

**PSCI 3041: The American Congress
Fall 2009**

Instructor: Scott Minkoff

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Office: Ketchum 130

Office Hours:

Wednesdays, 12:30-2:30pm (in my office)

Fridays, 10:00-10:50am (at the Laughing Goat Coffee Shop in Norlin Library)

Section 001:

MWF 9:00AM-9:50AM

MUEN E131

Section 002:

MWF: 11:00AM-11:50AM

MUEN E131

This course examines the members, structure, and performance of the United States Congress. We begin the semester with a brief overview of what Congress is and then focus on a range of topics in much greater detail. Among the topics we study are member motivations, congressional procedure, legislative productivity, spatial voting, and the external forces on Congress. Throughout the semester 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. Moreover, 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 a midterm exam, a final exam, a legislative brief, a reading journal, and a participation grade.

Throughout the semester 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 Texts

The course has 2 required books.

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

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

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

5th edition. Students wishing to purchase used copies of the Oleszek (O) book online should not purchase anything older than the 5th edition.

There will be required readings throughout the semester that do not come from either of these books. All of these readings will be posted on CU Learn 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.). Links to all of these publications' websites are available on CU Learn.

Grade Distribution

Midterm Examination: 20%

Final Examination: 30%

Legislative Brief: 30%

Reading Journal: 10%

Participation: 10%

Examinations (50%)

The midterm (20%) and final examination (30%) will require you to bring a blue book and the final will be cumulative. Additional details will be given out as the exam dates approach.

Legislative Brief (30%)

The details of the legislative brief assignment (as well as the proposal) will be handed out separately.

Reading Journal (10%)

Each student is required to write a response to or summary of *each* reading. When there are multiple readings for a class, the student should be certain to write something about each reading. Each journal entry should be typed and identify which class the response is for, which reading(s) the entry is about, and the topic. Though you do not have to, I recommend that you keep all your journal entries in a single file on your computer. Even if you take thorough reading notes, you are required to keep up with your journal. The journal is a way for you to synthesize, react to, and formulate questions about what you read for class. The journal will be collected at several points throughout the semester (with at least 2 days notice) and will be graded for completeness. *A complete journal will have 1 entry for each class in which a reading is assigned, the entry will be at least 200 words long, and the entry will adequately summarize, comment on, and/or raise questions about the reading. Journal entries must be typed and single-spaced.*

When writing your journal entries, you might consider these questions:

1. What were the primary messages offered in the reading?
2. What does this reading tell you about the institutional nature of Congress?
3. What questions do you have about the reading or the topic?

4. How does the reading inform your understanding of what we have learned in the course thus far?

The following example demonstrates how you should begin each journal entry.

Date: Friday, August 29, 2009 [Date the reading is due]

Reading: SRV: Chapter 1 [From Course Schedule]

Topic: What is Congress? [From Course Schedule]

Participation (10%)

Participation comes in many forms. The best way to participate is by offering comments and asking questions in class. Alternatively, some students may choose to participate by regularly visiting me during my office hours to further discuss course material. You cannot get a good participation grade unless you show up to class. Consequently, while there is no attendance grade, attendance will be an important component of your final grade. Students should feel free to visit me during my office hours if they wish to discuss their participation in the course to that point.

Failure to Prepare

In the event that students are not doing the necessary preparation to participate during class, unannounced reading quizzes and homework will be given. Should this happen, the quizzes and homework will account for a portion of your participation and reading journal grades.

Laptop Computers

Students who use their laptops during class should be aware that when they are not taking notes or reviewing course material (for example, when they are browsing the internet) 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 found to be using their laptop for activities unrelated to the course will be asked to move to the back of the classroom.

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>.

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Fall 2009 Course Schedule

SRV = Smith, Roberts, & Vander Wielen Textbook | O = Oleszek Book | * = Reading Available on CU Learn

Week #	Class Date	Topic	Reading, Assignment Due
Part 1: Getting to Know Congress			
1	Monday, August 24, 2009	Introduction to Course, Syllabus	
	Wednesday, August 26, 2009	Policy Brief, What is Congress?	
	Friday, August 28, 2009	What is Congress?	SRV: Chapter 1 (all)
2	Monday, August 31, 2009	Constitutional Context	SRV: Chapter 2 (all); *Article 1 of the Constitution
	Wednesday, September 2, 2009	Congressional Elections and Policy Alignments	SRV: Chap 3 (pp53-77)
	Friday, September 4, 2009	Congressional Elections and Policy Alignments	SRV: Chap 3 (pp77-85); *Ambramowitz et al. (2006)
Part 2: Institutional Analysis			
3	Monday, September 7, 2009	Labor Day - No Class	
	Wednesday, September 9, 2009	Institutional Analysis and Rational Choice	*Shepsle and Bonchek (1997): Chapters 2 (pp15-24), 11 (all), 12 (pp312-322)
	Friday, September 11, 2009	Institutional Analysis and Rational Choice	*Wagner (2001)
Part 3: Members and Organization			
4	Monday, September 14, 2009	Members, Goals, Resources, and Strategies	SRV: Chapter 4 (all)
	Wednesday, September 16, 2009	Members, Goals, Resources, and Strategies	
	Friday, September 18, 2009	Members, Goals, Resources, and Strategies	Legislative Brief Proposal Due
5	Monday, September 21, 2009	Parties and Leaders	SRV: Chapter 5 (pp121-146)
	Wednesday, September 23, 2009	Parties and Leaders	SRV: Chapter 5 (pp146-163)
	Friday, September 25, 2009	Parties and Leaders	*Cox and McCubbins (2005)
6	Monday, September 28, 2009	Committees	SRV: Chapter 6 (all)
	Wednesday, September 30, 2009	Committees	
	Friday, October 2, 2009	Committees	O: Chapter 3 (all)
7	Monday, October 5, 2009	Committees	*Adler and Lapinsky (2007)
	Wednesday, October 7, 2009	Flex	
	Friday, October 9, 2009	MIDTERM EXAM (Bring a Blue Book)	
Part 4: Lawmaking			
8	Monday, October 12, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	SRV: Chapter 7 (all)
	Wednesday, October 14, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	
	Friday, October 16, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	O: Chapters 4 and 5 (all)

Week #	Class Date	Topic	Reading, Assignment Due
9	Monday, October 19, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	
	Wednesday, October 21, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	O: Chapters 6 and 7 (all)
	Friday, October 23, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	
10	Monday, October 26, 2009	Rules of the Legislative Game	O: Chapter 8 (all)
	Wednesday, October 28, 2009	Voting	SRV: Chapter 8 (all)
	Friday, October 30, 2009	Voting	SRV: Appendix: Intro to the Spatial Theory of Legislating
11	Monday, November 2, 2009	Voting	
	Wednesday, November 4, 2009	Budget Politics	SRV: Chapter 12 (all)
	Friday, November 6, 2009	Budget Politics	
12	Monday, November 9, 2009	Budget Politics	O: Chapter 2 (pp42-56)
	Wednesday, November 11, 2009	Divided Government and Legislative Productivity	*Binder (1999)
	Friday, November 13, 2009	Divided Government and Legislative Productivity	
Part 5: External Forces			
13	Monday, November 16, 2009	Congress and the President/Oversight	SRV: Chapter 9 (all)
	Wednesday, November 18, 2009	Congress and the President/Oversight	
	Friday, November 20, 2009	Congress and the President/Oversight	*McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) Legislative Brief Due
FALL BREAK - No Class			
14	Monday, November 30, 2009	Congress, Lobbyists, and Interest Groups	SRV: Chapter 11 (all)
	Wednesday, December 2, 2009	Congress, Lobbyists, and Interest Groups	*Hall and Wayman (1999)
	Friday, December 4, 2009	Congress, Lobbyists, and Interest Groups	
15	Monday, December 7, 2009	Congress and the Courts	SRV: Chapter 10 (all)
	Wednesday, December 9, 2009	Congress and the Courts	
	Friday, December 11, 2009	Flex	
FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE:			
Section 002 Final: Saturday, December 12th, 4:30pm - 7:00pm			
Section 001 Final: Monday, December 14th, 1:30pm - 4:00pm			