Congress and the Legislative Process- GOVT 321  
Lafayette College, Fall 2013  
Professor Brittany Perry

Time: MWF: 1:10-2:00pm  
Location: Kirby Hall of Civil Rights, 204  
Office Hours: Thursday noon-1 pm, Friday 2:15pm-3:30 pm and by appointment  
Office Location: Kirby Hall of Civil Rights, 110

Course Description

This course analyzes the structure and function of the United States Congress. As a class, we will investigate the evolution of Congress, how it operates today, and how its members interact with the public, the President, and the judiciary. We will also cover a wide range of past and current policy debates, assessing the success of certain bills and their implications.

Students will take an interactive approach throughout this course, answering questions such as: “Why are cockroaches more popular than Congress?” “Why does Congress have so many rules?” and “Why should we care?” We will pull information from a variety of sources including recent political science literature, polling data, congressional resources, newspapers, and television.

Course Prerequisites: GOVT 101, 211, 217, 311, 316, 320 or permission of instructor

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Explain congressional rules and procedures
- Assess current theoretical arguments in the congressional literature
- Formulate new arguments and theories to explain the institution of Congress and the behavior of its members
- Evaluate congressional districts and the relationship between legislators and their constituents
- Develop a legislative proposal and strategy
- Critically examine a recent policy debate in Congress
**Expectations and Assignments**

- **Being the Legislator**
  - **District Profile:** Due October 11th
    - Students will research a congressional district of their choice and write a 3-4 page (double spaced) comprehensive report covering district geography, demographics, politics, and key issues.
  - **Legislative Proposal and Strategy:** Due November 1st
    - Students will propose a piece of legislation and map out a strategy for passing this legislation into law. The legislation length will vary, but the strategy must be at least 3 double spaced pages and must reference theories and strategies discussed in assigned readings and in class.
  - **Policy Project:** Due December 2nd
    - In groups, students will write a short report (6-8 double spaced pages) outlining a recent policy debate in the U.S. Congress. The report will trace the history of a given policy, discuss its path through Congress and assess how the public, President, and other political actors have influenced the policy’s success or failure. In the final week of class, the group will give a 10-15 minute presentation on the final report.

- **Exams**
  - Exams will consist of both short-answer/identification style questions and longer essay length questions. They will 50 minutes and will be completed in-class.
    - **Midterm:** October 4th
    - **Final:** TBA
      - Note: Please do not schedule flights for Winter Break prior to the release of the final exam schedule!!

- **Participation**
  - You will be graded on participation in this class. Your grade will be based on the quality of your contribution to in-class discussions, debates, and assignments (this may include paper assignments, small group activities, and discussion of current events). You will be expected to keep up with current happenings in Congress on a daily basis by following national newspapers (New York Times, Washington Post) or websites specific to Congress (such as Roll Call).
    - On a given day you will receive a participation score ranging from 0 to 3. My rubric is as follows:
      - 0: No participation
      - 1: Little participation (surface level engagement, little command of the material)
      - 2: Moderate to active participation (deeper engagement, solid understanding of the material)
      - 3: Active participation (asking challenging questions, going to the extra mile to understand and analyze the material)
Note on Attendance: You may have one unexcused absence without penalty. Beyond this, each unexcused absence will result in a 5% deduction from your final participation grade. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from your classmates, as I will not post lecture slides.

In addition to activities in class, students are expected to attend and engage in assigned out-of-classroom activities. These will include two campus/local events related to the material discussed in this course, video nights (dates TBA), and required office hour/librarian/writing center visits. These activities contribute to the four credit hour requirement for this course.

- If you have an excused absence for a scheduled out-of-class activity, you must meet with me to discuss a make-up assignment.

**Required Texts**


- Any additional articles/chapters will be posted on the Moodle site for this course found at: [http://moodle.lafayette.edu/](http://moodle.lafayette.edu/). If you do not have a Moodle site for this course or if you have trouble logging in, please let me know ASAP!!

**Grading**

- **Final Grade**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>District Profile</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislative Proposal and Strategy</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Project and Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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- **Notes on Grading**
  - Any student who is not satisfied with a grade on a given assignment must submit, in writing, a description of the issue in dispute (i.e. what is allegedly mis-graded and why you believe your work is correct). If necessary, I will set up a meeting with the student to discuss the issue. I will then decide whether to raise, lower, or leave the grade unchanged.
  
  - All late assignments will be docked one full letter grade for every day they are late. Make sure you turn in everything on time.
Grading Scale

A+  100-98    B+  89-88    C+  79-78    D  69-60
A   97-93     B   87-83     C   77-73     F  <60
A-  92-90     B-  82-80     C-  72-70

Other Requirements/Course Information

• The Academic Honesty policy is taken seriously in this class. Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of College policy and may result in a failing grade and/or other disciplinary measures. Please review the guidelines on “Principles of Intellectual Honesty” (available in the Student Handbook at: http://studentlife.lafayette.edu/files/2011/08/studenthandbook_1112.pdf), which elaborate College policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.

• You may NOT use your cell phone to email or text message in class. Before you come to class, make sure that your cell phone is turned off and put away.

• You may use laptops in this class, however, if I see you emailing, surfing the Internet or checking Facebook, I will ask you to put it away and take notes by hand.

• I also expect everyone in this class to be RESPECTFUL OF THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS. During class discussions, I ask that you be courteous of other students and the instructor at all times.

• Accommodations for Students with Disability: In accordance with Lafayette College policy, reasonable academic accommodations and support services will be available to students who have a documented disability. Students with disabilities should review the information available at: http://attic.lafayette.edu/disability-services/.

Federal Credit Hour Statement

• The student work in this course is in full compliance with the federal definition of a four credit hour course. Please see the Registrar’s Office web site (http://registrar.lafayette.edu/additional-resources/cep-course-proposal/) for the full policy and practice statement.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments:

o This schedule is subject to slight modifications. New video nights and other events will be included as the semester proceeds. You will have advance notification of any changes.

o CM: Congress and Its Members Textbook; CR: Congress Reconsidered; W: On Moodle
Week 1: Introduction

**August 26:** Chapter 1 (CM)
**August 28:** Hibbing and Larimer. 2005. “What the American Public Wants Congress to Be.” (W)

**Supplementary Readings:**

**Week 2:** The Origins and Development of Congress

**September 2:** Chapter 2 (CM), U.S. Constitution
**September 4:** Polsby, Nelson. 1968. “The Institutionalization of the House of Representatives” (W)
**September 6:** Nothing new!

**Supplementary Video:**
- The Legislative Branch. 2009. Cambridge Education Films (link found on Moodle)

**Week 3:** Elections: Recruitment and Candidacy

**September 9:** Chapter 3 (CM) and Bullock, Charles. 2010. Redistricting. Chapter 1. (W)
**September 11:** ACLU History of the Voting Rights Act (W)
**September 13:** Goldmacher, Shane. 2013. “Why Would Anyone Ever Run for Congress?” (W)

**Supplementary Readings:**
- Department of Justice: History of Voting Rights Act (W)

**Week 4:** Elections: The Electoral Game

**September 16:** Chapter 4 (CM)
**September 18:** Erikson and Wright. 2009. “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections” (CR)
**September 20:** Haidt and Hetherington. 2012. “Look How Far We’ve Come Apart” (W)

**Week 5:** Hill Styles and Home Styles: Representation

**September 23:** Chapter 5 (CM)
**September 27:** Fenno, Richard. 1977. “US House Members and Their Constituencies: An Exploration. (W)
**Supplementary Readings:**

*Week 6: Finish Up and Review*

**September 30:** “Call Time for Congress Shows How Fundraising Dominates Bleak Work Life” (W); *In class video: “Congress: A Day in the Life of a Representative”*

**October 2:** Midterm Review

**October 4:** MIDTERM!!

*Week 7: Parties and Leaders*

**October 7:** Chapter 6 (CM)

**October 9:** Smith and Gamm. 2013. “The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress” (CR)

**October 11:** DISTRICT PROFILE DUE!!

**Supplementary Readings:**

**FALL BREAK: October 14th**

*Week 8: Committees*

**October 16:** Chapter 7 (CM)

**October 18:** Aldrich et al. 2013. “Richard Fenno’s Theory of Congressional Committees and the Partisan Polarization of the House.” (CR)

**Supplementary Readings:**

*Week 9: Congressional Rules and Procedures*

**October 21:** Chapter 8: pgs. 215-238 (CM)

**October 23:** Chapter 8: pgs. 238-250 (CM)

**October 25:** Koger, Gregory. 2013. “Filibustering and Parties in the Modern Senate.” (CR)

*Week 10: Decision-Making*

**October 28:** Chapter 9 (CM)

**October 30:** Oleszek and Oleszek. 2012. “Legislative Sausage-Making: Health Care Reform in the 111th Congress” (W)

**November 1:** LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL AND STRATEGY DUE!!

*Week 11: Congress and the President*

**November 4:** Chapter 10 (CM)

November 8: TBA

VIDEO NIGHT: West Wing: On the Day Before

Week 12: Congress and the Bureaucracy and Courts

November 11: Chapter 11 (CM)
November 13: Chapter 12 (CM)

Week 13: Congress and Organized Interests

November 18: Chapter 13 (CM)

Thanksgiving Break: November 27-29

Week 14: Policy-Making
November 25: Chapter 14 (CM)

Week 15: Future of Congress and Policy Presentations

December 2: Chapter 16 (CM)
December 4: Policy Project Presentations
December 6: Policy Project Presentations