

PSCN 485: Congress and the Presidency

Class Meetings: M-W-F 9:00-9:50 p.m.
Dixon-Eilers Hall, room 211

Dr. Bradley Best

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Office Hours: Daily 11:00-12:00 noon.

Course Description:

Students enrolled in *PSCN 485: Congress and the Presidency* survey a large number of the most current and respected scholarly investigations of the two elected branches of American national government. Each day, students dissect and analyze the research strategies and findings of political scientists working in the legislative behavior and presidential studies subfields. Moreover, each class meeting combines a brief lecture, video, or student produced report with a discussion of one or more readings from top-quality anthologies. The result, ultimately, is a setting wherein students encounter simultaneously key perspectives on institutional history, structure, processes, behavior, and the implications of each for the trajectory of public policy. At bottom, students enrolled in *Congress and the Presidency* assemble not merely factual awareness but theoretical understanding supportive of advanced study and entry into political life.

Required Texts:

Dodd, Lawrence and Bruce Oppenheimer. 2005. *Congress Reconsidered*. Eighth Edition . Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Pfiffner, James P. and Roger H Davidson. 2007. *Understanding the Presidency*. Fourth Edition. New York: Pearson Longman Publishers.

Course Objectives

1. Students will enhance their familiarity with the theoretical perspectives and methodological tools employed by political scientists in the study of Congress and the American presidency.
2. Students will develop an advanced, undergraduate-level awareness of the structures, decision processes, and behavior of the U.S. Congress and presidency.

3. Students will develop an introductory awareness of the factors accounting for inter-institutional conflict and cooperation between the Congress and the Presidency.
4. Students will deepen their capacity to model and analyze the role of the Congress, its individual members, and the President as players in the public policy process.

Skill Enhancement Goals

1. Students will develop, via reading assignments, class discussions, essay questions, and writing exercises, analytical and logical reasoning skills.
2. Students will develop, via class discussions and debates, argumentation and related rhetorical skills.
3. Students will develop essay examinations and writing exercises written and oral communication skills.

Student Responsibilities

Attendance: Consistent and faithful attendance at classroom sessions is required. Students are allowed **three (3) unexcused absences** during the term. For each additional absence, the students class participation / preparation grade will be reduced by 5 points. Absences are excused in only the most extraordinary of circumstances – i.e., prolonged illness, personal crisis, family exigency – or in the event of required participation in a university-sponsored event. Dr. Best will serve as the sole and final arbiter of whether and when to grant excused absences.

Reading Assignments: Students are required to complete all assigned readings prior to the discussion / lecture dates indicated on the course calendar. In view of the seminar format adopted by the professor, diligent preparation by all students is essential to the realization of course goals. Thus, students failing to prepare consistently and adequately for class discussions will receive a markedly reduced class participation / preparation score.

Examinations and Quizzes: There are two (2) examinations scheduled during the semester. Each is worth 50 points and is comprised of either long essay, short essay, identity/distinction, multiple choice, or true-false questions. Four (4) quizzes are scheduled during the semester. Each is worth 25 points and is comprised of either short essay, identity-distinction, or multiple choice questions. Make-up examinations and quizzes are given in only the most unusual of circumstances – i.e., profound illness, personal crisis, family exigency – or required participation in a university-sponsored event. Students are warned to make all reasonable attempts to notify the professor of an expected or likely absence from an examination or quiz. Failure to do so dramatically

lowers the probability that a make-up quiz or exam will be granted. Dr. Best will serve as the sole and final arbiter of whether and when to grant a make-up examination.

“Great Decisions” Writing Assignment: On the date specified on the course calendar, each student will submit an exposition suitable for publication in an edited work titled either “Great Decisions of the U.S. Congress.” or “Great Decisions of the American Presidents.” Each expository work should be 4-5 pages in length, contain evidence of significant research, and be edited so as to contain not a single spelling error or grammatical difficulty. Each work will, provided each author agrees, be published in a student-developed website and used as a resource for other students of American government and politics. Authors will be fully and appropriately credited for their work. Additional instructions will be provided during the initial weeks of the term. The “Great Decisions” writing assignment is worth a maximum of 20 pts.

Plagiarism: Consistent with University policy, evidence of plagiarism will result in a failing grade in the course. Furthermore, in instances where plagiarism or academic dishonesty is detected, the instructor reserves the right to pursue additional remedies through University administrative channels.

Laptop Computers: Unless the instructor indicates otherwise, students are asked to keep laptop computer cases closed during all class meetings.

Changes to course calendar or class policies: In the event that unforeseen circumstances arise requiring either a change in the content of course policies or a significant change in the course calendar, students will be notified by the instructor in writing and will be granted the opportunity for comment on the proposed change.

Basis and Method of Grading: Grades will be assigned according to the following point distribution and grade scale indicated below.

<u>Point Distribution</u>		<u>Final Grade Scale</u>
Exam #1	50 points possible	225 – 250 pts A
Exam #2	50 points possible	200 - 224 pts B
Quiz #1	25 points possible	175 – 199 pts C
Quiz #2	25 points possible	150 – 174 pts D
Quiz #3	25 points possible	< 150 pts F
Quiz #4	25 points possible	
“Great Decisions” writing assign.	30 points possible	
Class participation/ preparation	20 points possible	

PSCN 485: Congress and the Presidency - Course Calendar

PART I: The United States Congress

Note: All readings in Part I of the course can be found in the Dodd and Oppenheimer *Congress Reconsidered* anthology.

Discussion Topic / Assigned Readings

Week 1

- 1/29 Course Introduction / Introduction to Congressional Behavior
- 1/31 Sinclair, "The New World of U.S. Senators"
- 2/2 Dodd and Oppenheimer, "A Decade of Republican Control"

Week 2

- 2/5 Hibbing and Larimer, "What the American Public Wants Congress to Be"
- 2/7 Erikson and Wright, "Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections"
- 2/9 Herrnson, "The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act and Congressional Elections"

Week 3

- 2/12 Oppenheimer, "Deep Red and Blue Congressional Districts"
- 2/14 Fiorina, "Keystone Reconsidered"
- 2/16 Special Lecture: Coalition Formation in the U.S. Congress

Week 4

- 2/19 **Quiz #1 (25 pts)**
- 2/21 Smith and Gamm, "The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress"
- 2/23 Schickler and Pearson, "The House Leadership in an Era of Partisan Warfare"

Week 5

- 2/26 Evans and Lipinski, "Obstruction and Leadership in the U.S. Senate"
- 2/28 Aldrich and Rohde, "Congressional Committees in a Partisan Era"
- 3/2 Gordon, "The (Dis)Integration of the House Appropriations Committee"

Week 6

- 3/5 **Quiz #2 (25 pts)**
- 3/7 Binder and Maltzman, “Congress and the Politics of Judicial Appointments”
- 3/9 Rudder, “The Politics of Taxing and Spending in Congress: Ideas, Strategy, and Policy”

Week 7

- 3/12 Wolfensberger, “Congress and Policymaking in an Age of Terrorism”
- 3/14 Cooper, “From Congressional to Presidential Preeminence”
- 3/16 Class Discussion: “Great Decisions of the U.S. Congress”
“Great Decisions” projects due (1/2 of students) – 30 pts

PART II: The American Presidency

Note: All readings in Part II of the course can be found in the Pfiffner and Davidson anthology.

Discussion Topic / Assigned Readings

Week 8

- 3/26 **Exam #1 (50 pts) – The U.S. Congress**
- 3/28 Introduction to the Presidency [focus on constitutional foundations]
- 3/30 Historical Perspectives on the Presidency
Pfiffner and Davidson, pp. 23-50

Week 9

- 4/2 Historical Perspectives on the Presidency
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 6-11
- 4/4 Presidential Campaigns and Elections
[special lecture on presidential selection]
Pfiffner and Davidson, reading 12

Week 10

- 4/11 Presidential Campaigns and Elections
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 16, 17, 18, 19
- 4/13 **Quiz # 3 (25 pts)**

Week 11

- 4/16 The Public Presidency
Pfiffner and Davidson, reading 20
- 4/18 The Public Presidency
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 22, 23
- 4/20 The Public Presidency – Presidential Impeachment Politics

Week 12

- 4/23 Institutional Presidency
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 26, 28
- 4/25 Institutional Presidency
Pfiffner and Davidson, reading 29
- 4/27 Special Lecture – Bureaucratic Power

Week 13

- 4/30 Domestic and Foreign Policy Leadership
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 35, 36
- 5/2 Domestic and Foreign Policy Leadership
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 39, 40, 41
- 5/4 Class Discussion: “Great Decisions of the American Presidents”
“Great Decisions” projects due (1/2 of students) – 30 pts

Week 14

- 5/7 **Quiz #4 (25 pts)**
- 5/9 Evaluating the Presidents (Great and Less-than-Great Presidents)
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 44, 45
- 5/11 Evaluating the Presidents (Great and Less-than-Great Presidents)
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 46, 47

Week 15

5/14 Congress and the President in a System of Separated Powers
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 31, 32

5/16 Congress and the President in a System of Separated Powers
Pfiffner and Davidson, readings 33, 34

5/18 Review and Overview Lecture

Week 16

Final Exam (50 pts) is scheduled for _____.