

POS 4424: Legislative Politics

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Meeting Times: **Tues. Period 7 (1:55pm – 2:45pm); Thurs. Periods 7 and 8 (1:55pm – 3:50pm)**
 Classroom: **16 Matherly Hall**
 Office Hours: **Tues. & Thu. 12:30pm – 1:45pm**
 Office Location: **330 Anderson Hall**

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a class about the United States Congress, the “First Branch” of the American federal government. Congress is a unique institution among representative bodies in world democracies. It is the most active and most powerful of the world’s independent legislatures, and it is characterized by member autonomy and prestige well beyond that of any other legislature or parliament.

In recent years we have seen some of the lowest public approval ratings ever recorded for Congress as an institution, as well as repeated swings in party control of both the House of Representatives and Senate. At the same time, individual members continue to win re-election at rates exceeding ninety percent. How is this apparent paradox possible, and what does it mean for the legitimacy and efficacy of our chief representative institution?

In this class, we will learn the real story behind the institutional and electoral incentives that drive member behavior, the conflict between the demands of legislation and the demands of representation, how decisions made in the past have influenced the institution of Congress today, and how decisions made today might affect what the future of representative government in the United States will hold.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will develop the ability to think clearly and analytically about:

1. The structure and organization of Congress and the processes by which Congress operates (including differences between the House and the Senate);
2. The committee system and the role of party caucuses/conferences and leadership in the internal procedures of Congress (i.e., how a bill *really* becomes a law);
3. The role of Congress with respect to the executive and judicial branches of the federal government;
4. The causes and consequences of polarization, partisanship, and divided government;
5. The “electoral connection” and the demands of the constant campaign;
6. Representation, constituencies, and the relationship between Congress and interest groups;
7. The delegate/trustee model and Fenno’s paradox (love the congressman/hate the Congress);
8. Cycles of power and the dynamics of congressional change over time.

III. REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Roger H. Davidson, Walter J. Oleszek, Frances E. Lee, and Eric Schickler: *Congress and Its Members*, 15th edition (Washington: CQ Press, 2015). ISBN 9781483388885.
2. Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein: *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2013). ISBN 9780465074730.

Highly recommended:

1. David Mayhew: *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). ISBN: 9780300105872

Mayhew's short book, first published in 1974, is foundational to modern scholarship on Congress. We will discuss Mayhew's influential arguments at length in class and a number of assigned readings will touch on his work both directly and indirectly. For the purposes of this class, it is not necessary to read the book to understand the arguments in it, but any student with an interest in graduate-level studies or in professional legislative work should read this book. It is an easy read and is available inexpensively from many sources.

One copy of each of the above books is available on two-hour reserve at Library West. Other assigned readings – articles from scholarly journals and periodicals – are available through the course reserve page on the course Canvas site, and/or through clickable links embedded in the reading schedule on this syllabus.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

The course requirements consist of three exams, two short papers on the television series *House of Cards* (about 6 pages total), one campaign plan report and group presentation, and regular class attendance.

1. Exams: Exams will consist of a series of multiple choice and/or short answer questions worth a total of 20 points each. Exams will cover material both from assigned readings and from lectures. The midterm and final exams are cumulative, in that some material from previous sections may reappear, if I believe the material is especially important or otherwise deserves reiteration. Exam dates follow:

First exam: **Thursday, February 4th**

Midterm exam: **Thursday, March 17th**

Final exam: **Thursday, April 28th**

You may, if you wish, schedule an alternative exam, which will take the form of a written essay. I offer this choice both for students who encounter a conflict on one of the scheduled exam dates and for those who prefer an essay format to multiple choice/short answer. Essay exams will be completed on Canvas within a pre-scheduled limited time frame (generally, two hours). Because you will have access to your notes and books during essay exams, you can expect the questions to be relatively challenging.

2. House of Cards Papers: Together we will watch the first episode of the television series *House of Cards*, after which you will submit a short (2 page maximum) assessment of what you think the show gets right and what you think it gets wrong about the work of Congress. Near the end of the course, you will write a second paper (about 4 pages) reassessing the accuracy of the show's portrayal of Congress and interrogating the ways in which what you have learned differs from the expectations you expressed in your first paper. The first *HoC* paper will be due on **Thursday, January 14th**, and the second paper will be due on **Thursday, April 7th**.

3. Campaign Plan: Students will work in groups to craft a campaign plan for a congressional election (House or Senate) taking place in the 2016 electoral cycle. Each student will take on a specific role within the campaign – e.g. Campaign Manager, Policy Adviser, Finance Director, etc. – to be determined in conjunction with me. Groups will present their plan to the class as a whole near the end of the semester, but each student will write an *individual* report on their role in the campaign. Rough drafts of campaign plans and reports will be due before Spring Break, on **Thursday, February 25th**. Final reports will be due on **Monday, April 25th**. All reports should be submitted via Canvas. We will discuss these reports in greater detail as the semester unfolds.

You will be required to meet with me ***in person*** at least once (and more if possible) to discuss the progress of your campaign. I will assign group members and schedule group meetings after the add/drop period of the semester is complete.

5. Attendance: I expect you to attend class. I will take attendance regularly and will calculate 5% of your final grade on this basis. See the ***make-up policies*** below for information on excused absences.

6. Extra Credit Quizzes: At my discretion, I may offer some extra credit through occasional ***unannounced*** in-class quizzes.

V. GRADES AND GRADING SCALE

The grading percentage for each item follows:

First Exam	... 20%	Attendance	... 5%
Midterm Exam	... 20%	Campaign Plan Paper	... 20%
Final Exam	... 20%	Campaign Plan Presentation	... 5%
<i>House of Cards</i> Papers	... 10%	Total	... 100%

Grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

A	... 90-100	C+	... 74-76
A-	... 87-89	C	... 70-73
B+	... 84-86	C-	... 67-69
B	... 80-83	D	... 58-66
B-	... 77-79	E	... 0-57

Please note that a grade of C- or below in this class may not be a qualifying grade for major, minor, college, or general education requirements. Please see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/>.

VI. MAKE-UP POLICIES

My policies for excused absences and make-up work are consistent with university guidelines available at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>. In general, written documentation is required for an excused absence, an extension on assigned work, or a make-up exam.

I will schedule make-up exams for authorized absences with advance written notice from the responsible official (e.g., athletic or academic advisor). You may make up an exam for an illness with a written doctor's note only. If you miss an exam for any other reason, you have twenty-four (24) hours from the scheduled start time of the exam to contact me by email and request authorization to take a ***written essay exam*** as a make-up. Failure to contact me within twenty-four hours will result in a zero for the exam.

VII. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities should register with the Disability Resource Center by calling 352-392-8565, or by visiting the DRC website at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>, and providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive further instructions on requesting accommodations. Please register ***as early as possible*** in the semester.

VIII. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I expect you to comply with all university policies pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. Please review the Academic Honesty policy at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/staff/policies.html#honesty>. The student honor pledge – “*On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment*” – is implicit in every exam or assignment you complete. However, I will make it explicit: Don’t plagiarize and don’t receive unauthorized help. If you do, you will receive a zero on the assignment or exam, you will not be permitted to redo it, you will have to explain yourself to me, I will lose respect for you, and your ability to pass this class will be seriously jeopardized. So don’t do it.

The expectation of academic integrity extends to faculty and instructors as well. I repeat here the UF Faculty Honor Pledge: *We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.*

IX. RESPECTFUL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

This is a class about politics. Classroom discussion may touch on political and social issues which are often controversial and sometimes quite sensitive. Please be prepared for this possibility. Furthermore, be willing to open your mind to different ways of viewing the world that arise from the wide range of geographic, socioeconomic, religious, and racial and ethnic backgrounds – not to mention from different personal experiences with politics and the political system – that are represented at a major state university. This rich assortment of diverse life experiences is one of the great advantages of undergraduate study at a large university like UF.

As your instructor, I will maintain a respectful attitude toward all students during classroom discussion, and I will never discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other category protected by law, university policy, or common human decency. I expect the same from all of my students. I reserve the right to remove you from my classroom and assign an attendance grade of zero for unacceptable violations of these norms.

X. EVALUATIONS

I expect all students to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are open during the last two weeks of the semester. Evaluations help me in my own assessment of the course and in my future academic pursuits. I take them seriously and I ask you to do the same.

XI. COURSE SCHEDULE

Links to periodicals are embedded in the text of the schedule. Other required readings (journal articles, etc.) will be available through the course reserves link on the course Canvas site. You may also search for the article title in JSTOR or Google Scholar.

Shorthand for required texts: “CAIM” = Davidson et al., *Congress and Its Members*; “WORSE” = Mann and Ornstein, *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks*.

[See \(or click here for\) the separate file “POS4424 Course Schedule” for the reading schedule.](#)