

U.S. Congress
Spring, 2014 (POLS 228)

(This syllabus is current as of January 14, 2014, but is subject to change.)

Instructor: Dr. Noah Kaplan

Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:15 pm, Burnham Hall B6.

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Introduction

The 112th Congress was something of a roller coaster ride, presenting challenges to those who seek to explain systematically how the institution operates. The tone of the Congress was set when the Republican party made record gains in the 2010 elections, recapturing control of the House of Representatives and narrowing the seat gap with Democrats in the Senate. Many of the newly elected representatives were affiliated with the Tea Party faction of the GOP, an anti-tax and generally anti-federal government movement that promised to make fundamental changes to the way that Washington operates. While such promises are perennially made but rarely kept, it is without question that the influx of these new members helped to make the 112th Congress one of the most tumultuous on record. The 2012 election was a status quo election which did not change partisan control (or general make-up) of either chamber of Congress and insured that the partisanship and gridlock that characterized the 112th Congress has continued in the 113th Congress.

In August of 2011, Congress brought the country to the brink of default because of deep disagreements over legislation to increase the debt ceiling. Despite reaching a short-term legislative solution, the United States lost its Triple A credit rating for the first time in its history. And yet the issue over legislation to increase the debt ceiling (and reduce federal spending) dominated the next few months of the current (113th) Congress – and resulted in a temporary shutdown of the federal government. All of this has occurred against a backdrop of continuing economic stagnation, painfully high unemployment, and general fiscal uncertainty, which has left many wondering whether members of Congress have the right priorities. Approval ratings of Congress have dipped to historic lows, as people express anger, frustration, and genuine puzzlement over what was going on in the national assembly.

The goal of this course is to help you understand how we have arrived at the current situation and, more generally, the role that Congress plays in the political, economic, and social life of the people of the United States. How will members of Congress address the vexing economic and fiscal problems facing the United States? How will the impending elections in 2014 affect the ability of members of Congress to work together to respond to the exasperation felt by those whom they are supposed to represent? In turn, how will their behavior and the general political and economic environment affect the outcome of the 2014 elections? What can we expect to see if the elections produce divided or unified partisan control of the Congress and presidency?

This course is designed to help you answer questions such as these. By systematically exploring issues of individual motivation, institutional structure and constraints, and the problems of collective decision-making, we will attempt to gain a thorough understanding of what is arguably the most important branch of the federal government and undoubtedly the most powerful legislature in the world.

Readings and Assignments

The weekly readings must be read **before** the first class for which they are assigned. Readings for each week are specified in the attached syllabus. The required texts are at the UIC bookstore. The required books for this course are:

Required Texts:

- 1) Roger Davidson *et al.*, *Congress and Its Members* (14th edition). Henceforth referred to as *CAIM*.
- 2) Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer, *Congress Reconsidered* (10th Edition). Henceforth referred to as *CR*.

Please note: as specified in the schedule of readings below, non-textbook articles and book chapters are required readings throughout the semester (i.e., there are required readings which are not from the text book). All such articles and book chapters will be available online at least one week in advance via the course's Blackboard page. Some of the required readings are from *Classics in Congressional Politics*, edited by Herbert Weisberg, Eric Heberlig and Lisa Campoli (New York: Longman Publishers). Henceforth referred to as Weisberg *et al.*

Also, some of the recommended readings are from the following:
Schickler, Eric and Frances Lee. 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of the American Congress*. New York: Oxford University Press. Henceforth referred to as Schickler and Lee.

Recommended Texts: sometimes students benefit from reviewing an alternative textbook on the subject of study. For a quite different approach to the study of congress, I recommend:

Stewart III, Charles. 2011. *Analyzing Congress* (2nd edition). New York: W. W. Norton Press. Henceforth referred to as Stewart.

Newspapers

I expect you to read regularly at least one of the below newspapers/publications throughout the course. Which paper you choose is up to you. I list four major newspapers to choose from and they are all freely accessible on the web or via Lexis-Nexis.

Specifically:

- The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/>
- The Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- Roll Call <http://www.rollcall.com/>
- The National Journal <http://www.nationaljournal.com/>

Starting Thursday, January 23rd, you must bring in an article from one of these four papers **every** Thursday (except exam and/or paper due weeks 1, 7, 12, 13 & 16). The article must be from one of these newspapers and cannot be from any other newspaper. The article should be related to the topic of the week (to the extent possible). You must have your name and the date on the article and hand it in at the end of class. I will often initiate discussion by asking a student to read her/his article aloud to the class and then ask questions related to the article. Of the 10 weeks you are expected to submit an article, you can miss one without penalty.

Class Requirements and Grading

- 1) Attendance, Participation and Weekly Newspaper Article -- 20% of grade.
The weekly readings must be read before the first class for which they are assigned. Readings for each week are specified in the attached syllabus. You should always come prepared to discuss the assigned material. I will call on individuals to respond to specific questions from time to time. I have kept the readings relatively manageable – approximately 80 pages a week, on average. I have done this to facilitate your ability to stay current with the readings, as well as to encourage close scrutiny of the texts.

Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class period. If you miss more than two classes, your course grade will be reduced by a grade for each additional class you miss. If you do not miss more than two classes but do not participate in class discussions, you will receive a “B” for this part of your grade. The more you participate in class discussion, the more I will "bump up" your grade for this part of the course (up to a maximum of “A+”).

- 2) Paper – 30% of grade (April 10th)
A 8-10 page essay (double spaced, 12-point font). You will be provided all the information regarding this assignment after the first exam. The paper is due in class on April 10th. For each day an assignment is late, including weekends, I will subtract 10 percent of the assignment’s total point value from your score. You must submit a hard copy of the paper to me in class on the 10th of April. You must also submit a copy of the paper online on April 10th via the course’s blackboard safeassign option before class begins.
- 3) Exam I – 25% of grade (Feb. 27th).
This will be an in-class exam consisting of a few identifiers and a short essay. You will have the option of writing the essay based upon one of two questions. I will provide study questions the week before the exam.
- 4) Exam II – 25% of grade (May 1st).
This will be an in-class exam consisting of a few identifiers and a short essay. You will have the option of writing the essay based upon one of two questions. I will provide study questions the week before the exam.

Prerequisites: This course presupposes a basic knowledge of the American political system, as demonstrated by the completion of “Introduction to American Government and Politics” with a minimum grade of C (i.e., POLS 101 is a prerequisite).

Make-Up Exams: I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. In *all* instances, I will require documentation. Students who will miss an exam due to membership in an official university group must notify me at least FIVE days in advance, and you will arrange with me to take the exam *before* you leave town.

Academic Etiquette: Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I will ask you to leave the room. Turn off all cell phones before class begins. Turn off all laptop computers before class begins.

When we are in class, you may not use a laptop computer, tablet, cell phone or PDA. If you believe you have a valid reason for using a laptop for note-taking purposes, please see me and we can discuss your situation. These courtesies will increase your engagement and improve the quality of everyone's learning experience.

Cheating and Plagiarism: I do not tolerate plagiarizing or cheating of any kind. Such behavior will result in **failing** the course and other disciplinary action. Cheating and plagiarism in this class will be punished to the maximum extent possible. Any violation may result in expulsion from the University. All students are expected to observe the University of Illinois at Chicago's rules against cheating and plagiarism. See the section on "Academic Integrity/Academic Dishonesty" in the University of Illinois at Chicago's Undergraduate Student Academic Policy Guide 2009-2011 (<http://www.uic.edu/depts/oa/SMAAPP/guide.pdf>) for a full statement regarding UIC's rules against cheating and plagiarism. The relevant regulations and procedures can be found at <http://www.uic.edu/depts/dos/docs/StudentDisciplinaryPolicy0809withpagenumbersandcov.pdf>. The department of political science provides a full definition of plagiarism and guidelines on how to avoid plagiarism at: <http://www.uic.edu/depts/pols/Plagiarism1.pdf>. Cheating and plagiarism in this class will be punished to the maximum extent possible.

ADA Statement: The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please see <http://www.uic.edu/index.html/disability.shtml> and then follow-up with me as appropriate.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction/Overview (January 14 & 16)

- Weisberg *et al.*, Chapter 1.
- *CAIM*, Chapter 1
- Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Pages 114-125.

Recommended:

- Grofman, Bernard. 2004. "Downs and Two-Party Convergence." *Annual Review of Political Science* 7: 25-46.

Week 2: Historical and Institutional Background (Jan.21 & 23)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 2
- *CR*, Chapter 16
- *2014 APSA Report* – "Causes and Consequences of Polarization" (Chapter 2).

Recommended:

- Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein. 2012. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, Chapter 2.

Week 3: Congressional Institutions and Procedures: Parties and Party Leadership (Jan.28 & 30)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 6.
- *CR*, Chapters 2 & 7.
- *2014 APSA Report* – "Making Deals in Congress" (Chapter 3)

Recommended:

- Schickler and Lee: Chapter 17.

Week 4: Congressional Institutions and Procedures: Committees and Subcommittees (February 4 & 6)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 7.
- *CR*, Chapter 8.
- Weisberg *et al.*: Chapters 16 and 19.

Recommended:

- Schickler and Lee: Chapters 18 and 31.

Week 5: Congressional Institutions and Procedures: The Floor (Feb. 11 & 13)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 8.
- *CR*, Chapter 9.
- Weisberg *et al.*: Chapters 24, 25 and 27.

Week 6: Deliberation and Representation (Feb. 18 & 20)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 9.
- *CR*, Chapter 3, 10.

Recommended:

- Schickler and Lee: Chapters 11, 13, 14 & 15.

Week 7: Review & Exam I (Feb. 25 & 27)

Make-up & Exam I Review on the 25th.

EXAM I on the Feb. 27th.

Week 8: Congressional Elections I (March 4 & 6)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 3.
- Weisberg *et al.*: Chapters 8, 10 and 11.
- TBA

Week 9: Congressional Elections II (March 11 & 13)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 4.
- *CR*, Chapter 4.
- TBA

Week 10: Congressional Election III (March 18 & 20)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 5.
- *CR*, Chapters 5 & 6

Week 11: Spring Break (March 25 & 27)

NOTE: Spring break – no class!

Week 12: Congress and the Executive (April 1 & 3)

NOTE: No class on Thursday, April 3rd!

- *CAIM*, Chapters 10 & 11.
- *CR*, Chapter 11.

Week 13: Congress, the Courts and Organized Interests (April 8 & 10)

NOTE: PAPER DUE April 10th!

- *CAIM*, Chapters 12 & 13.

Week 14: Congress and Policy: Domestic and Fiscal I (April 15 & 17)

- *CAIM*, Chapter 14.
- *CR*, Chapters 13 and 14.
- Weisberg *et al.*: Chapter 17

Week 15: Congress and Policy: Domestic and Fiscal II (April 22 & 24)

- *CR*, Chapters 12 & 17
- TBA.

Week 16: Review and Exam II (April 29 & May 1)

Exam II Review on April 29th.

Exam II on May 1st.