumed that you read the text and other required readings carefully, before and again after the class for which they are assigned.. Pick out the reading’s conclusions, evidence, and consequences. .

Class participation: Come to each class (a) having mastered the assigned material for that class and having perused the morning’s news, especially anything relating to your own three members of Congress; (b) having thought about the issues and questions posed in the syllabus, below; and (c) prepared to participate in a discussion. The best sources for the day’s congressional news would be the *Washington* *Post,* *Politico* (<http://www.politico.com/>), *Roll Call* (http://www.rollcall.com/), *The Hill* (<http://thehill.com/>), and *Politics Daily* <http://www.politicsdaily.com/>). *CQ Weekly Report* (http://library.cqpress.com.ezp1.villanova.edu/) provides a weekly summary, with various features.

Exams. There will be two “hour” exams plus a final exam.

Daily issue summaries of readings. As an aid for you, for each top indicated by “**issue summary due**,” you will prepare a one-half page statement (sentences, bullet points, phrases, whatever – typed or handwritten) listing: (a) any and all items you do not understand and want clarified or questions you may have about the material; (b) what are the one or two most important points made in the readings; and (c) a one sentence (or one word!) answer to each of the “Questions for discussion” for each topic. These mini-papers provide the basis for class discussion. Some will be collected on a random basis. They will be noted for the record and graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Failure to fulfill this assignment, or submitting more than one unsatisfactory statement, will penalize your final grade by one third of a letter (0.3 points). Students will be called on, randomly, to present their issue summaries and defend their positions.

Short papers. You will prepare three short papers due in September.

(1) The first (three pages maximum) asks you to interpret data on congressional elections

and apply them to three questions listed in the syllabus in the section on

“elections.” This is due **September 9**.

(2) The second (two pages) asks you to interpret some data on congressional parties and

is due **September 30**.

(3) The third (four pages maximum) invites you to learn about your senators and

representative and then to evaluate their “fit” to their constituents. This paper is

due **September 18**. The paper focuses on the question: Do these three members of

Congress well and effectively represent (a) your district and state and (b) you

personally? Are they good members of Congress? Would you vote for them? Why?

Your evidence comes from an investigation of the following items:

(1) Members’ backgrounds and experience.

(2) Member’s ideology, party loyalty, voting records, support of or opposition to

the president

(3) Electoral situation: how safe or marginal are the district and state? What

margins of victory have they enjoyed? How much do they spend getting

elected, and where do they get their campaign funds?

(4) Do they serve on the “right” committees? Are they leaders of committees or

of the party?

(5) What have been their greatest accomplishments in Congress?

Some valuable sources include:

a) Members’ own websites (be careful – they “embellish” the truth)

b) *CQ Weekly Report* 2/3/2014; 1/21/2013; and 1/16/2012 -- available in Falvey

Library Electronic Journals

c) http://thatsmycongress.com/house/; and

d) http://thatsmycongress.com/index.php/legislative-scorecards/

*e) Falvey Library Guide*:

<http://library.villanova.edu/research/course-guides/political-science->

course-guides/legislative-branch/

f) *The Political Science Toolbox*, available on Blackboard for this course, lists a

number of other valuable sources.

g) The *Almanac of American Politics* and CQ’s *Politics in America* are most useful as well.

Be sure to indicate the source of your information (do so by parenthetical notations in the text that provide the source and the page and date, if appropriate).

Writing Papers.

(1) All papers are to be double-spaced, using 12 point type. All will be graded both on content and on quality of writing and grammar. (See the “Research and Writing on Congress” items on Blackboard for this course.) Since one goal of the course is to help you improve your writing skills, papers failing to achieve a high standard of writing may be returned for re-writing, with a penalty of one-half a letter grade (0.5) in the grading scheme Revisions are due within seven days of the return of the paper. Submit all three papers via the Blackboard site for the course.

(2) Late papers are penalized 0.3 points (on the 4 point scale) for each calendar day late (including weekends and holidays).

(3) Writing: Writing is extremely important now, as you move through college, and surely in your careers. Remember: writing formally is different from writing casually (Twitter, emails to friends, etc.), and wholly different from speaking. Read and digest the “Study Aids: Reading and Writing Tips” on the Blackboard site for this course.

Among the most troubling writing errors are:

1. Using a % sign instead of writing out “per cent” in the text (% is okay in a table or chart)

2. Beginning a sentence with a numeral (e.g., “87 of 100 students agree with this view.”)

3. Lacking proper agreement between subject and reflexive pronouns (pronouns such as “he,” “she,”

or “they” that refer back to an antecedent subject) or between pronominal adjectives as in: “ a

person cannot bring their lunch to class.” The subject is singular; “their” is plural. This is a

cardinal sin.

4. Misuse of commas (too many, too few, misplaced) and semi-colons. Two independent clauses in

a single compound sentence must be properly separated by a comma plus “and” or “but,” or

separated by a semi colon.

5. Putting a period or comma outside of quotation marks. They belong inside.

6. Using the phrase “based off of” when you mean “based on.” Nothing can be “based off of”

something else.

7. Failure to capitalize the “c” in Congress or Constitution, “D” in Democrat, or “R” in Republican.

8. Capitalizing common words such as representatives, congressmen, congressional, constitutional,

senators – except when referring to a person as in “Senator Jones.”

9. In a sequence of items, using “firstly” or “secondly” – “first” is just fine, followed by “second,”

etc.

10. Using “amount” when you mean “number.”

11. Mistaking “then” for “than”

12. Confusing “less” with “fewer”

13. Writing “try and” when you mean “try to”

14. Using “impact” when you mean “effect”

15. Writing “different than” when you mean “different from”

16. Writing the way one speaks. Talking and writing are very different; they are not to be confused.

**GRADING POLICY**

Grading Policy: Each of the two exams is worth 20 per cent of the final grade; the final exam counts for 30 per cent. Each of the three short papers is worth 10 per cent. Quality of class participation will determine borderline grades; and failure to execute properly the half page paper for each cluster of readings can lower your grade. Each item other than the half page papers will be graded as follows, and then appropriately weighted to determine final grades.

Grading System: All assignments will be graded on a scale where:

A = 3.8 - 4.0; A-minus = 3.6 - 3.7; AB = 3.5; B-plus = 3.3 - 3.4;

B = 2.8 - 3.2; B-minus = 2.6 - 2.7; BC = 2.5; C-plus = 2.3 - 2.;4

C = 1.8 - 2.2; C-minus = 1.6 - 1.7; CD = 1.5; D-plus = 1.3 - 1.4;

D = 0.8 - 1.2; D-minus = 0.6 - 0.7; DF = 0.5 F = 0.0 - 0.4

Definition of Grades. **“C**” connotes satisfactory, acceptable work indicating thorough but general and perhaps inconsistent comprehension of material. One’s work and one’s thinking contain evident weaknesses and omissions as well as strengths. **“D”** is work that indicates some basic but limited and inconsistent understanding that fails to achieve basic expectations. Weaknesses, errors, omissions, sloppy thinking, failure to distinguish the important from the unimportant, and inconsistency or even failure to integrate facts and concepts into a bigger picture are more common than signs of strength and strong thinking. Of course, an **“F”** grade characterizes failure to do the work, inability to understand and relate concepts and supporting data, and/or a pattern of weak reasoning or inadequate thought and research. A **“B”** grade denotes demonstrably good work, clearly above the satisfactory level, in which strengths greatly outnumber and outweigh weaknesses. In addition to mastery of the subject matter, it suggests serious thoughtfulness and, ideally a degree of originality and creativity; perception in identifying complicated issues; and an ability to distinguish more important from less important concepts. A “B” paper or exam indicates perception of the values in competing arguments; sophistication in comprehension; and ability to express ideas cogently in both written and oral format. An **“A”** grade denotes truly excellent and exceptional work, including mastery of the material, insight, creativity, originality, and excellence of expressing complex ideas. Weaknesses are absent or very minor. Note: “average” has no substantive meaning when it comes to grading, since one expects the average grade to be in the B range, but that depends on each student’s performance.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

(1) ***U.S. Constitution***, article 1

(2) *F****ederalist******Papers***, #47 – 66. These short articles are available on many web sites, e.g.:

http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html or

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\_menus/fed.asp

(3) Roger Davidson, Walter Oleszek, Frances Lee, and Eric Schickler, ***Congress and its Members***, 15th

ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 2015) http://www.cqpress.com/images/arrow.gifISBN 978-1-4833-8888-5, Print Paperback

(4) Barbara Sinclair, ***Unorthodox*** *Lawmaking*, 4th edition (Washington: CQ Press, 2012).

(5) Norman Ornstein, Tom Mann, Mike Malbin, and Andrew Rugg, ***Vital Statistic****s* ***on Congress*:** on

Blackboard e-reserve and at

http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/07/vital-statistics-congress-mann-ornstein

(6) Tom Davis, Martin Frost, and Richard Cohen, *The* ***Partisan Divide****: Congress in Crisis*

(Campbell, CA: Premier Press, 2014)

(7) Occasional required readings may be placed on e-reserve on Blackboard.

**COURSE POLICIES**

Attendance: As everyone knows, going to class enhances one’s knowledge; and of course knowledge brings power. But as Lord Acton said, “power corrupts.” Therefore the clever fool will skip classes in an effort to avoid corruption. DON’T DO IT!!!! Attendance will not be taken formally, but absences will be carefully noted. More than three unexcused absences will affect your final grade and unfairly deprive your classmates of your insights and wisdom.

Classroom Etiquette and Demeanor: As a courtesy to all members of the class, and as an incentive to active participation, cell phones, pagers, and all other electrical devices are to be turned **off**. If you are anticipating a very important call or text message, inform the instructor and put your phone on vibrate; when the call or message comes, you may leave the room to take it. Laptops, Ipads, etc. are not to be used in class except by explicit permission of the Instructor (for reasons of inability to take notes longhand, etc.). Gentlemen do not wear hats in class, and eating and drinking are out of order. The classroom is a place for concentration. Bathroom breaks should be taken before, not during, class time.

Academic Integrity: The work you submit must be your own, for this course alone. We rely on the University’s academic integrity policy. Please take a careful look at the policy, which may be found at: [www.villanova.edu/vpaa/office/studentservices/policies/integrity/index.htm](http://www.villanova.edu/vpaa/office/studentservices/policies/integrity/index.htm)

Learning Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations will be made for qualified individuals with certified learning disabilities. Registration with the Learning Support Office is required in order to receive accommodations. If you have such a certified disability, please contact the instructor at once.

**COURSE OUTLINE**: Note: the indicated schedule may need to be adjusted as the semester progresses; if so, notice will be provided.

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| DATE | **TOPIC** | **READINGS AND**  **ASSIGNMENTS** |
| ***Part One: Introduction and Framework*** | | |
| M 8/24  W 8/26 | *Introduction: Course Mechanics; Studying Congress; Establishing standards and models for judging*  Questions for discussion:   1. What do you think of Congress? What does the American public think of Congress? Why? 2. What’s wrong (right) with Congress? Is the problem the members, the structure, the processes, or what? 3. How – by what criteria and standards -- should we evaluate Congress’ performance? | **Read by 8/26**  *Partisan Divide, chaps 1-2*  **Optional reading:**  https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/statistics |
| F 8/28 | *Congress at the Founding*  Questions for class discussion  1. How did the framers of the constitution think about the role of Congress,  how members should be chosen, what kind of people they would be,  how they would function, the advantages of two chambers, and the  strengths and weaknesses of the structure?  2. What would today’s Congress look like had the founders’ intentions  played out as they hoped?  3. What’s happened over time to change all this? | **Read by 8/28:**  Constitution, Article 1 and  amendments 17, 27  *Federalist Papers* , #47 – 66  *Congress and Members*, chaps.  1-2 |
| ***Part two: Senators, Representatives, Voters, and Constituents*** | | |
| M 8/31  W 9/2 | *Elections -- Part One: Rules of the Game*  Questions for class:  1. What has happened to the distribution of House seats? (*Vital Statistics*)  2. Why are congressional districts drawn the way they are? Are they fair?  3. What should the criteria be for drawing congressional districts?  4. Are gerrymanders legal? Explain their legal and constitutional status.  5, What are the consequences of gerrymandering? Bad as “they” say?  6. Are “majority minority” districts good or bad?  7. Should the size of the House and Senate be increased?  8. Should we switch to multi-member districts?  9. Above all, what stands out in the readings for this section? | **Read by 8/31**  *Congress and Members*, chap.  3, pp. 41-56.  *Partisan Divide*, chaps. 3, 4, 5  *Vital Statistics*, tables 1-1 to  1- 5  <http://www.washingtonpost>.  com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2014  /06/03/this-computer-  programmer-solved-  gerrymandering-in-his-spare-  time/?tid=sm\_fb  **Optional (and fun) exercise**: try your hand at redistricting:  http://www.gardow.com/davebradlee/redistricting/launchapp.html  http://redistrictinggame.org  <http://www.wxxi.org/curriculum/redistrict/interactive/simulation/> |
| F 9/4  W 9/9  F 9/11 | *Elections -- Part Two: Candidacy, Nominations, Campaigns, and Election Results*  Questions for class:  1. Candidates: When do incumbents **no**t run for re-election?  2. Who are the challengers, and when/why do they run for Congress?  3. [**Be prepared to debate in class]**: Is there enough turnover in Congress, or  should we have term limits to ensure turnover? Or should longevity and  experience be valued more?  4. Why are Senate elections more competitive than House elections?  5. In congressional elections, how do people vote? Are they responsible?  Are voters fools?  6. What determines congressional election results – in presidential years and  in mid-term elections? Why does the president’s party almost always  lose seats in mid-term elections?  7. Are elections and campaigns hard work? Why? (*See Partisan Divide*)  8 . How important is money in congressional elections? Do candidates spend  too much or too little? Which ones receive and spend lots of money? Any  surprises in the data from Vital Statistics? Is independent spending good,  or should all spending by by candidates and parties?  9. Do elections give people the ability to hold Congress accountable?  10. Above all, what stands out in the readings for this section? | **Read by 9/4**  *Congress and Members*, chap 3,  pp. 56-63  *Congress and Members*, chap. 4  *Partisan Divide*, chaps. 6-12  ***Assignment: Paper #1 due 9/9****:* Three page paper. Apply the data in *Vital Statistics*, chapters 2 and 3, to questions 3, 5, and 7 in the section to the left. Compare this to what Frost and Davis have to say in *Partisan Divide* |
| M 9/14  W 9/16 | *Congress, Members, and Constituents: The Job – Home and Hill*  Questions for class:   1. What are the consequences of bicameralism? 2. What are congressmen like, and what motivates them? Compare Democrats and Republicans on prior careers 3. What makes one legislator more effective than another? 4. How important are congressional staffs? 5. Why cannot members get along civilly? 6. Should members spend more time in Washington or back in their districts? Should they function as trustees or delegates of their constituents? **[Be prepared to debate this in class]** 7. How do they relate to their constituents? Is casework good or bad? 8. Is Congress representative? How? Of whom? Should it be? 9. Should we increase the size of Senate and House? | **Read by 9/14`**  *Congress and Members*, chap. 5  *Partisan Divide*, chap. 13  *Vital Statistics*, 1.6 – 1.20; 6.1 –  6.4; 5.1 – 5.12 |
| ***Part three: The Internal Environment, Structure, Distribution of Power, and Processes*** | | |
| F 9/18  M 9/21 | *The Party System***:**  Questions for class:   1. What is “conditional party government”? The “Hastert rule”? 2. What are the primary goals and tasks of party leaders, and are they fully compatible? What problems arise? 3. What sort of leader would you elect if you were in Congress? 4. What is the difference between the Speaker of the House and Majority Leader of the Senate? 5. What are the powers and advantages leaders have? What are the major constraints that limit them? 6. If you were the Speaker of the House or Majority Leader in the Senate, what strategies and goals would you follow today? 7. If you were the Minority Leader in the House or Minority Leader in the Senate, what strategy and goals would you follow? 8. What kind of parties would best serve Congress and policymaking – strong, centralized disciplined “responsible” parties or loosely organized and relatively undisciplined parties | **Read by 9/18:**  *Congress and Members*, chap.  6 and Appendix A  *Vital Statistics*, tables 8-3, 8-4  **Assignment**: **Paper #2** (four pages maximum) on your senators and representatives (see above). Due 9/18 |
| **W 9/23** | **Exam on everything to this point** |  |
| M 9/28  W 9/30  F 10/2 | *The Committee System:*  Questions for class:   1. Why are committees important? What do they provide? 2. What are “turf wars,” what are their consequences? 3. What has happened to committee power and autonomy? 4. What consequences are there in the process that assigns members to committees? Is there a better way? 5. Is the process for choosing committee chairs fair? Wise? Conducive to good policy formation? Is pure seniority better? 6. More or fewer subcommittees? 7. Which committees are the most and least ideological | **Read by 9/28**  *Congress and Members*, chap. 7  *Partisan Divide*, chap. 14  *Vital Statistics*, tables  4-1 through 4-8,  5-5 through 5-7  8-7 through 8-10  **Assignment: Paper #3 due September 30**: Two pages maximum: What do you make of the data in Vital Statistics, tables 8-7 to 8-10 |
| M 10/5  W 10/7  F 10/9  M 10/19  W. 10/21 | The Legislative Process: Making Sausage Questions for class:  1. Of what utility are committee hearings? Are they important?  2. How can party leaders get recalcitrant committees to do what the  leaders want? How can committee leaders frustrate party leaders?  3, How do committee politics and processes today differ from those  of fifty years ago?  4. Why and how are House procedures more complex than  those in the Senate?  5. Would you rather be Speaker of the House or Senate Majority  Leader?  6. Open or closed rules – which is better?  7. Filibusters: good or bad? | **Read by 10/5:**  *Congress and Members*, chap. 8  *Unorthodox*, chaps 1-4, 6, 8, 10  *Vital Statistics*, tables 6-1  through 6–4, 6-7  Example of a Report:  http://www.cq.com/doc/commreport-4670321?3  **Optional**: See the progress of legislation at www.legex.org; a tutorial is available at  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGEsqBmRdMw  https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/statistics |
| F 10/23  M 10/26 | Deliberating and Deciding Questions for class:   1. How and why do members vote as they do? So what? 2. What is the best predictor of the outcome of a floor vote in the House and Senate – and why? 3. If you were a member of Congress, how would you decide how to vote? | **Read by 10/23:**  *Congress and Members*, chap. 9 |
| ***Part four: The External environment*** | | |
| W 10/28  F 10/30  M 11/2 | *The President and Executive Branch*  Questions for class:   1. What is and should be the president’s role in the legislative process? 2. How much influence does a president have to enact his legislative agenda? If he should have more, how would you arrange for it? 3. Should the president have an item veto? 4. Should Congress delegate more power to the president? 5. What are the current “sore spots” and tensions between president and Congress. | **Read by 10/28:**  *Congress and Members* chap 10  *Partisan Divide*, chap. 15  *Vital Statistics,*  6-6, 8-1, 8-2 |
| W 11/4 | **Exam on everything since last exam** |  |
| F 11/6  M 11/9 | *Congressional Oversight of the Executive*  Questions for class   1. Should Congress “do” oversight? 2. How well does it perform? Why? 3. What are the congressional techniques for oversight? 4. What can be done to enhance the oversight role? | **Read by 11/6:**  *Congress and Members,*chap.  11  *Vital Statistics*, table 6-5 |
| W 11/11  F 11/13 | *Congress and the Judiciary*  Questions for class:   1. Relative to congressional authority, is judicial review good for the country? 2. What’s wrong with congressional confirmation of judges and justices? Should confirmation consider political ideology? 3. Should Congress have more control over the judiciary? How? | **Read by 11/11:**  *Congress and Members*, chap. 12 |
| M 11/16  W 11/18 | *Interest Groups and Lobbying*  Questions for class:   1. Are interest groups and their lobbyists too powerful? 2. What are the ways in which interest groups seek to influence Congress/ Which are most effective? 3. Can interest group money buy votes? 4. Should lobbying be more stringently regulated and limited? | **Read by 11/16:**  *Congress and Members*, chap. 13 |
| ***Part five: Evaluating Congressional Performance*** | | |
| F 11/20  M 11/23  M 11/30 | *Congress as Policy-maker: Economic and Budgetary Policies*  Questions for class:   1. What is Congress’ role in economic policy relative to that of the president? 2. How does Congress carry out its function? Structures? Process? Authorizations versus appropriations? 3. How well does Congress perform in its role as policymaker? 4. How does the budget process work? What about the “pork barrel? | **Read by 11/20:**  *Congress and Members*, chap 14  *Unorthodox*, chaps.5, 7, 9  *Vital Statistics*, tables 7-1  through 7-8  Blackboard e-reserve: “Budget Process Comes of Age” |
| W 12/2  F 12/4  M 12/7 | *Congress as Policy-maker: Foreign and National Security Policy*  Questions for class:   1. What is the proper role for Congress in foreign and security policy? 2. What are executive agreements, and should Congress have a role? 3. How well does Congress perform its policymaking duties? 4. What is and what should be the congressional role in war? How can it function more effectively? 5. What’s wrong with the War Powers Resolution? | **Read by 12/2**  *Congress and Members*, chap 15  Blackboard e-reserves: War  Powers Resolution |
| Tu 12/8  (follows  Friday  Schedule  W 12/9 | *Judging Congress; Need and prospects for reform*.  Questions for class:  Anything and everything: can and should Congress be reformed? What and how – membership, structure, and/or procedures? | **Read by 12/8:**  *Congress and Members*, ch. 16  *Partisan Divide*, chap. 16  Blackboard e-reserves:  J. Johannes, *Thinking About*  *Reform*, chaps. 8, 9, 11  http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a32838/congress-the-report-reforms-fixcongress-1114/ |
| 12/12 | **Final Examination** 1:30 - 4:00 p.m |  |