**PLSC 323 CONGRESS IN AMERICAN POLITICS**

Winter Session 2018

Instructor: Shawn J. Donahue

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Office Location: LNG 279 (Library Tower Basement)

Office Hours: N/A

Office Phone: N/A

Class Meeting: Online

Class Location: Online

**Syllabus**

**Course DescriptioN**

Examines the history, change and current state of America’s pre-eminent political institution: the U.S. Congress. Critical to understanding Congress in understanding the forces that affect that institution, both internally and externally, and how the institution has changed and reformed itself in response to those forces. These pressures fall into three categories: member demands, institutional or efficiency demands and external demands (interest groups, the courts, the executive, etc.) Main topic areas include representation, elections, campaign funding, the organization of Congress (committees) and voting behavior. This course satisfies the American Politics and upper level requirement for the Political Science major.

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS BEING A WINTER COURSE**

Please note that since this class is being held during the winter session that we will move at a rapid pace. It is important to keep up with the pace of the class as it is easy to get behind. However, given that this course is over the winter break and is split into before and after the week of Christmas, I will be as flexible as possible on due dates for students. Students just need to email me ahead of time for any reasonable extensions of time on assignments.

**Course Objectives**

The fundamental premise guiding this course is the idea that the Congress is one of the fundamental parts of American government being that it seems that events are always occurring there and, furthermore, that it is an inherently interesting and exciting topic. In other words, studying the Congress should be both enjoyable and informative. That said, more specific goals for this course include:

1. To learn about the organization of Congress, including leadership and committees;
2. How Congress has changed over time
3. To explore the manner in which members are elected to the body;
4. To learn how bills become laws and the policies included therein;
5. The interaction with Congress with other branches of government;
6. How members of Congress seek to represent their constituents;
7. How the chambers of Congress differ from each other;
8. To strengthen the ability to evaluate and construct analytic arguments; and
9. To enhance written communications skills.

**Texts**

The following texts are required and is available for purchase at the University bookstore or on Amazon.com or other booksellers, but just be sure to get the right edition:

* Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, Frances E. Lee, and Eric Schickler. Congress and Its Members: 16th Edition. (2018). CQ Press.
* Mayhew David. Congress: The Electoral Connection. Any edition is acceptable.

**OPTIONAL TEXTS**

* None.

**Course Requirements & Grading**

Evaluation in this course is based on the following components:[[2]](#footnote-2)

* Weekly Quizzes (3x15%) 45%
* Mid-Term Exam 25%
* Final Exam 30%

Final grades in this course are computed on the following basis:[[3]](#footnote-3)

* A: 94-100%
* A-: 90-93%
* B+: 88-89%
* B: 82-87%
* B-: 80-81%
* C+: 78-79%
* C: 72-77%
* C-: 70-71%
* D+: 68-69%
* D: 62-67%
* D-: 60-61%
* F: <59%

**QuiZZES**

There will be three short quizzes in the course. They will be open book and open note. They will each cover materials from each week of the course. These will be multiple choice. These will likely not take more than about 30-45 minutes to complete. These will be available on MyCourses under the Content tab. These quizzes will need to be completed at the end of each week of class. Each quiz is worth 15% of your final grade, for a total of 45%.

**Exams**

This course will have two exams- a midterm and a final exam. The midterm exam is worth 25% of your course grade and the final exam is worth 30% of your course grade. Both of these exams will consist of short answer identification questions and an essay question. You will have a choice on both types of questions as to which ones you will choose to answer. Each of the exams will have details in their instruction section.

Both exams will be submitted via turn it in. These will take a similar amount of time as they would if you were taking them in class, but you will have as long as you need to complete them on your own.

Be sure that if you directly cite anything to include a citation for that in the text, as well as to include a works cited page at the end of your exams.

**Blackboard/MY COURSES**

Since this is an online class, everything will be conducted through Blackboard. All lectures, notes, assignments will be available via blackboard. This is also your responsibility to check it for assignments.

**LECTURES**

I will provide a lecture for each part of the material covered, which is recorded via Vimeo. It is necessary to listen to each of these lectures in addition to the material in the textbook. These lectures will include power points and breakdown of the material. You can generally figure that the material that I feel most important in the lectures will tend to be the focus of the assignments. The lectures will usually be about 30-45 minutes each, with some being shorter or longer on occasion.

**E-Mail**

All students registered for this course will automatically be subscribed to a class list serve via Blackboard. This list will be used to communicate reminders, updates, etc. to the class. Students are absolutely responsible for all information that is communicated in this manner. Those students who usually use an e-mail address other than their BU e-mail address should set their BU account to forward to their preferred e-mail address. Students should contact Computing Services if assistance with e-mail is required. You may find that there is a way to send messages on Blackboard. Don’t use, as I don’t check it. I won’t respond to it so don’t expect a response.

**Grade Disputes**

Grading should be an entirely transparent process and, accordingly, I will be as clear as I can be about my grading process and standards. Students wishing to dispute a grade for an assignment or exam must do so in writing within one (1) week of the return of the graded item. Students must also wait 24 hours before initiating an appeal. When doing so, students should provide a clear explanation as to why they feel a different grade is in order. Simply “wanting” or “needing” a higher grade is insufficient reasoning. When work is reviewed pursuant to a grade dispute, the entire item (assignment or exam) is reviewed, meaning that a grade dispute may result in the same grade, a higher grade, or a lower grade.

**Make Up Policy**

Each student is expected to complete all assignments by the due date and take all examinations at the scheduled times. Assignments will be distributed well in advance of their due dates. Given the nature of the winter session, however, I will try to be flexible for students that for whatever reasons may need some extra time to complete their assignments. To get any reasonable extension, students will simply need to email me with the amount of time they need to finish something. I expect to approve any reasonable extensions.

**Special Needs**

I am committed to meeting any special needs students with learning disabilities might have. Students with special needs are advised to contact me immediately with documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities. Last minute accommodations are not feasible so students with special needs are obligated to contact me early in the semester.

**Religious Accommodation**

Students with a scheduling conflict related to the observance of a religious holiday are advised to contact me immediately. I will be very happy to make an appropriate accommodation. Students should note, however, that they must notify me within the first two (2) weeks of the start of the session to make any such accommodation.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Academic integrity is an important touchstone of academic life, for both students and faculty. As the instructor for this class and a member of the Binghamton University community, I have a responsibility to scrupulously abide by and vigorously promote the highest standards of academic integrity. Accordingly, no form of academic dishonesty (intended or accidental) will be tolerated. Anyone found guilty of cheating or plagiarism or of other violations of academic integrity will receive an automatic grade of 0.0 (F) for the course. Furthermore, all other available penalties within the University (e.g., proceedings before the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee) will be pursued to the fullest extent. Students should bear in mind that there are severe consequences for violations of academic integrity, which may well extend beyond Binghamton University (e.g., it may complicate or prevent admission to law school).

Students are required to review the Student Academic Honesty Code, which can be found on-line in the Bulletin. I will assume that you have no objections to the code unless otherwise specified.

I will be very happy to answer any questions students in this class may have about the Code and provide any necessary clarifications. I will also provide guidance, both to the class as a whole and to individual students as needed, regarding academic integrity as it applies to the assignments and exams in this course. Students have an affirmative obligation to seek out additional assistance from me if they have any unanswered questions about academic integrity.

**I AM PUTTING THIS IN BOLD AND CAPS FOR A REASON.**

**DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!**

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**DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!**

**IT IS NOT WORTH IT!**

**IF YOU QUOTE SOMEONE, CITE IT! DON’T COPY STUFF OFF THE NET AND SAY IT IS YOUR OWN! TURNITIN WILL CATCH YOU! I WILL CATCH YOU! YOU MAY GET KICKED OUT OF THE SCHOOL AND NEVER GET TO GO TO LAW SCHOOL!**

I am very serious about plagiarism. I caught a student last year. That person received an F for the class and the case was forwarded to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. It is very easy to try to copy and paste material from the internets, but it is surprisingly easy to catch on turn it in, especially since most undergraduates do not possess the legal writing skills of law professors, who write much of the material. If you do copy and paste something, give credit for where you got it from, that is not plagiarism, but it will make for you getting a low grade since it about your interpretation and analysis, not another person.

**Schedule**

given that we have to finish this course in THREE weeks (PLUS the break week), we will cover ABOUT 5 chapters per week in the davidson book and the mayhew book will be spread around.

**Please note that this is a suggested schedule for the readings and lectures so that you can get through the materials. don’t think you have to rigidly follow the times for readings and lectures. however, the due dates for assignments are when things need to be turned in unless extensions are requested.**

**Week 1 (december 18-23):**

December 18 (Monday):

Lecture 1: Evolution of Modern Congress

Readings: Davidson- Chapters 1 and 2 (pages 1-40)

Mayhew (pages vii-xx)

December 19 (Tuesday):

Lecture 2: Recruitment of Candidates

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 3 (pages 42-71)

December 20 (Wednesday):

Lecture 3: Congressional Elections

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 4 (pages 72-109)

Mayhew (pages 1-38)

December 21 (Thursday):

Lecture 4: Members in their Districts

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 5 (pages 110-137)

Mayhew (pages 39-79)

December 22 (Friday):

Lecture 5: Congressional Leaders

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 6 (pages 139-173)

*Quiz #1 to be completed by the end of the day of December 27. This quiz covers only Week #1 materials.*

**week 2 (january 2-7)**

January 2 (Tuesday):

Lecture 6: Congressional Committees

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 7 (pages 175-217)

Mayhew (pages 81-105)

January 3 (Wednesday):

Lecture 7: Congressional Rules and Procedures

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 8 (pages 219-259)

The mid-term exam covers material up to this point.

January 4 (Thursday):

Lecture 8: Congressional Decision Making

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 9 (pages 261-290)

Mayhew (pages 105-140)

January 5 (Friday):

Lecture 9: Congress and the President

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 10 (pages 292-319)

*Quiz #2 to be completed by the end of this week (January 7 by the end of the day).*

*I wanted to note that I will be attending the Southern Political Science Conference from January 3-6. I will answer emails within the same day, but it may not be as quick as other times.*

*The mid-term exam should be completed by the end of the day of January 8.*

**week 3 (january 8-13)**

January 8 (Monday):

Lecture 10: Congress and the Bureaucracy

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 11 (pages 320-347)

January 9 (Tuesday):

Lecture 11: Congress and the Judiciary

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 12 (pages 348-373)

January 10 (Wednesday):

Lecture 12: Congress and Interest Groups

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 13 (pages 374-397)

January 11 (Thursday):

Lecture 13: Domestic Policy

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 14 (pages 398-429)

January 12 (Friday):

Lecture 14: Foreign Policy and National Security; Current and Future Issues

Readings: Davidson- Chapter 15 and 16 (pages 430-479)

Mayhew (pages 158-180)

*Quiz #3 to be completed by the end of this week (January 15 by the end of the day).*

January 17: (Wednesday):

**Final Exam due by 6:00 PM**- Grades have to be submitted by 4:00 PM the next day, so this is about as late as I can make this. A quick note is that if you need an extension past the due date here, your grade may take a little longer to be posted. If this is not a problem.

1. Though I try to be as prompt as possible in responding to student inquiries, it may take up to 24 hours for a response depending upon when an e-mail inquiry is received. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note that students must complete each of these components to be eligible to receive a passing grade in the class. Stated differently, failure to complete any one of these items will result in a failing grade for the class regardless of whether, from a numerical perspective, a student could earn a passing grade. This is a departmental policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Students submit to the Academic Integrity rules of the University Student Code of Conduct. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)