

## **Congress and the Legislative Process -- Political Science #341**

Illinois Wesleyan University

Dr. Greg Shaw

{sample syllabus only – this may not reflect the details of the current course}

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### *Course description and requirements:*

This course introduces students to the historical and contemporary U.S. Congress through readings, lectures and discussions, and individualized student research. Topics include congressional elections, chamber and committee structures and practices, theories of congressional organization, members' voting behavior, and inter-branch relations.

Students' grades are based on 3 essay-type exams, a substantial term paper, a short legislative history paper, and class participation. Each of the exams is worth 20% of the final course grade. The term paper is worth 25% of the course grade, and the legislative history is worth 5%. Active and thoughtful participation in class discussions comprises the remaining 10% of the grade. I will say more about the legislative history writing assignment once the course is underway. A few days before each of the exams I will distribute a list of questions resembling, but not identical to, the questions you will face on the upcoming exam. These should give you a framework for study and should be taken as a rough indicator of the level of difficulty and style of the questions that will appear on the exams. Taking an exam at any time other than in class on the designated exam date requires my advance approval.

A term paper topic will be chosen by each student in consultation with me. Topics should be narrow enough to be manageable in approximately 15 pages (plus bibliography and any appendices). Papers need not focus exclusively on the current or even very recent Congress, but the papers should make some clear implications for the contemporary Congress (post-Vietnam War). Because the study of Congress lends itself so well to quantitative analysis, students are strongly encouraged to incorporate at least some of this type of work in their papers. Quantitative or not, I will expect rigorous analytical papers that go beyond mere description and that draw inferences from well-constructed analyses. Note interim deadlines below for paper proposals, bibliographies, outlines, and final papers. Late papers suffer a 10 percentage point reduction for each day they are late, weekends and holidays included. Late papers should be e-mailed to me as soon as possible. The penalty clock will stop when your paper is received.

### *Grades and academic integrity:*

Final course grades are assigned as follows: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. Taking a grade of incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. Under no circumstances will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester. All other university policies apply.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. In these cases I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

*Readings:*

The following course texts are highly recommended for purchase:

*Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, Morris Fiorina (Yale University Press, 1989)

*Committees in Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, Christopher Deering and Steven Smith (CQ Press, 1997)

*Congress and Its Members, 9<sup>th</sup> edition*, Roger Davidson and Walter Oleszek (CQ Press, 2003)

The following readings are available in the library's electronic reserve collection (password: hastert):

*Congress Reconsidered, 7<sup>th</sup> edition*, Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer, editors (CQ Press, 2000)

David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Yale University Press, 1974)

Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (University of California Press, 1993)

Keith Krehbiel, *Information and Legislative Organization* (University of Michigan Press, 1991)

John Kingdon, "Models of Legislative Voting," in *Classics in Congressional Politics* (Addison-Wesley-Longman Publishers, 1999)

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**Topics**

**Week of:**

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**Readings**

Introduction and course overview

Davidson & Oleszek, chaps. 1 & 2

The founding and the early Congress

Congressional elections, Pt. 1

Davidson & Oleszek, chaps. 3-4

Congressional elections, Pt. 2

Fiorina, entire text  
Dodd & Oppenheimer, chapt. 7

Nuts and bolts of the contemporary Senate  
and House of Representatives

Davidson & Oleszek, chapt. 8

Paper proposals due

Legislative history due

Committees

Deering & Smith, entire text

First exam: covering all material to date

Research methods overview/refresher, term paper progress reports

Theories of congressional organization, Pt. 1  
- Distributive politics

Mayhew part 1 & pages 81-158 of  
part 2

Annotated bibliographies due

Dodd & Oppenheimer, chapt. 12

Theories of congressional organization, Pt. 2 - Partisan politics	Cox & McCubbins intro., chaps. 1, 2, 6, 7, 9 & conclusion Davidson & Oleszek, chapt. 6
Theories of congressional organization, Pt. 3 - Informational politics	Krehbiel chaps. 1-3, 7 Dodd & Oppenheimer chapt. 9
Congress members' voting behavior - Floor votes	Kingdon article Davidson & Oleszek, chapt. 9
Congressional-executive relations, Pt. 1 - Executive vetoes - Oversight - War making	Davidson & Oleszek, chaps. 10 & 11
Paper outlines due in class on Friday, the 7 <sup>th</sup> Second exam: covering all material since 1 <sup>st</sup> exam	
Congressional-executive relations, Pt. 2 - Divided government - Legislative short-cuts	
Congress and the courts	Davidson & Oleszek, chapt. 12
Policymaking in Congress	Davidson & Oleszek, chaps. 13 & 14
Recent developments in Congress Papers due	none
Summing up Review for final exam	Davidson & Oleszek, chapt. 16
Final exam: comprehensive	