

POLS 4620E: The United States Congress, Process and Policy-Making

Short Session I 2025

Online Instruction

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Course Description:

The United States Congress, Process and Policy-Making is an advanced Legislative Process course offered online. In it, students will learn about congressional rules and policy-making through course readings and recorded lectures. Students will also be required to complete a detailed analysis of the passage of a landmark piece of legislation.

Course Goals:

The primary goal of this course is to familiarize the student with the inner-workings of the United States Congress. To this end, the course is taught from a more “applied” legislative standpoint than other congressional politics courses. Greater emphasis is placed understanding how Congressional lawmaking operates. As a consequence, there is less academic scholarship assigned and almost very little discussion of campaigns and elections.

Moreover, the U.S. Congress is both large and procedurally complex. Trying to understand it all is impractical. Accordingly, in this course a greater emphasis is going to be placed on understanding and utilizing congressional resources. Students should expect to learn how to find and access information on congress process and policy-making. This includes (but is not limited to): *The Congressional Record*, Congressional Research Service Reports; Historical Newspapers; *CQ Almanac*; *ProQuest Congressional*; Voteview; Google Scholar and Congress.gov.

At the end of this course, students should be equipped to do the following: (1) Describe, assess, and critique the rules and processes that govern lawmaking in both the House and the Senate; (2) Comprehend the many ways these rules impact policy-making; (3) Identify and access tools associated with the tracking of bills and policies; and (4) Examine and detail how a federal policy is made and has evolved over time.

Books and Readings:

There is no required book for POLS 4620E: The United States Congress, Process and Policy-Making. Instead, links to readings that correspond to each lecture are provided in the schedule at the end of this syllabus. Some of these readings will be highly technical in nature. As such, students are not expected to understand all aspects of each paper. However, they will be held accountable for a basic understanding of the paper’s theory and applications.

Students will not only be expected to have done the reading assignments, but should also be aware of relevant news stories. As such, I recommend reading a daily newspaper – such as the New York Times and/or the Washington Post – or at least checking cnn.com. Other political

blogs that students may find useful include FiveThirtyEight, Political Wire, The Monkey Cage, The Upshot, Vox, the Drudge Report and Roll Call.

Some optional books students might want to consider purchasing can be found on amazon.com:

Oleszek, Walter J., Mark J. Oleszek, Elizabeth Rybicki and Bill Heniff, Jr. 2020. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*. 11th Edition. CQ Press: Washington, DC.

Mann, Robert. 1996. *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.

Murray, Alan and Jeffrey Birnbaum. 1987. *Showdown at Gucci Gulch*. Random House Publishing.

Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. 2nd Edition. Yale University Press.

Draper, Robert. 2012. *Do Not Ask What Good We Do: Inside the U.S. House of Representatives*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Kaiser, Robert. 2013. *Act of Congress: How America's Essential Institution Works, and How It Doesn't*. New York, NY: Alfred Knopf.

Schickler, Eric. 2001. *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Course Grading:

Your grade in this class will be assigned according to the following:

1. Background Survey (**5% of final grade**): Students will be asked to fill out a short background survey for the purposes of matching them with a legislative history topic. The deadline to fill out the survey is Monday, **June 9** at 5 pm.
2. Midterm Exams (**40% of final grade**): Two midterm exams will be given on Friday, **June 20** and Wednesday, **July 2**. Links to the exams will be e-mailed to students at 8 am and they will be due at 8 am the following day. The exams will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions. Students are free to use whatever resources they want to answer these exams. The midterm examinations will be non-cumulative and include questions related to a student's assigned legislative history topic. While the first midterm examination is required, the second is optional. Each midterm exam is worth 20% of the final course grade. Should a student opt to not take the second midterm exam, the first exam will count for 40%.
3. Legislative History (**55% of final grade**): In order to demonstrate an understanding of the historical policy-making process, students are required to complete a paper analyzing the consideration and passage of a major piece of American legislation. After filling out

the background survey discussed above, each student will be assigned to a legislative history “team.” While students are encouraged to work with their legislative history “teammates,” they are not obligated to do so. Each student will be provided with a prompt sheet pertaining to their legislative history and assigned differing questions and duties. They will be graded separately. These prompt sheets will be posted by the instructor on eLC. Students are also encouraged to use material from their exams in compiling their legislative histories.

The legislative history assignment will count for 55% of the final course grade, broken up accordingly (more detailed discussions of the assignments are provided in eLC):

(1) A brief, three-paragraph Summary detailing the legislation and issue the student will be analyzing. More specifically, the summary section should do three things: Paragraph 1: Tell the reader what the law does/sought to do; Paragraph 2: Tell the reader why both the underlying issue and law are (or are not) considered important today; Paragraph 3: Characterize its passage. Was it controversial? Partisan? What were the key votes/moments that occurred during consideration?. The summary section should not exceed 500 words and is due on **June 16** at 11pm. It is worth 5% of the final course grade.

(2) A Background section that answers a specific question assigned by the instructor. Typically, this will necessitate contextualizing either the political climate the legislation was considered in or provide a history of the policy. Ideally, it will demonstrate why the legislation was needed. The background section is due on **June 25** at 11pm. It is worth 15% of the final course grade.

(3) A Member Spotlight section. This is a short, one to two-page discussion detailing a member of Congress associated with the passage of the law. It can include either on a broad overview of a member’s career and/or an interesting episode they were involved in. Students are encouraged to focus on whatever details they feel are the most interesting. The Member Spotlight is due on **June 27** at 11 pm. It is worth 5% of the final course grade.

(4) A Process section that analyzes committee and floor consideration of the measure during a specific period assigned by the instructor. This may involve House or Senate consideration of a bill or conference report and will likely necessitate the discussion of a given rule or legislative procedure. It will also likely necessitate analyzing a roll call vote. The process section is due on **June 30** at 11 pm. It is worth 20% of the final course grade.

(5) An Aftermath section that analyzes a post-enactment event related to the bill assigned to the student by the instructor. This might include the law being amended by a subsequent piece of legislation, being altered by a series of Supreme Court decisions or its enforcement by the President and bureaucracy. The Aftermath section is due on **July 3** at 11 pm. It is worth 10% of the final course grade.

Each of the sections mentioned above should be clearly labelled, written in Times New Roman 12-point font (main text) and Times News Roman 10-point font (footnotes). It should be single-spaced and include a Work Cited section.

Final course grades will be assigned as follows: 100-93 = A, 90-92 = A-, 87-89 = B+, 83-86 = B, 80-82 = B-, 77-79 = C+, 73-76 = C, 70-72 = C-, 60-69 = D, and 60-0. Extra credit will not be given in this course.

Disabilities:

Students with disabilities of any kind are strongly encouraged to notify the instructor and the Office for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester, so appropriate accommodations can be made.

Instructor Availability:

Students seeking to contact me are encouraged to stop by during scheduled office hours. Students who are unable to attend office hours should e-mail ahead of time to set up a meeting. In addition to holding regular office hours in a Zoom Meeting Room, I am available via phone or e-mail.

Cheating and Plagiarism:

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will have their names forwarded to the University. It is each student's responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism. Further information regarding academic honesty can be found at <http://www.uga.edu/honesty/>.

Lectures:

Links to the video lectures are provided on eLC. While a suggested lecture outline and readings schedule is provided below, students are free to watch the videos and complete the readings at any time prior to the exam dates.

Suggested Lecture Outline/Readings Schedule:

Day	No.	Topic	Readings
5-Jun	1	Introduction to POLS 4620E	CRS and Legislative Process
	2	Five Key Take-Away Points about Congress	Help! We're in a Living Hell
6-Jun	3	How a Bill Becomes a Law: House	CRS: Intro to the Legislative Process
	4	How a Bill Becomes a Law: Senate	
9-Jun	5	Legislative History Groups	The Georgia Congress Project
	6	Congressional Resources and Information <i>Qualtrics Survey Due</i>	Legislative History Resources
10-Jun	7	Constitutional Foundations of Congress	U.S. Constitution
	8	Why Rules?	Cox 2000
11-Jun	9	Committees and Leaders	The Committee System
	10	Power in the House	Party Leaders in the House Cooper and Brady (1981)
12-Jun	11	Spatial Modeling in Congress	Shepsle and Bonchek Ch. 5
	12	The House Rules Committee	Vick et al. 2020
13-Jun	13	Committee-Gatekeeper Games with Bad Stick Figures	None
	14	The House Floor	Legislation on the House Floor House Voting Procedures
16-Jun	15	Ideological Scaling	WaPo: Congress is More Polarized
	16	Using Resources: Voteview <i>Summary Section Due</i>	Mapping Congressional Polarization
17-Jun	17	House Rule Choice	Schickler and Rich (1997) Cox and McCubbins (1997)
18-Jun	18	Parties in Congress I	Krehbiel 1995
	19	Parties in Congress II	Binder et al. 1999 Counting Laws
19-Jun		<i>No Class--Juneteenth</i>	
20-Jun		<i>Exam 1</i>	

Suggested Lecture Outline/Readings Schedule (*cont*):

Day	No.	Topic	Readings
23-Jun	20	Senate Floor Procedures	Senate Floor Process
24-Jun	21	Senate Origins and Development	Senate: Origins and Development
25-Jun	22	The Evolution of the Senate Filibuster <i>Background Section Due</i>	Filibusters and Cloture Wawro and Schickler (2004) Madonna (2011)
26-Jun	23 25	Resolving Differences Process Sections	Sinclair Ch. 4 Sinclair Ch. 13
27-Jun	26	Congressional Agenda Control <i>Member Spotlight Section Due</i>	Finocchiaro and Rohde (2008)
30-Jun	27 28	Negotiations and Delegation Elections and Fundraising <i>Process Section Due</i>	Binder and Lee 2013 Last Week Tonight
1-Jul	32	“Fixing” Congress and Conclusion	Confessions of a Congressman New Directions in Legislative Research
2-Jul		<i>Exam 2</i>	
3-Jul		<i>Aftermath Section Due</i>	