

# PSC 2218W: Legislative Politics

Colin Emrich

Fall/Spring XXXX

E-mail: [cemrich51@gwu.edu](mailto:cemrich51@gwu.edu)

Office Hours: XXXX

Office: XXXX

Web: [blackboard.gwu.edu](http://blackboard.gwu.edu)

Class Hours: XXXX

Class Room: XXXX

---

## Course Description

This course offers an overview of the legislative branch of the American government. The U.S. Congress is the oldest popularly elected legislature in the world and the most powerful one, albeit currently struggling. Numerous factors like polarized parties, internal party divisions, a new presidential administration, and a former president's influence on their party complicate lawmakers' ability to legislate. This class focuses on both sides of Pennsylvania Avenue as it explores the electoral and institutional forces that shape the membership of Congress and the institution's capacity to solve public problems. In doing so, lectures, readings, and discussion will address the origins and development of the U.S. Congress, congressional elections, the nature of congressional representation, the committee system, the legislative process, congressional parties, and inter-branch relations. Students will also be introduced to the fundamental tools used to study the U.S. Congress, including basic game theory and quantitative political methodology, although no prior knowledge in these areas is required.

## Learning Objectives

After completing this Writing in the Disciplines (WID) course, you should be able to:

- Recall and explain electoral, institutional, and systemic features of the U.S. Congress;
- Apply political science concepts and theories to the study of the U.S. Congress;
- Demonstrate conventions of writing in the discipline of political science; and
- Communicate critical and analytical thinking in writing through drafting and revising, as well as through peer review of classmates' writing.

## Course Materials

There are three required texts that we will draw from throughout the semester, both of which are available at the campus bookstore, online, and on reserve at Gelman Library. Additional readings, are available online, with the URLs provided in the Course Calendar below and on the course web page on Blackboard.

Please note several entries from Steven S. Smith's [Steve's Notes on Congressional Politics](#) are assigned in the Course Calendar. These are excellent supplements to the course, and students are

encouraged to read all of the notes beyond those listed in the Course Calendar for a deeper understanding of congressional happenings.

### Required Texts

Davidson, R. H., Oleszek, W. J., Lee, F. E., Schickler, E., & Curry, J. M. (2022). *Congress and Its Members*, 18th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. ["D" on Course Calendar.]

Mayhew, D. R. (2004). *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. ["Mayhew" on Course Calendar.]

Oleszek, W. J., Oleszek, M. J., Rybicki, E., & Heniff Jr., B. (2020). *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*, 11th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. ["O" on Course Calendar.]

### Expectations

The electoral context sets the stage for the course's study of Congress. As such, each class session will begin with a discussion of relevant news based to the topic of study, so students are expected to come to class prepared to raise interesting stories or questions from the week's news. Students are recommended to read a daily newspaper (e.g., *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times* or *Roll Call*) or listen to a news program (e.g., NPR's *Morning Edition* or those produced by *CQ Roll Call*) or consume news through other media like *The Daily Show*. Following current political events will enhance the value of this course, although they are no substitute for careful reading and classroom discussion and attendance.

Students are expected to attend lectures and do all readings prior to class meetings. They are also expected to contribute regularly in class. This means answering questions, participating in discussions, and helping other students. This is the best way to maximize performance.

Note: This is a 3-credit, lecture-based course. Federal regulations for 3-credit courses include 2.5 hours/week of direct instruction (in-class) and 5 hours/week of independent learning (out-of-class).

### Grades

*Participation (5%)*: There will be six pop writing opportunities over the course of the semester (each worth one percent of the final grade). These are brief opinion-based writing prompts at the beginning of class which concern current congressional affairs. Because there are six assignments, it is possible to receive one extra point towards your semester grade. Students must arrive to class on time in order to take the pop writing assignment.

*Midterm Exam (20%)*: The midterm exam will include material covered in the assigned readings and in the lectures for all of the weeks up to the midterm. A study guide will be distributed to the class one week before the midterm exam.

*Research Paper (55%)*: A core requirement of the course is to produce a research paper (roughly 12-15 pages) that analyzes a topic related to one of the subjects covered in the course readings and/or lectures. A detailed description of the paper assignment will be distributed early in the semester (as well as grading rubrics for each stage of the research paper). The research paper grade will be determined as follows:

- Proposal: (10%)
- Rough Draft: (15%)

- Peer Review Participation: (5%)
- Final Draft: (25%)

*Final Exam (20%):* The final exam will assess if students have acquired an understanding of the structure, functions, and development of American politics and government. The final will consist only of essay and short answer questions. It will be cumulative, drawing on material from the entire semester. A study guide will be distributed to the class one week before the final exam.

Final letter grades for the course will be assigned as follows:

92.5% and above = A	80.0% – 82.49% = B–	67.5% – 69.99% = D+
90.0% – 92.49% = A–	77.5% – 79.99% = C+	62.5% – 67.49% = D
87.5% – 89.99% = B+	72.5% – 77.49% = C	60.0% – 62.49% = D–
82.5% – 87.49% = B	70.0% – 72.49% = C–	59.99 and below = F

## Important Dates

As a rule, there will be no deadline extensions given in this course. Exceptions will be made only with prior consent for planned events such as sponsored GWU activities, religious observances or under unusual circumstances such as a documented medical emergency.

The core assignments of the course are *tentatively* scheduled as follows. All written assignments are due hard-copy in class, except as noted. Any changes will be announced in class. Students are responsible for being aware of any changes.

*Research Paper Proposal:* Week 3

*Midterm Exam:* Week 7

*Research Paper Rough Draft:* Week 9

*Research Paper Peer Review Workshop:* Week 12

*Research Paper Final Draft:* Week 14

*Final Exam:* The final exam will be given during the final exam period and not the last week of the semester, in accordance with university policy. For details and complete policy, see: [provost.gwu.edu/administration/final-examinations-during-examination-period](https://provost.gwu.edu/administration/final-examinations-during-examination-period).

## University Policies

### Campus Commitment & Policy

Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the [campus commitment policy](#). By coming back to campus, students, staff, and faculty are agreeing to this policy. In our classroom environment, the section “Care for Others” is especially important, including the requirement for students to be masked in class.

### University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on the day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: [students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays](https://students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays)

## **Academic Integrity Code**

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: [studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity)

## **Safety and Security**

In an emergency: call GWPD 202-994-6111 or 911. For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook: [safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook](http://safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook). In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out: [go.gwu.edu/shooterprep](http://go.gwu.edu/shooterprep). Stay informed: [safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed](http://safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed).

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

## **Support for Students Outside the Classroom**

### **GW Writing Center**

The GW Writing Center facilitates collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations about student writing. Working alongside peer mentors, student writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Students are encouraged (but not required) to use the Writing Center at any stage of writing, from brainstorming to final editing. For additional information see: [writingcenter.gwu.edu](http://writingcenter.gwu.edu). Although appointments are not required and drop-ins are welcome, the Writing Center recommends that you reserve a time slot at [gwu.mywconline.com/](http://gwu.mywconline.com/).

### **Disability Support Services (DSS)**

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information see: [disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/](http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/)

### **Counseling and Psychological Services 202-994-5300**

GW's Student Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information see [healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services](http://healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services).

## Course Calendar

### Week 1: Introduction and Writing Conventions

#### Day 1

*Readings* - Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 26. An Unpopular Congress.](#)

Snyder, T. 2021. [The American Abyss.](#) *The New York Times.*

*Watch* - [A Day of Rage: An In-Depth Look at How a Mob Stormed the Capitol.](#) *The New York Times.*

#### Day 2

*Readings* - D: Chapter 1

Green, A. (2013). [“How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps”.](#)

Texas A&M. [“Clear & Concise Writing”.](#)

### Week 2: Historical Context

#### Day 1

*Readings* - D: Chapter 2

Article I of the [Constitution.](#)

Federalist Papers, [No. 10](#) and [No. 51.](#)

Toobin, J. 2013. [Our Broken Constitution.](#) *The New Yorker.*

#### Day 2

*Readings* - O: Chapter 1

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 17. Manchin and Sinema.](#)

*Watch* - [How Aaron Burr may have created the filibuster by mistake.](#) *CQ Roll Call.*

### Week 3: Districts

#### Day 1

*Readings* - D: Chapter 3

Mutnick, A. 2021. [How Screwed is Adam Kinzinger?.](#) *Politico.*

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 18. Why 435?.](#)

#### Day 2

*Readings* - Fenno, R. F. (1977). “U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration.” *American Political Science Review*, 71(3), 883-917. [Link](#)

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 8. Diversifying.](#)

*Due* - Research Paper Proposal

## **Week 4: Elections**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapter 4

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - Abramowitz, A., Alexander, B., & Gunning, M. (2006). "Don't Blame Redistricting for Uncompetitive Elections." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(1), 87-90. [Link](#)

Jacobson, G. C. (2021). "The Presidential and Congressional Elections of 2020: A National Referendum on the Trump Presidency." *Political Science Quarterly*, 136(1), 11-45. [Link](#)

*Due* - Paper Proposal

## **Week 5: Elections**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - Brownstein, R. 2020. [Democrats' Real Liability in the House](#). *The Atlantic*.

Rakich, N. 2018. [How Much Was Incumbency Worth In 2018?](#). *FiveThirtyEight*.

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 6. Party and Incumbency](#)

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - Kane, P. 2017. [All politics is local? In the era of Trump, not anymore](#). *The Washington Post*.

Davidson, T. 2018. [The Sad Death of "All Politics Is Local"](#). *The American Conservative*.

## **Week 6: Representation**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapters 5 and 16

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 26. An Unpopular Congress](#). (Note: This is the same reading as assigned on Week 1, Day 1).

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - Mayhew: Part 1

Bade, R. 2019. [Freshman Rep. Wild turns grief from partner's suicide into a new purpose](#). *The Washington Post*.

## **Week 7: Midterm Exam and In-Class Film**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - Review Weeks 1-6

*In-Class Assignment* - Midterm Exam

### **Day 2**

*Watch In-Class* - Can Mr. Smith Get to Washington Anymore?

*Readings* - Terris, B. 2021. [Jeff Smith was supposed to be in Congress by now. Instead he's an ex-con, with a story to tell.](#) *The Washington Post*.

## **Week 8: Committees**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - L: Chapter 9

Mayhew: Part 2

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 2. Beneath the Surface.](#)

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - O: Chapter 3

Maltzman, F., & Smith, S. S. (1994). "Principals, Goals, Dimensionality, and Congressional Committees." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 19(4), 457-476. [Link](#)

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 22. From Subcommittee Government to Party Government.](#)

## **Week 9: Parties**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - L: Chapter 8

O: Chapters 4 and 5 (Skim)

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - O: Chapters 6 and 7 (Skim)

*Due* - Research Paper Rough Draft

## **Week 10: (Un)Orthodox Lawmaking**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapter 8

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 1. Gridlock.](#)

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 13. Spatial Theory.](#)

*Watch* - [I'm Just a Bill \(Schoolhouse Rock!\)](#)

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - O: Chapter 8

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 14. Regular Order.](#)

Taibbi, M. 2005. [Four Amendments and a Funeral.](#) *Rolling Stone*.

## **Week 11: (Un)Orthodox Lawmaking**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapter 9

Grunwald, M. 2016. [The Victory of 'No'](#). *Politico*.

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - O: Chapter 10

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 23. Unanimous Consent in the Senate, Part 1](#); [Note 24: Unanimous Consent in the Senate, Part 2](#)

## **Week 12: Congress and the Executive**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapters 10 and 11

O: Chapter 9 (covers Executive & Courts)

Smith, S. S. 2021. [Note 27. Motivation and Capacity](#).

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - N/A

*In-Class Assignment* - Research Paper Peer Review Workshop

## **Week 13: Congress and the Courts**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapter 12

O: Chapter 9 (review)

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - Cameron, C. M., Cover, A. D., & Segal, J. A. (1990). "Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees: A Neoinstitutional Model." *American Political Science Review*, 84(2), 525-534. [Link](#)

## **Week 14: Congress and Public Policy**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - D: Chapter 14

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - D: Chapter 15

*Due* - Research Paper Final Draft



## **Week 15: Wrap-up and Final Exam Review**

### **Day 1**

*Readings* - All of the above

### **Day 2**

*Readings* - All of the above

NOTE: In accordance with university policy, the final exam will be given during the final exam period and not the last week of the semester. For details and complete policy, see: [provost.gwu.edu/administration-final-examinations-during-examination-period](http://provost.gwu.edu/administration-final-examinations-during-examination-period).