

Roger Austin
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Office Hours: Before/after class, TBD, and by appointment

Tuesday, 7th period (1:55-2:45)
Thursday, 7th-8th period (1:55-3:50)
Matherly 16
Office: 307 Anderson

Legislative Politics POS 4424; Section 25416

Fall 2025 (Final)

"...to make of the columns of The New York Times¹ a forum for the consideration of all questions of public importance and to that end to invite intelligent discussion from all shades of opinion." Adolph Ochs, 1896, publisher, NY Times

Goals of the Course

This is an important time to be studying the U. S. Congress. Even before the pandemic, politics in America had grown increasingly volatile and many worried that a heightened partisanship had made the national government incapable of governing. For its part Congress is a complex institution that is pulled in several different directions by a myriad of influences within and outside its chambers. Throughout the semester, we will look at how those influences shape the Congress' ability to represent the American people while working with the President and others to govern wisely. Among the topics we will consider are: (a) elections; (b) congressional organization; (c) executive-legislative relations; (d) legislative policy-making; and (e) congressional reform. In doing that, a number of issues will be addressed, including:

- What kinds of changes have occurred in the basic operations of the Congress in recent decades? What are the implications of those changes for the quality of congressional life?
- What forces operate in congressional elections? How have congressional elections changed in recent years? What changes, if any, need to be made in how congressional elections are financed and contested?
- What should be the respective roles of Congress and the President? Has the balance of power shifted even more to the president?
- To what extent is the Congress able to produce effective public policies that are responsive to the needs and demands of the American people? What institutional characteristics contribute to and detract from Congress' ability to govern and govern wisely?
- What changes are needed to make Congress a viable democratic institution? To what extent, and in what ways, are those changes likely to occur in the first decades of the new century?

Reading Materials

Required Books

Davidson, Oleszek, Lee and Schickler, Congress and its Members, 18th edition, 2022, CQ Press (**Oleszek**)
Mayhew, David, Congress: The Electoral Connection, Yale University Press, 1994 (**Mayhew**)

(I encourage you to obtain used or paperback editions)

There will be other articles as we go and as listed in the Syllabus. I will either provide these or provide a link or post to Canvas.

As we will be discussing current events every week, several websites and newspapers may come in handy. As a UF student, you get free online access to the NY Times and the Wall St. Journal. SayfieReview.com and floridaPolitics.com are free and offer great coverage of all things Florida. There is also fivethirtyeight.com, Ballotpedia.com, election.princeton.edu, Politifact.com, Politico.com, RealClearPolitics.com, Pollster.com. Absorb them all. Take the long view – you're building your knowledge base for the next 40 election cycles.

¹ And by definition, The University of Florida in the 21st century

Policies and Grading

Food and drinks in class are fine. You are expected to clean up after yourselves. If you need to leave to use the restroom, please do so quietly. Attendance will not be taken, but you will be conspicuous by your absence.

Your grade will reflect your performance in the following areas:

- **10% Class Participation** – this means active participation in our discussions, not just attendance
- **30% Midterm** – this will tentatively be in class on Thursday, October 16
- **30% Short Writing Assignments** – there will be at least 4-5 of these
- **30% Final Exam** – probably a take home exam due Thursday, December 11 @ 5:00 pm, TBD

Section I In Search of Two Congresses – 2 weeks

“Rarely do we find men who are willing to engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.” Dr. Martin Luther King

Week 1	August 21	What is this course about and what are the implications? Discuss: Readings, Syllabus, Expectations, Grading, Introductions, etc. Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 1 and assigned articles
Week 2	Aug 26 & 28	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 2

Section II A Congress of Ambassadors – 3 Weeks

“Thinking is the hardest work known to man. This would account for why so few engage in it.” Henry Ford

Week 3	Sept 2 & 4	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 3
Week 4	Sept 9 & 11	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 4
Week 5	Sept 16 & 18	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 5, Mayhew, Part 1

Section III A Deliberative Assembly of One Nation – 3 Weeks

Week 6	Sept 23 & 25	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 6, Mayhew, Part 1
Week 7	Sept 30 & Oct 2	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 7, Mayhew, Part 2
Week 8	Oct 7 & 9	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 8, Mayhew, Part 2

Section IV Policy Making and Change in the Two Congresses – 6 Weeks

Week 9	Oct 14 & 16 Oct 16	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 9 Tentative date of in-class Midterm
Week 10	Oct 21 & 23	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 10
Week 11	Oct 28 & 30	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 11
Week 12	Nov 4 & 6	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 12
Week 13	Nov 11 & 13	Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 13

Week 14 Nov 18 & 20 Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 14 & 15

Week 15 Nov 25 Thanksgiving Week – No Class

Section V Conclusion – 1 week

Week 16 December 2 Reading – Oleszek, Chapter 16

Week 17 December 12 Final Exam – probably a take home; due by the end of the exam period, which is Thursday, December 11, 3-5 pm, TBD

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

I take academic dishonesty very, very, very, very seriously. If I find evidence of cheating or plagiarism or other academic dishonesty, I will personally initiate disciplinary action.

Students with Special Needs

It is the responsibility of students needing special accommodation for this course to make an appointment to see me at the beginning of the semester. I will make every effort to meet your needs in accordance with UF Guidelines.

Office Hours

Feel free to come to my office hours for any reason, academic or otherwise. If my office hours are not convenient for you, we'll find a time that is. I am also easy to reach by email and typically respond quite quickly; this is the best way to reach me. I also sometimes do Zoom or phone calls. I personally keep very late hours.

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see this link.” (The direct link is <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.)