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**Office Hrs: MWF 10:00-11:00; & by appt.**  
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**Political Science 3604**  
**Congress in Theory and Practice**  
**Spring 2016**  
**MWF 9:05-9:55**  
**Oak Hall, Room 112**

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### Course Description

This course will cover the historical origins, development, and contemporary politics of the United States Congress, placing the partisan conflict that defines modern congressional life in historical context. We will investigate the tension between Congress' representational function and its policymaking function, the lawmaking process, and the role of interest groups in policymaking. We will also explore the reasons Congress is held in such low regard by the American public.

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**Readings:** The following book is required and is available in the Co-op. Additional readings are available online via HuskyCT.

- Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, Frances E. Lee, and Eric Schickler. 2015. *Congress and Its Members*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, DC: CQ/Sage. (ISBN: 978-1-4833-8888-5)

**Grading and Examinations:** (1) homework, in-class assignments, and participation 15%; (2) essays 20%; (3) representation quiz 10%; (4) legislative procedures quiz 10%; (5) midterm 20%; (6) final examination 25%. I will be happy to provide testing accommodations for students who provide documentation from the University's Center for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.csd.uconn.edu>).

**Writing Requirement:** Students will complete some short (2-3 page) writing assignments during the semester. More information on those assignments will be available later in the semester. Combined, these assignments will comprise about 20% of your grade. These assignments will be submitted via HuskyCT.

**Class Participation:** While this class is more lecture-oriented than some, I still expect students to come to class prepared to participate in a meaningful way. To do so, students must complete the assigned readings. I also recommend that students do their best to follow news coverage of the 114th Congress in serious news outlets (e.g., *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*). Failure to prepare for class on a regular basis will result in a sharp reduction in your grade.

**Final Examination:** Visit the Registrar's website (<http://registrar.uconn.edu/exams/>) to view the final exam schedule. Per university policy, all students are required to take the final exam at its scheduled time. Exceptions must be approved in advance by Office of Student Services and Advocacy (<http://www.ossa.uconn.edu>). I have no discretion in this matter.

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## Course Outline

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### I. Introduction

#### A. Week 1: Organizational Meeting and Introduction to Course (W1/20)

- Review course syllabus; discuss major themes of course.
- Assignment: Visit course HuskyCT site. Complete biographical assignment before midnight Sunday, 1/24.

#### B. Week 1 (cont.): Where We Stand and How We Got Here (F1/22)

- Readings:
  - Davidson, Oleszek, Lee & Schickler (hereafter denoted DOLS), ch. 1
  - Hetherington, "Why Political Trust Matters" (**HuskyCT**)
  - Mann and Ornstein, "Let's Just Say It" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Why have Americans always "hated" Congress? What are the "Two Congresses"? What are the major sources of the contemporary "dysfunction" that characterizes American political institutions? Do you agree with Mann and Ornstein's assessment of what's wrong with Congress today?

### II. Representation

#### A. Week 2: Apportionment, Gerrymandering and Voting Rights (M1/25, W1/27, F1/29, M2/1)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, pps. 41-56 (M1/25)
  - *The Economist*, "Congressional Representation" (**HuskyCT**) (M1/25)
  - Liptak, "Smaller States Find Outsize Clout Growing in Senate" (**HuskyCT**) (M1/25)
  - Bullock, "Redistricting: Racial and Partisan Issues, Past and Present" (**HuskyCT**) (W1/27)
  - Persily and Mann, "*Shelby County v. Holder* and Future of the VRA of 1965" (**HuskyCT**) (F1/29)
  - Menand, "The Color of Law" (**HuskyCT**) (F1/29)
- Discussion Questions: Contrast descriptive and substantive representation. Describe two specific problems that can occur in the drawing of congressional district lines. Outline some of the pros and cons of our "SMP" system. If everyone agrees the Voting Rights Act has been successful, why did the Supreme Court strike down Section IV?
- Out-of-Class Assignment: Play "The Redistricting Game" at [www.redistrictinggame.org](http://www.redistrictinggame.org). Create an approved districting scheme (population equality stage only). Save a screen-shot and submit it via HuskyCT before midnight Sunday, 1/24 (see HuskyCT for details).

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**Monday, 2/1: Quiz on Apportionment, Gerrymandering, and Redistricting  
(first 15 minutes of class)**

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B. Week 3: Candidate Recruitment and the Decision to Run (W2/3, F2/5)

- Readings:
  - DOLS pps. 56-62 (W2/3)
  - Lawless and Fox, "Why are Women Still Not Running for Congress?" (**HuskyCT**) (W2/3)
  - Carnes, "White Collar Government in the United States" (**HuskyCT**) (F2/5)
- Discussion Questions: What characteristics do most candidates for the U.S. Congress share? What are the conditions under which strong challengers are likely to emerge? What factors influence prospective candidates' decisions to run (or not to run)?

C. Week 4: Congressional Elections (M2/8, W2/10, F2/12)

- Reading:
  - DOLS, pps. 62-64, and all of ch. 4 (M2/8)
  - Jacobson, "How the Economy and Partisanship Shaped the 2012...Elections" (**HuskyCT**) (F2/12)
- Discussion Questions: Are all politics really local? To what extent are congressional elections determined by national events? What explains the incumbency advantage? What is the "personal incumbency advantage"? What are the consequences of declining party competitiveness in elections?

D. Week 5: Being There – Home Styles (M2/15)

- Reading:
  - DOLS, pps. 117-124
- Discussion Questions: List and describe several goals that motivate members of Congress. Contrast various ways members of Congress perceive their constituencies.

E. Week 5 (cont.): Being There – Hill Styles and "Member Enterprises" (W2/17, F2/19)

- Reading:
  - DOLS, pps. 105-117 and 124-131
  - Schiller, "Choosing Different Institutional Career Paths" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: What are the competing influences on members of Congress? What challenges do Members of Congress face upon arriving in Washington? What are the implications of the intersection of "Hill Styles" and "Home Styles" for representation in the House? In the Senate?

### III. Lawmaking

#### A. Week 6: The Structure of Congress: Historical Development (M2/22, W2/24, F2/26)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 2 (M2/22)
  - Cooper and Brady, “Institutional Context and Leadership Style” (**HuskyCT**) (W2/24)
  - Shepsle, “The Changing Textbook Congress” (**HuskyCT**) (W2/24)
  - Sinclair, ch. 1 (F2/26)
- Discussion Questions: What was the “Textbook Era” Congress and how did it differ from the contemporary Congress? Which is most powerful and influential in the modern House of Representatives: parties, committees, or some other entity? In the modern Senate?

#### B. The Structure of Congress: Parties and Committees

##### 1. Week 7: Parties and their Leaders (M2/29, W3/1, F3/4)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 6 (M2/29)
  - Sinclair, “Orchestrators of Unorthodox Lawmaking” (**HuskyCT**) (W3/1)
  - Strahan and Palazzolo, “The Gingrich Effect” (**HuskyCT**) (F3/4)
- Discussion Questions: What resources do party leaders have at their disposal to encourage rank-and-file members of Congress to do as they say? What aspects of legislative life tend to weaken the power of leaders? Under what conditions would you expect legislative party leaders to be most influential?

##### 2. Week 8: Committees – The Little Legislatures (M3/7, W3/9)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 7 (M3/7)
  - Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde, “Richard Fenno’s Theory of Congressional Committees” (**HuskyCT**) (W3/9)
- Discussion Questions: Which would you rather be: a party leader or a committee chair? What are the responsibilities of committee chairs in the contemporary Congress?

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**Friday, 3/11: Midterm Examination (20% of grade)**

**March 14-18: Spring Break. No Class Meeting.**

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C. The Lawmaking Process in the House and Senate

1. Week 9: Congressional Rules and Procedures (M3/21, W3/23, F3/25, M3/28)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 8 (M3/21) – especially pp. 236-239
  - Sinclair, chs. 2, 3, 4 & 6 (**HuskyCT**) (W3/21)
  - Smith, “The Emergence of the Senate Syndrome” and “Reform by Ruling 2013” (**HuskyCT**) (F3/25)
- Discussion Questions: Contrast the “orthodox” legislative processes in the House and Senate. What are the prominent techniques of “unorthodox” lawmaking? What is the “Senate Syndrome”? Outline the process through which Democrats enacted filibuster reform in 2013.

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**Monday, 3/28: Quiz on Legislative Procedures (15% of grade)**

*(Legislative Procedures Review Sheet will be posted online on or before Monday, 3/21)*

*Monday, 3/28: Last day to drop with grade of "W"*

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2. Week 10: Budgets, Fiscal Policy Making, and Systemic Dysfunction (W3/30, F4/1)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 14 (W3/30)
  - Sinclair, ch. 5 (W3/30)
  - Watch "Cliffhanger" before class on Friday, 4/1 (link available on **HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: The United States Congress has been characterized as "dysfunctional." How did it reach this point? What is the relationship between this dysfunction and the budget process?

3. Week 11: Case Study – Health Care Reform and the ACA of 2010 (M4/4, W4/6)

- Readings:
  - Sinclair, ch. 8 (M4/4)
  - Moscardelli, “Harry Reid and Health Care Reform” (**HuskyCT**) (W4/6)
- Discussion Questions: Trace the process through which health care reform was achieved in 2009-10. Identify at least three "unorthodox" procedures that were employed in securing passage of the ACA. Contrast competing theories of legislative leadership.

4. Week 11 (cont.): Research on Congressional Life – Why So Polarized? (F4/8)

- Readings:
  - Theriault and Rohde, “The Gingrich Senators” – pp. 1011-1016 only (**HuskyCT**)
  - Lee, “Agreeing to Disagree” (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: How do the authors you read for today measure polarization in Congress? What forces are driving the growing polarization in the House? In the Senate? In what ways do the studies you read challenge the conventional wisdom about polarization?

D. Outside Influences on the Policy Making Process: Interest Groups and the Executive

1. Week 12: Representing Whom? Research on Special Interests in Congress (M4/11, W4/13, F4/15)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 13 (M4/11)
  - Lee, “Interests, Constituencies, and Policy Making” (**HuskyCT**) (W4/13)
  - Bartels, “Economic Inequality and Political Representation” (**HuskyCT**) (F4/15)
- Discussion Questions: Contrast "inside" and "outside" lobbying. Is Congress controlled by special interests? Which interests are represented more effectively by Congress: local, particular interests or national, general interests? What characteristics of Congress as an institution encourage the representation of local interests? Of national interests? Of the affluent? Of the poor?

2. Week 13: Inter-branch Relations – Congress and the Executive (M4/18, W4/20, F4/22)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 10, and pps. 353-362 (M4/18)
  - Binder and Maltzman, “The Struggle to Shape the Federal Judiciary” (**HuskyCT**) (4/20)
  - Binder and Maltzman, “The Dynamics of Senate Confirmation” (**HuskyCT**) (W4/20)
- Discussion Questions: What is oversight? What types of programs are most likely to be the subjects of congressional oversight? How has the relationship between Congress and the President changed over time? Why do presidents have such a hard time filling openings on the lower federal courts?

IV. **Conclusion (and Catch-Up) – Representation, Lawmaking, & Change** (M4/25, W4/27, F4/29)

- Readings:
  - DOLS, ch. 16 (M4/25)
  - Sinclair, "The Consequences of Unorthodox Lawmaking" (**HuskyCT**) (W4/27)
- Discussion Questions: Why do we "love our congressperson" but "hate Congress"? What are the implications of the reliance on unorthodox legislative procedures for policy making? For the public's evaluations of Congress as an institution?