

# POS 4424: Legislative Politics

Spring 2026

Tuesday 8:30 am to 10:25 am

Thursday 9:35 am to 10:25 am

Matherly 0016

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## ***Course Overview***

The United States Congress is the most scrutinized branch of the U.S. government and plays a central role in shaping national policy, elections, and the functioning of representative democracy. This course explores two fundamental questions: (1) What do members of Congress do, and why? (2) How do the actions of individual members and the collective body of Congress influence national policy outcomes?

We will delve into the legislative process, examining the influence of political parties, leadership structures, and interest groups. Additionally, we will critically assess the common critique that “Congress is broken,” exploring the effectiveness and challenges of Congress as an institution. Through discussions and analysis, students will gain a deeper understanding of Congress’s role in shaping public policy and its place within the broader democratic system.

## ***Learning Outcomes***

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Explain congressional rules and procedures
- Assess current theoretical arguments in the congressional literature
- Formulate new arguments and theories to explain the institution of Congress and the behavior of its members
- Evaluate congressional districts and the relationship between legislators and their constituents
- Develop a legislative proposal and strategy
- Critically examine a recent policy debate in Congress

## **Course Materials**

There is one required textbook in this course. Students can purchase them in the UF Bookstore or online. All the other articles and book chapters can be found on the UF E-Learning (Canvas) at <http://elearning.ufl.edu/>.

Adler, E. Scott, Jeffery A. Jenkins, and Charles R. Shipan. *The United States Congress (Second Edition)*, 2021. W.W. Norton Company. (referred to in the syllabus as AJS).

## **Evaluation of Grades**

### 1) Class Participation (10%)

You are expected to attend all class meetings prepared for an in-depth discussion of the assigned course material. Please know that attendance is not equal to participation. Your grade will reflect not just whether you show up, but your engagement in class discussions. I will be actively keeping a record of student participation in class.

### 2) Exam I (20%)

There will be an in-class midterm exam on **February 17, 2026**. It is worth 20% of your final grade. It will cover all class material up to that date.

3) Exam II (30%)

There will be a cumulative exam on **April 21, 2026**. It is worth 30% of your final grade.

4) Get to know a Legislator (40%)

Students will be assigned a member of congress you will be required to do the following:

a) Legislator Profile (10%) **Due February 27<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 pm EST**

Research your member of Congress in order to answer questions on the member's background, electoral history, and legislative activity write a 2-page (double-spaced) paper outlining your member.

b) District Profile (10%) **Due March 27<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 pm EDT**

Research your member of congress's congressional district and write a 2-page (double-spaced) comprehensive report covering district geography, demographics, politics, and key issues.

c) Legislative Proposal and Strategy (20%) **Due April 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 pm EDT**

Students will propose a piece of legislation and map out a strategy for passing this legislation into law. The legislation length will vary, but the strategy must be at least 3 double-spaced pages and must reference theories and strategies discussed in assigned readings and in class.

#### Grading Scale

Percent	Grade
93.4-100	A
90.0-93.3	A-
86.7-89.9	B+
83.4-86.6	B
80.0-83.3	B-
76.7-79.9	C+
73.4-76.6	C
70.0-73.3	C-
66.7-69.9	D+
63.4-66.6	D
60.0-3.3	D-
0-59.9	E

#### Course Policies

**Academic Integrity:** The University of Florida is an institution of learning, research, and scholarship that is strengthened by the existence of an environment of integrity. It is essential that all members of the University practice academic integrity and accept individual responsibility for their work and actions. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction and referral to the university's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult me.

**Expected Workload:** You should be aware that our course requires a *significant* deal of outside work including reading, writing, analysis, and preparing comments. As a Carnegie I, research-intensive university, UF is required by federal law to assign at least 2 hours of work outside of class for every contact hour. Work done in these hours may include reading/viewing assigned material and doing explicitly assigned individual or group work, as well as reviewing notes from class, synthesizing information in advance of exams or papers, and other self-determined study tasks.

For our 3-credit class, this means you should expect to spend 6-9 hours per week outside of class. The amount of time spent on this course may vary by week. I strongly encourage you to speak to me during office hours if you encounter any struggles or difficulties.

**Attendance:** To successfully pass this course, your participation and engagement is necessary. Students must be prepared to discuss the readings and other materials listed for that day. However, if you are sick or have been in contact with someone who is sick please stay home and take care of yourself. Please let me know if you are not attending class because of illness. You will not be penalized for missing classes (within reason). If you are sick for more than a couple of days, please get an excused absence so we can discuss options. If you miss class, you are encouraged to ask your classmates for their notes or come to office hours to talk about the class you missed.

**In-Class Recording:** Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal, educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, ***students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.***

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student

**Lecture Slides:** I will post redacted lecture slides on the course website at the conclusion of each class meeting. The slides are meant as a guide and are in no way a substitute for attending lectures. My hope is that by making the slides available, students will not feel that they must spend the entire class furiously taking notes and instead pay close attention to the lecture, ask questions, and participate deeply in class discussion.

**Communication:** Students should use Canvas to contact me. Although you may email me at my UF email account, the university strongly encourages we communicate via Canvas to avoid the potential of violations of student confidentiality protected by [FERPA](#). I encourage students to visit office hours to discuss any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the course.

**Email/Messaging Hours:** You may email or message me via Canvas at any time that is convenient to you. I will respond within two business days between the hours of 8 am and 4 pm. If you do not receive a reply from me after 48 hours, please resend your message. Although I may sometimes reply outside of these designated hours, responses cannot be guaranteed after 4 pm on weekdays, weekends, or holidays.. Please plan accordingly to have your questions answered in advance of the assignment and exam deadlines.

**Exams:** There are two exams. If you know, you will miss the exam for a UF-sponsored commitment (e.g., traveling with the debate team, softball team, orchestra, ROTC, etc.) **or** for some foreseeable personal commitment *that is not discretionary* (e.g., a scheduled medical procedure, like surgery) **or** because of an existential-level family emergency (e.g., death, medical emergency), you will be able to make up the exam. If the miss is because of a scheduled event, you must let me know at least a week in advance (email is perfectly acceptable and preferred). I will work with you to make accommodations, but it is your responsibility to arrange with me to take a makeup exam.

**Grades and Appeals:** You will be graded on your academic performance. This includes clarity of thought, knowledge of the material, composition, spelling, and grammar. Students can file an appeal when they believe that the assigned grade is

inconsistent with student performance or incorrect due to computational error. Formal appeals will consist of a single typed page that identifies the grading error and explains why the assigned grade is incorrect.

**Late Assignments:** Make-up assignments are only offered under valid and documented circumstances. Typically, all make-up work must be submitted within 72 hours of the grade submission deadline. Any assignment submitted after the due date will be penalized a full letter grade (10%) each day it is late. For example, if you submitted an assignment two days late that receives a grade of 95% your grade would be deducted 20% (2 days late\*10%), meaning your adjusted grade would be 75%.

**Accessibility Services:** If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you should contact the UF Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible ([dso.ufl.edu/drc](https://dso.ufl.edu/drc)). Please be sure that necessary accommodations are properly documented by the UFDRC. To obtain a classroom accommodation, you must first pre-register with the DRC (352.392.8565) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to your instructors when requesting an accommodation. I am always happy to make whatever accommodations you may need to be successful in the course.

**Technology Resources:** The UF Computing Help Desk can assist you with any of your technical issues. You can access the Help Desk 24/7 at <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>, 352-392- HELP (4357), or [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu). If you use email, write from your [gatorlink@ufl.edu](mailto:gatorlink@ufl.edu) email address, or include your UFID and/or GatorLink username (NOT your password!) in the body of the email. Provide complete information regarding the course and content to which you are referring.

**Academic Resources:** There are many other campus, academic resources you should take advantage of throughout the semester. These include:

- E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).
- Library Support: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask> Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392- 6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> Now offering online consultation.
- On-Line Students Complaints: <https://distance.ufl.edu/getting-help/student-complaintprocess/>.
- Career Connections Center: <https://career.ufl.edu/> Career assistance and counseling.

**Crisis Resources:** If you or someone you know is struggling with any crisis including but not limited to gender, sexual, racial, or domestic violence, there are many community and University of Florida resources available. Some of these include:

- U Matter, We Care (umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, <https://umatter.ufl.edu>)
- RESPECT – UF Division of Student Affairs (<https://respect.ufsa.ufl.edu>)
- Counseling and Wellness Center – available 24/7 (352-392-1575, <https://counseling.ufl.edu>)
- Student Health Care Center (352-392-1161, <https://shcc.ufl.edu>)
- Multicultural & Diversity Affairs (352-392-1217, <https://multicultural.ufl.edu>)
- Hitchcock Field & Fork Pantry- Assisting members of our campus community who experience food insecurity - <https://pantry.fieldandfork.ufl.edu>
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center (352-733-0111)
- Gainesville Police Department (non-emergency #: 352-955-1818, <https://gainesvillepd.org>)

## Course Schedule

### Week 1: Introduction to Congress

#### January 13<sup>th</sup>

- Course overview and introduction
- AJS – Chapter 1 “Representation and Governing in a Separated System”

#### January 15<sup>th</sup>

- NO CLASS

### Week 2: Development of Congress

#### January 20<sup>th</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 2 “The Historical Development of Congress”

#### January 22<sup>nd</sup>

- Polsby, Nelson W. "The institutionalization of the US House of Representatives." *American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1 (1968): 144-168.

### Week 3: Representation

#### January 27<sup>th</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 4 “Representation”

#### January 29<sup>th</sup>

- Jacobson, Gary C. “Partisan Polarization in American Politics: A Background Paper.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2013): 688–708. (skim)
- Hertel-Fernandez, Alexander, Matto Mildenberger, and Leah C. Stokes. "Legislative staff and representation in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (2019): 1-18.

### Week 4: Elections I

#### February 3<sup>rd</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 3 “Elections”

#### February 5<sup>th</sup>

- Gay, Claudine. "The effect of black congressional representation on political participation." *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (2001): 589-602.

### Week 5: Elections II

#### February 10<sup>th</sup>

- Jacobson, Gary C. "Strategic politicians and the dynamics of US House elections, 1946–86." *American Political Science Review* 83, no. 3 (1989): 773-793.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder Jr, and Charles Stewart III. "Candidate positioning in US House elections." *American Journal of Political Science* (2001): 136-159.
- Hall, Andrew B. "What happens when extremists win primaries?" *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 18-42.

#### February 12<sup>th</sup>

- Jacobson, Gary C. "It's nothing personal: The decline of the incumbency advantage in US House elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 3 (2015): 861-873. (skim)

- Carson, Jamie L., Joel Sievert, and Ryan D. Williamson. "Nationalization and the incumbency advantage." *Political Research Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2020): 156-168. (skim)

### **Week 6: Midterm/Committees**

**February 17<sup>th</sup>**

- **In-Class Midterm**

**February 20<sup>th</sup>**

- Chapter 5 "Committees"

### **Week 7: Committees II and Parties I**

**February 24<sup>th</sup>**

- Chapter 5 "Committees" cont.
- Fenno, Richard F. "The House Appropriations Committee as a political system: The problem of integration." *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 2 (1962): 310-324..
- McCubbins, Mathew D., and Thomas Schwartz. "Congressional oversight overlooked: Police patrols versus fire alarms." *American Journal of Political Science* (1984): 165-179.

**February 26<sup>th</sup>**

- **NO CLASS**

### **Week 8: Parties II**

**March 3<sup>rd</sup>**

- **NO CLASS**

**March 5<sup>th</sup>**

- AJS – Chapter 6 "Parties"

### **Week 9: Parties III**

**March 10<sup>th</sup>**

- Sinclair, Barbara. "The emergence of strong leadership in the 1980s House of Representatives." *The Journal of Politics* 54, no. 3 (1992): 657-684

**March 12<sup>th</sup>**

- Thomsen, Danielle M. "Ideological moderates won't run: How party fit matters for partisan polarization in Congress." *The Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3 (2014): 786-797.
- Clarke, Andrew J. "Party sub-brands and American party factions." *American Journal of Political Science* 64, no. 3 (2020): 452-470.

### **Spring Break (March 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>)**

### **Week 10: Rules, Process, and Policymaking**

**March 24<sup>th</sup>**

- AJS – Chapter 7 "Policy Making"

**March 26<sup>th</sup>**

- Binder, Sarah A. "The dynamics of legislative gridlock, 1947–96." *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 3 (1999): 519-533

Week 11: Policymaking

March 31<sup>st</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 8 “The Legislative Effectiveness of Congress and its Members”
- Butler, Daniel M., Adam G. Hughes, Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. "Do constituents know (or care) about the lawmaking effectiveness of their representatives?" *Political Science Research and Methods* 11, no. 2 (2023): 419-428.

April 2<sup>nd</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 9 “Congress and the President”

Week 12: Interbranch Relations I

April 7<sup>th</sup>

- Guenther, Scott. M., & Kernell, Sam. "Veto Threat Bargaining with a Bicameral Congress". *Political Research Quarterly*, 74, no. 3 (2021): 628-644.

April 9<sup>th</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 10 “Congress and the Bureaucracy”

Week 13: Interbranch Relations II

April 14<sup>th</sup>

- Potter, Rachel Augustine. "Slow-rolling, fast-tracking, and the pace of bureaucratic decisions in rulemaking." *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 3 (2017): 841-855.
- AJS – Chapter 11 “Congress and the Courts”

April 16<sup>th</sup>

- AJS – Chapter 12 “Congress and Interest Groups”
- You, Hye Young. "Dynamic lobbying: Evidence from foreign lobbying in the US Congress." *Economics & Politics* 35, no. 2 (2023): 445-469.

Week 14: Exam

April 21<sup>st</sup>

- Exam II in class