

PSCI 3041: THE AMERICAN CONGRESS
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
FALL SEMESTER 2010
INSTRUCTOR: SCOTT L. MINKOFF

COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor: Scott Minkoff
Office: Ketchum 130
Email: scott.minkoff@colorado.edu
Course Website: CU Learn
Office Hours: Mondays 12:30pm to 2:00pm, Wednesdays 12:30pm to 2:00pm, and by appointment.

Section Meeting Times:

Section 001: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday: 9:00am-9:50am (Ketchum 235)

Section 002: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday: 11:00am-11:50am (Museum Collections E155)

IMPORTANT DATES

Midterm Exam: Monday, October 12

Research Plan Due: Friday, September 17

Term Paper Due: Friday, November 12

001 Final Exam: Monday, December 13, 7:30pm

002 Final Exam: Tuesday, December 14, 7:30pm

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines the structure, members, processes, and performance of the United States Congress. We begin the course with a brief overview of what Congress is and how it works and then focus on a range of topics in greater detail. Among the topics we study are member motivations, congressional procedure, legislative productivity, voting, and the external forces on Congress. Throughout the course we will frequently return to the theme of lawmaking as we seek to understand how policy ideas travel through congressional systems to become (or fail to become) laws. Our approach to these topics will be what political scientists call “institutional.” This means that we will look closely at the rules which organize and govern Congress in order to understand the ways members behave and the outcomes Congress produces.

As an advanced course in political science, a thorough understanding of the American political system is a prerequisite. Students without such an understanding should not take the course. The expectation is that you will come to all classes having completed the assigned reading and prepared to participate in a discussion about the material. Your performance in the course will be assessed based on two exams, a research paper, and your participation in class.

I will use the course CU Learn page to post course readings, resources, and information. Additionally, an email list has been setup to contact you. Changes to the syllabus and course schedule are likely so it is critical that you regularly check your *University email account* and CU Learn for updates. Students will be held accountable for assignments and syllabus changes communicated via email. I will always give you reasonable notice of any changes or additions to the syllabus.

REQUIRED BOOKS AND ADDITIONAL READINGS

The course has 2 required books.

TXT: Smith, Steven S, Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2009. *The American Congress*. 6th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

RDR: Smith, Steven S, Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2009. *The American Congress Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Both books can be purchased at the University Book Store. Students wishing to purchase used copies of the Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen textbook (TXT) online may purchase the 5th or the 6th edition but should be aware that I will refer to the 6th edition. Students should not purchase any version older than the 5th edition. Students may also purchase used copies of the Reader (RDR).

The course has one optional book that may be purchased at the book store or online. This book, Oleszek's *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*, is the most comprehensive and understandable guide to the policy making process in Congress. If you are interested in a career working in Congress or the policy process, I recommend you purchase this book. This book may also be helpful for your research paper.

O: Oleszek, Walter. J. 2001. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*. 7th ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.

There will also be required readings that do not come from these books. All of these readings will be posted on CU Learn or emailed to the class and are marked with an asterisk (*) on the course schedule.

Finally, it is important that you stay up to date with what is going on in Congress and American politics more broadly. You should be regularly reading at least one national newspaper (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.) and one online politics magazine (politico.com, cqpolitics.com, etc.). We will be discussing the news in class.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION*

Midterm Examination: 25%

Final Examination: 30%

Research Paper: 30%

Participation: 10%

Current Events Fridays: 5%

Examinations (55%): You will have two examinations in this course—the first coming approximately midway through the course and the second coming at the end of the course. They are worth 25% and 30% of your overall grade respectively. While the second exam will strongly emphasize the second half of the course, it will require you to draw on concepts from the first half of the course. Additional details about the format of the exams will be given out as the exam dates approach.

Research Paper (30%): The details of the research paper assignment (as well as a research plan assignment) will be handed out separately.

Participation (10%): To be successful in this course you must engage the course material both in and out of class. The material is engaged in class by offering comments and asking questions. While I do not take

*Please note that I reserve the authority to make changes to the course requirements based on how the course progresses.

regular attendance, please note that you cannot get a good participation grade unless you show up to class. Students should feel free to visit me during my office hours if they wish to discuss their participation in the course to that point.

Current Events Fridays (5%): On Current Events Fridays all students will come to class prepared to offer a summary of and discuss at least one article they found in a national paper or political magazine pertaining to Congress or congressional elections. The article should be in hand (printed out, cut out, and not on your laptop screen). Students will be called on to offer their current events topic and get a brief discussion going. Students who are called on but are not prepared to discuss a current event will receive a zero for the current events grade. I will also be circulating articles for students to look at in preparation for class.

Reading Quizzes: For this class to work it is critical that you stay up-to-date on the reading. I will begin the course trusting that students will come to class having completed the required reading and that reading quizzes are not necessary. Daily reading quizzes will be instituted should it become clear that students are not doing the reading. If reading quizzes do become necessary, the grade distribution will be adjusted to make room for the reading quiz grade.

Grading Scale: I grade on a 4 point grade scale. Each letter grade you receive for this class is converted to that scale (A=4.0, A-=3.66, B+=3.33, B=3.0...) and weighted to calculate your final course grade.

LAPTOP COMPUTERS

Students are allowed to use their laptop computers during class. However, those who do should be aware that when they are not taking notes or reviewing course material (for example, when they are browsing the internet, sending email, or social-networking) it is a distraction to other students in the class who are trying to focus. *All students who know that they will be using their laptop for activities unrelated to the course should sit in the back of the classroom with no one behind them.* Students not sitting in the back and found to be using their laptop for activities unrelated to the course will be asked to move to the back of the classroom.

BE ON TIME

Each class will begin promptly at the designated time. Entering the classroom late is a distraction to the instructor and to your fellow students. Students who regularly come late to class will see it reflected in their participation grade and may be asked not to attend at all.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

If you qualify for **accommodations because of a disability**, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, and <http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices>.

Campus policy regarding **religious observances** requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. See full details at: http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an **appropriate learning environment**. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an

alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at:

http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on **discrimination and harassment**, the University of Colorado policy on **sexual harassment**, and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>.

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the **academic integrity** policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at:

<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

How to read this course schedule: The course schedule is broken up by weeks and specific dates. **“Readings for the Week”** need not be completed for a specific day of class but will be discussed generally throughout the week and their contents will be covered on the examinations. Generally speaking, the earlier you read these readings, the more prepared you will be for class. **Readings listed by specific dates** should be completed for the designated day because we will be discussing them in class. If a specific date is not listed it means that there is no reading due for that particular day. Many Fridays on the schedule are **“Current Events Fridays”** where some or all of the class will be devoted to discussing current events as they pertain to Congress, congressional elections, and politics more broadly. Requirements for Current Events Fridays are detailed above. *Finally, this course schedule is subject to change at my discretion. All changes to the schedule will be communicated via email with reasonable notice.*

TXT = Your Textbook: *The American Congress* by Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen

RDR = Your Reader: *The American Congress Reader* by Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen

* = Reading will be posted on CU Learn

WEEK 1: AUGUST 23, 25, 27

Topics: Course Introduction, What is Congress? Who is Congress?

Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 1

Fri, Aug 27: Paper Assignment Handed Out, Current Events Friday

WEEK 2: AUGUST 30, SEPTEMBER 1, 2

Topics: How a Bill Becomes a Law, How to Study Congress

Mon, Aug 30: *Taibbi: Four Amendments and a Funeral

Wed, Sep 1: *Weissberg: The Study of Congress

WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 8, 10

Topic: Institutional Analysis

Wed, Sep 8: *Shepsle and Bonchek: Excerpts from *Analyzing Politics*

Fri, Sep 10: Current Events Friday

WEEK 4: SEPTEMBER 13, 15, 17

Topic: Member Motivations

Mon, Sep 13: RDR: #6 Fenno, #10 Mayhew

Wed, Sep 15: *Senior: Hill Climbing

Fri, Sep 17: **Research Plan Due**, Current Events Friday

WEEK 5: SEPTEMBER 20, 21, 24

Topics: Measuring Members, Spatial Models

Readings for the Week: TXT: Appendix

Fri, Sep 24: Current Events Friday

WEEK 6: SEPTEMBER 27, 29, OCTOBER 1

Topic: Parties in Congress

Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 5, RDR: #15 Cox and McCubbins, #16 Smith

Fri, Oct 1: Current Events Friday

WEEK 7: OCTOBER 4, 6, 8

Topic: Committees in Congress

Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 6

Wed, Oct 6: RDR: #17 Hurwitz et al.

Fri, Oct 8: Review

WEEK 8: OCTOBER 11, 13, 15

Topic: Midterm Exam, Floor Politics
Mon, Oct 11: **Midterm Examination**
Fri, Oct 15: RDR: #22 Cox

WEEK 9: OCTOBER 18, 20, 22

Topic: House and Senate Procedure
Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 7
Wed, Oct 20: RDR: #20 Special Rule
Fri, Oct 22: Current Events Friday

WEEK 10: OCTOBER 25, 27, 29

Topic: House and Senate Procedure, Is Congress Broken?
Mon, Oct 25: #21 UC Agreement
Wed, Oct 27: *Packer: The Empty Chamber
Fri, Oct 29: Current Events Friday

WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 1, 3, 5

Topic: Post-Passage Politics
Mon, Nov 1: *Smith: Conference Committees
Fri, Nov 5: Current Events Friday

WEEK 12: NOVEMBER 8, 10, 12

Topic: Budget Politics
Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 12
Wed, Nov 10: *CRS Report: The Congressional Appropriations Process
Fri, Nov 12: **Research Paper Due**, Current Events Friday

WEEK 13: NOVEMBER 15, 17, 19

Topic: Congress, the President, & Legislative Productivity
Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 9
Mon, Nov 15: RDR: #31 Fisher
Wed, Nov 17: RDR: #31 Binder
Fri, Nov 19: Current Events Friday

FALL BREAK: NOVEMBER 20-28

WEEK 14: NOVEMBER 29, DECEMBER 1, 3

Topic: Congress and Interest Groups
Readings for the Week: TXT: Chapter 11
Mon, Nov 29: #36 Hall and Wayman
Wed, Dec 1: *Ferguson: A Lobbyist's Progress
Fri, Dec 3: Current Events Friday

WEEK 15: DECEMBER 6, 8, 10

Topic: Congress and Public Opinion
Mon, Dec 6: RDR: #1 Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, #2 Brady and Theriault
Wed, Dec 8: RDR: #3 Stimson
Fri, Dec 10: Review

FINAL EXAMINATION

Section 01: Monday, December 13th at 7:30pm
Section 02: Tuesday, December 14th at 7:30pm