

**Legislative Politics**  
**Politics Science 517**  
**Monday and Wednesday 11:30-1:18**  
**Caldwell Laboratory 277**

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**Course Description**

This is an advanced undergraduate course concerning the issues and development of America's legislative branches, specifically the U.S. Congress. Throughout the course we will focus on the institutions and problems currently facing Congress, and how those issues and problems have developed. The general goals of this class are to think critically and analytically about legislative politics, discuss political problems in a productive manner, and understand the interconnected nature of the legislative process. We will satisfy these goals through readings, lectures, discussion, and debates, and the satisfaction of these goals will be evaluated through two exams, reading quizzes, a project, and individual debates.

**Required Texts**

Congress and its Members by Roger Davidson and Walter Oleszek; 10<sup>th</sup> edition; CQ Press

Various readings on Carmen: [www.carmen.osu.edu](http://www.carmen.osu.edu)

**Carmen and this Course**

There will be various postings for this course via Carmen, so please check it on a regular basis. Outlines, debate information, the syllabus, and other information will be posted there.

**Grading**

Midterm: 20%

Final: 20%

Reading Discussion: 5%

Reading Quizzes: 10%

Fantasy Congress Project: 20%

Debate: 25% (Teammate Evaluation- 5%, Debate Performance-10%, Debate Paper-10%)

Extra Credit: See Below

**Cards**

Your grades and reading questions will all be kept track of via cards, which will be handed out the first day of class. These cards are for ease of tracking reading questions and all other grades you receive in class. Please make sure they are current and accurately reflect your work. I keep the cards at the end of class for future reference.

### **Exams**

Your midterm will be on **Wednesday January 31**. It is worth 20% of your grade. It will be on the readings, lectures, discussions, and debates up until that point. It will be short essay. There will be several sections on the exam, and students will be able to choose to answer “so many” out of “a larger so many” for each section. The exams will offer some bit of extra credit. The final will be the same format, will be on and will be cumulative with a large focus on the latter part of class. The final is worth 20% of your total grade. Exam make-ups are given at my discretion.

### **Readings**

#### **Discussions**

Readings are to be completed before the class meeting. A group of 3-5 students will lead discussion of the readings once in the quarter. These students will present the readings and lead discussion. These students should not be the only ones that we hear from that day; they are responsible for facilitating discussion. They should be prepared to present the objectives, relevance, and low and high points of the reading. You will be able to choose which day you present on the second day of class. This section of the class will be judged by how well-prepared a student is, judged by myself. The classes available for discussion leaders are starred below. By midnight the day before you are assigned to be discussant, you are to email me 3-4 discussion points for the day, as well as a reading question to ask the other students in class. The discussion points should relate the readings to current events, the other readings in class, and commonly accepted knowledge. Your discussion performance is worth 5% of your grade.

#### **Reading Quizzes**

In addition to leading discussion, in order to ensure you are doing the readings, you will have reading quizzes. They will not occur every day there are readings, but they will occur most days. There will be 10 quizzes throughout the quarter, and these will be worth 10% of your total grade. These quizzes are not designed to “trick” anyone, but instead to judge that the reading assignments are being completed. You are allowed ONE makeup of a daily quiz, and this makeup will only be given if I have pre-approved your absence or if you have a VALID written excuse for your absence. There is also a bit of extra credit available most days for the reading questions.

### **Fantasy Congress**

Instead of a paper, we will be participating in a new project this quarter- Fantasy Congress. At the end of participating in this game, you will do a write up of your experience. Like other fantasy sports games, Fantasy Congress requires three things: a team, a system of scoring points, and a framework within which players can score. In this game, your team is a group of U.S. National Congress legislators, the legislators score points by pushing bills through the steps to create a law, and the framework within

which they play is Congress itself.

The website for Fantasy Congress is: <http://www.fantasycongress.us/fc/>

The directions are as follows:

1. Create an account and become a Citizen and manage Members of Congress.
2. Join a league. The team for this class is 517 Legislative Politics. When you join a league, you receive an empty team, ready for you to fill with players.
3. Draft your team.
4. Check the site regularly as your members of congress earn points for you.

At the end of the season, the Citizen with the most points wins. To accrue the highest number of points, use your political savvy to decide which when MCs should be playing and when they should be benched. MCs differ - sometimes dramatically - in how and if they can push legislation through Congress. Thus, choose wisely. To form your team, you choose a group of 16 legislators. To make things fair, and interesting, you must choose players from all parts of the spectrum of seniority. You draft:

- 2 senior Senators - "Upper Senators"
- 2 junior Senators - "Lower Senators"
- 4 senior Representatives - "All-Stars"
- 4 mid-range experience Representatives - "Supporting Lineup"
- 4 junior Representatives - "Rookies"

The Members of Congress (MCs) on your team are your players: they will be responsible for scoring the points. How? By moving bills through their chamber of Congress, the opposite chamber of Congress, and onto the President's desk for his signature. Chances are good that by the time the class finishes, very few pieces of legislation will actually be signed, but progress should be made on quite a few things.

The progress of each bill in the game is not anything simulated or imaginary; every bill in the database is an actual piece of legislation moving through Congress this very minute. The game reflects the progress of real legislators moving passing real legislation.

The seven basic stages through which your MCs must push legislation - and by which earn their points - are as follows: 1. Introduction in their Chamber (House or Senate); 2. Approval by Committee; 3. Vote on the Floor of their Chamber; 4. Introduction in the opposite Chamber; 5. Approval by Committee in opposite Chamber; 6. Vote on the Floor of opposite Chamber; 7. President's Signature. Obviously the above list is not exhaustive. Fantasy Congress factors in other processes such as the Rules Committee in the House, conference if the bill is not passed in an identical format in both Chambers, amendments to the legislation, and many more.

For this class, you must draft your members by January 10<sup>th</sup>. You must make at least five trades throughout the quarter. Final point values will be assessed on March 7<sup>th</sup>. Your project paper will also be due on March 7<sup>th</sup>. Your paper should be about 7-8 pages in length, and should address the following questions: Why did you choose your members? Why did you trade the members you traded? Pick one piece of legislation that is going through Congress, describe it very briefly, and explain why you believe it is doing so well. Pick another piece of legislation, describe it briefly, and discuss why it seems to be doing so poorly. Why are the winning members winning? Why are others losing? How

does the progression of legislation you've experienced in Fantasy Congress compare to the readings and discussion in class concerning the passage of legislation? Based on the activity you have seen throughout the quarter, what would you project for the next two years in Congress? Please make sure the paper is well written and organized, cited, and has a bibliography. Please come to me if you have any questions. There will be one day in class where we discuss the project: March 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **Debates**

We will have four debates in this class. The debate topics are listed below in the class schedule. There will be 4-6 students on each team, two teams per debate. The debate format will be given later. These debates are to highlight current issues in legislative politics. You can turn in your preferences for which debate topic the second day of class and you will be assigned to your group the third day of class. The debate itself is worth 10% of your grade, judged by how well your overall team does during the debate. 5% is judged by your teammates' average of how much you contributed to the debate. The class will vote on who is the winning team of the debate, and the members of that team will earn 2% extra credit. In addition to the debate, each team must turn in a 5-page paper presenting their side of the debate. Each team as a whole should present one paper. This paper will be worth 10% of your grade. Therefore, the debate altogether is worth 25% of your final grade.

### **Debate Topics**

#### **Debate 1: Being an Independent in Congress**

Team 1 should address why being an independent in either the House or the Senate is a desirable position. Team 2 should address why being an independent in either the House or the Senate is not a desirable position. The teams must address this topic in terms of the current session of Congress. Topics touched upon should include: committee assignments; seniority issues; caucusing; partisanship; ideology; and agenda issues.

#### **Debate 2: Divided Government**

Team 1 should argue that having divided government (defined as the executive branch being from one party and the legislative branch being from the other) is a desirable situation, while team 2 should argue that it is not. Topics touched upon should include: responsibility; accountability; veto power; public image; and agenda setting abilities.

#### **Debate 3: Term Limits in Congress**

Team 1 should argue that term limits should be enacted for the U.S. Congress, while team 2 should argue that they should not. The length/number of terms can be decided by the teams. Topics touched upon should include: interest group influence; seniority issues; state legislative examples; leadership; and 1<sup>st</sup> amendment rights.

#### **Debate 4: Campaign Finance Reform**

Team 1 should argue for publicly funded political campaigns, while Team 2 should argue against publicly funded elections. Topics touched upon should include: tax issues; 1<sup>st</sup>

amendment rights; the role of the media; the role of the parties; and the nature of campaigns.

### Debate Schedule

Team 1 Introduction: 5 minutes  
Team 2 Introduction: 5 minutes  
Team 1 Rebuttal: 4 minutes  
Team 2 Rebuttal: 4 minutes  
Team 1 Rebuttal: 4 minutes  
Team 2 Rebuttal: 4 minutes  
Team 1 Conclusion: 2-3 minutes  
Team 2 Conclusion: 2-3 minutes  
Student Questions: 15-20 minutes

### Debate Notes

As soon as I have graded the debate performance, the paper, and have received student evaluations of fellow students, your grades will appear on your cards. Remember to introduce the topic to the class well. While the burden of this falls to team 1 in particular, both teams are responsible for presenting background information. The key to getting a good grade on the debate is not only to completely research your argument, but also anticipate and refute the opposing argument. I suggest you have note cards or some kind of organization system for refuting arguments the other side makes. I encourage students who are debating to take notes on the various points and background of the subject matter, as the debates will appear on your exams.

### Concerning Sources for Your Paper

You may use internet sources, but they must be legitimate sources. A good rule of thumb would be if the site has a companion in actual print. For example, someone's blog cannot be used, but articles from Time, Newsweek, or any newspaper are fine. There are some sources that may not have companions in print (like CNN) that I find acceptable. Please ask me if you have any questions. You are more than welcome to use visual aids in your debate, but keep in mind the type of classroom that we are in.

### Extra Credit

There are several opportunities for extra credit in this class. The midterm and the final will have extra credit questions. In addition, many of the reading questions will have extra credit opportunities. Also, you will be allowed to participate in an experiment in the political science department for 2%. If you win the debate, you will be awarded 2% extra credit. If you win Fantasy Congress, you will be awarded 2% extra Credit. All together, this equals well over 10% extra credit, or over a full letter grade.

### Class Schedule:

January 3: Introduction to the class and to the New Congress  
Reading (Optional): Carmen-Best Senators  
Carmen: Best Senators  
Carmen: Political Mavericks

- Carmen: Jon Testler  
 Carmen: Harold Ford Jr.
- January 8: The Modern Congress; What is an Institution?  
 Reading: DO Chapters 1 and 2  
 Carmen- Weisberg et al “How Do Legislatures Develop?”
- \*January 10: Lawmaking Part 1  
 Reading: DO Chapters 6 and 7  
 Activity: Draft Fantasy Congress Members
- January 15: No Class; Martin Luther King Jr Day
- \*January 17: Lawmaking Part 2  
 Reading: DO Chapters 8 and 9
- January 22: Debate 1: Being an Independent in Congress  
 Debate 2: Divided Government  
 Reading: Dance of Legislation pages TBD  
 Carmen-Political Mavericks
- \*January 24: Discussion of Dance of Legislation  
 Reading: Dance of Legislation pages TBD  
 Carmen- Horse Politics
- \*January 29: Representation  
 Reading: Carmen- Kingdon “Models of Voting”  
 Carmen-Sinclair “Unorthodox Lawmaking”  
 Carmen-Weisberg et al “What is Representation?”
- January 31: Midterm**
- \*February 5: Getting Elected Part 1; *Taking on the Kennedys*  
 Reading: DO Chapter 3 and 4  
 Carmen: The Netroots Reach Their Limits  
**Activity: Redistricting**
- \*February 7: Getting Elected Part 2  
 Reading: Carmen-Herrnson “Money Maze”  
 Carmen- Weisberg et al “Candidate Affect Elections”  
 Carmen- Permanent Campaign
- \*February 12: Being in Congress  
 Reading: DO Chapter 5  
 Carmen- Cooperman and Oppenheimer “Gender Gap”  
 Carmen-Rhode: “Progressive Members”
- February 14: The Role of State Legislatures  
 Debate 3: Term Limits in Congress  
 Reading: Carmen-English-Only Language?  
 Carmen- The Filibuster and Tradition  
 Carmen- Negative Ads  
 Carmen- Politics and You Tube  
 Carmen- Term Limits
- \*February 19: Congress and the Executive Branch  
 Reading: DO Chapters 10 and 11  
 Carmen: Fresh Face of Barack Obama
- \*February 21: Congress and the Judiciary

- Debate 4: Campaign Finance Reform  
Reading: DO Chapter 12  
Carmen: Binder and Maltzman
- \*February 26: Congress and Interest Groups  
Reading: DO Chapter 13  
Carmen- Interest Groups
- February 28: The Role of the Party; *Thank You for Smoking*  
Reading: Carmen- Dodd and Oppenheimer  
Carmen- Oppenheimer  
Carmen- Culture Wars
- March 5: Discussion of Fantasy Congress Project  
Reading: Carmen-Ballot Initiatives
- March 7: Wrap-up; Review  
**Project Paper Due**  
Reading: DO Chapter 16  
Carmen- Hibbing and Smith “What the American Congress Wants to Be”

### **Final Exam: Week of 3/12-3/15**

#### **Recommendations for Success in this Class:**

1. Do the readings- Please make sure the you do the readings and understand what you are reading. It helps many students to make an outline. **DO NOT JUST SCAN THE READINGS.**
2. Come to class-There will be some material that will **JUST** be available **IN CLASS**, especially the debate material. You will not be able to get this material if you do not come to class.
3. I will post the outlines for the class on Carmen and put them up in class during lecture. Making sure your notes follow the outline and understanding how the topics fit together as the outline describes may help you when studying for the exams.
4. Prepare for the debates well in advance.
5. Try for the extra credit when you can- you have the possibility of earning over a whole letter grade in extra credit.
6. Come to my office hours if you are having problems.
7. Study thoroughly for the exams.

#### **Disability Info:**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

#### **Academic Honesty:**

Do not cheat-it is bad for you. The University Rule for this is 3335-31-02. Please understand that if any of these rules are violated, I will take appropriate action. I want **YOUR** ideas, not something from someone else, a test file of some sort, or an Internet posting. **I WILL TAKE ACTION IF I DISCOVER CHEATING IN ANY FORM.**