PLSC 2480: U.S. Congress  
Course Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Jeff Lyons  
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Office: Sturm 473  
Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday 11-12, Wednesday 10-12.  
Time: 12:00-1:50  
Location: Sturm 333

This course is meant to provide an advanced understanding of the American Congress and its members within the framework of social science. We will discuss congressional rules and procedures, member behavior and motivation, and the role of parties and leaders. We will also ask some important questions about the operation of the modern Congress. Does Congress represent the public interest, has it changed over time for the worse, and how does Congress address increasing complex national issues? Finally, the course will touch on some complaints and controversies about the modern Congress, including the lack of competition for seats, polarization, redistricting, the filibuster and pork-barrel politics. It is my hope that we can address all of these topics within the framework of social science. That is, we will not discuss these issues the same way the media or "pundits" do, instead we will analyze Congress in a way that allows us to advance our understanding of the institution.

The course is loosely organized into three sections. The 1st section of the class develops some basic tools that we will need to fully understand Congress and provides some background and context. The material includes an introduction to theories of rationality, as well as an introduction to formal and spatial modeling. We will discuss how certain assumptions apply to members of Congress and the institution's basic structure. Next, we will examine congressional operation. This section includes the lawmaking process, voting procedure, and the institution's interaction with other political actors. Finally, we will discuss some of the potential problems of the modern day Congress, and try to understand where Congress is headed and how well equipped the institution is to deal with future issues.

Book:


Grading:

Your grade for this class is comprised of the following components:

Attendance/Participation (10%)- Being present in class and participating regularly is essential for success in this class. It is important that you share your ideas and ask any questions that you may have. Doing so will result in better understanding of the course material and subsequently, higher grades.
Exam 1 (25%)- Exam 1 will be on February 3rd.

Exam 2 (25%)- Exam 2 will be on March 13th.

Research Paper (35%)- Due in class on March 5th.

Paper Presentation (5%)- Will take place during the last week of class.

Final Grades will be based on the following distribution, though please note that I reserve the right to curve point totals should I decide that is necessary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>&gt;93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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</tbody>
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A: Designates student performance of an extraordinarily high level, indicates a comprehensive understanding of course material, and reflects original insight and thought.

B: Designates student performance of a high level, indicates a thorough understanding of course material, and reflects solid insight and well-considered thought.

C: Designates student performance that completely fulfills the basic requirements of the course, indicates a basic understanding of course material, and reflects basic insights and a surface-level understanding of concepts.

D: Designates student performance that mostly fulfills the basic requirements of the course, indicates a basic or weak understanding of course material, and reflects poor, basic, or weak insights and a poor understanding of concepts.

F: Designates student performance that fails to fulfill the basic requirements of the course, indicates a weak or inaccurate understanding of course material, and reflects poor or misinformed insights and a lack of understanding of concepts.
Administrative Policies

Late Work: Late assignments will not be accepted.

E-Mail and Web Communication: An email list has been setup to contact you with class updates, additional readings, and questions you might consider while reading. It is critical that you regularly check your DU email account and Canvass for updates. Students will be held accountable for assignments and syllabus changes communicated via email. I will always give you reasonable notice for any changes or additions to the syllabus.

The Classroom Environment: Tardiness, early departures, ringing phones, etc. detract from the learning environment. Therefore, I ask that students arrive on time and remain in class for the duration of the period. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices when you enter the classroom. While the use of a computer for note-taking is certainly encouraged, web surfing, text-messaging, emailing, etc. not only reduces your engagement and comprehension of the material during class, but is highly distracting for the students around you. Please do not participate in these activities during class.

Academic Integrity: I take issues of academic integrity very seriously. Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All work is expected to be original, and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course. All forms of academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course.

Disability Services: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please contact me about this during the first week of the class so that I can prepare to make accommodations ahead of time.

Religious Accommodations: University policy grants students excused absences from class or other organized activities or observance of religious holy days, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship. Faculty are asked to be responsive to requests when students contact them in advance to request such an excused absence. Students are responsible for completing assignments given during their absence, but should be given an opportunity to make up work missed because of religious observance. Once a student has registered for a class, the student is expected to examine the course syllabus for potential conflicts with holy days and to notify the instructor by the end of the first week of classes of any conflicts that may require an absence (including any required additional preparation/travel time). The student is also expected to remind the faculty member in advance of the missed class, and to make arrangements in advance (with the faculty member) to make up any missed work or in-class material within a reasonable amount of time.

Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have a 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.

Course Schedule

Week 1

1/6: Syllabus, Congressional overview

   TAC: Chapter 1.

1/8: Historical context

   TAC: Chapter 2.

Week 2

1/13: Member goals and strategies

   TAC: Chapter 4.
   Adler, Ensly, Wilkerson, “Is Congress Accountable?”

1/15: Parties and leaders

   TAC: Chapter 5

Week 3

1/20: Committees – What They Do and Why

   TAC: Chapter 6.


   TAC: Chapter 7.

Week 4

1/27: Legislating – The Floor and Voting Procedures

   TAC: Chapter 8

1/29: Legislating, continued. Midterm review

**Week 5**

2/3: Midterm Exam.

2/5: Congress and the President

TAC: Chapter 9.

**Week 6**

2/10: Divided Government and Productivity


2/12: Congress and the Courts

TAC: Chapter 10

**Week 7**

2/17: Congress, Lobbyists, Interest Groups.

TAC: Chapter 11.

2/19: Elections, Resources, Policy, and Pork

TAC: Chapter 3.

**Week 8**

2/24: Voters – How do Voters Decide?

Lewis-Beck et al. (2008), “The American Voter Revisited, Chapter 4.”

2/26: The Economy and Other National Factors

**Week 9**

3/3: Redistricting

Abramowitz et al. (2007) “Don’t Blame Redistricting”
McDonald (2007), “Drawing the Line on District Competition”

3/5: Representation


****Research Papers Due in Class******

**Week 10**


3/13: Exam 2