San José State University
Department of Political Science
Congress
POLS 105, Section 1, SJSU Catalog Code 23985
Spring 2021

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Office hours:	Tuesday/Thursday 10:30 am to noon or by appointment
Class days/time:	Tuesday/Thursday noon to 1:15 pm

Course Description:

This class examines politics and policymaking in the U.S. Congress. Topics include party leadership, interest groups in Congress, congressional committees, political representation, redistricting and congressional elections, party polarization, and the process of how a bill becomes a law.

Political Science Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):

Upon completion of the Political Science major program, students should be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

PSPL01: Breadth: Students should possess a broad knowledge of the theory and methods of the various branches of the discipline.

PSPL02: Application and Disciplinary Methods: Students should be able to formulate research questions, engage in systematic literature searches using primary and secondary sources, evaluate research studies, and critically analyze and interpret influential political texts. Students should be able to apply these techniques to identify, understand, and analyze domestic and international political issues and organizations.

PSPL03: Communication Skills: Students should master basic competencies in oral and written communication skills and be able to apply these skills in the context of political science. This means communicating effectively about politics and/or public administration, public policy, and law.

PSPL04: Citizenship: Students should acquire an understanding of the role of the citizen in local, state, national, and global contexts and appreciate the importance of lifelong participation in political processes.

Course Learning Objectives (CLOs):

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

CL01: Demonstrate understanding of political science theories and concepts and theories that relate to the U.S. Congress.

CL02: Demonstrate the ability to critically think about the organization of Congress (including political parties and committees) and how organizational structures shape legislative outcomes.

CL03: Express an understanding of congressional campaigns and electoral systems and how they affect political representation in Congress.

CL04: Demonstrate knowledge of legislative processes and how a bill becomes a law in the contemporary U.S. Congress.

Mapping POLS 105 Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) to Political Science Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Program Learning Outcomes	Assessment
CL01: Demonstrate understanding of political science theories and concepts and theories that relate to the U.S. Congress	PL01, 2	Midterm and final exams, completion of 1000-word position paper, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments
CL02: Demonstrate the ability to critically think about the organization of Congress (including political parties and committees) and how organizational structures shape legislative outcomes	PL02, 4	Midterm and final exams, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments
CL03: Express understanding of congressional campaigns and electoral systems and how they affect political representation in Congress	PL02, 4	Midterm and final exams, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments
CL04: Demonstrate knowledge of legislative processes and how a bill becomes a law in the contemporary U.S. Congress	PL01, 2	Midterm and final exams, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments

Required Reading:

This course will draw from three main sources of material:

(1)   Textbook:

- Davidson, Roger, Walter Oleszek, Frances Lee, and Eric Schickler. *Congress and Its Members.* Either the 17th or 16th edition is fine. (17th: ISBN-13: 978-1544322957; 16th: ISBN-13: 978-1506369730.) Sage Publishing.

(2)   News articles, podcasts, videos: See course schedule for links and due dates.

(3)   Twitter Accounts: Please sign up for a Twitter account (if you don't already have one) and follow these accounts. Check your Twitter feed at least once a day during our course to stay abreast of news about Capitol Hill:

- Identify and follow your two senators. (For most of you, that will be Sen. Dianne Feinstein and Sen.-designate Alex Padilla: @SenFeinstein and @AlexPadilla4CA)
- Identify and follow your House member
- Rep. Kevin McCarthy, House minority leader: @GOPleader
- Senate Democrats: @SenateDems
- Senate Republicans: @SenateGOP
- U.S. Senate floor: @Senatefloor
- Senate press gallery: @Senatepress
- House Democrats: @HouseDems
- House Republicans: @HouseGOP
- U.S. House floor: @Housefloor
- House press gallery: @USHousenews
- Nate Silver, political statistician: @NateSilver538
- Cook Political Report: @cookpolitical
- Ana Navarro-Cardenas, political strategist/commentator: @ananavarro
- Stuart Rothenberg, political analyst/commentator: @stupolitics
- POLITICO newspaper: @POLITICO
- The Hill newspaper: @thehill
- Axios newsletter: @axios
- National Public Radio political desk: @nprpolitics
- PolitiFact, fact-checker: @PolitiFact
- CNN political desk: @CNNPolitics

Library Liaison:

The library liaison for Political Science is available to answer questions and provide one-on-one help learning using the library for research:

      Paul Kauppila
      University Librarian (Political Science Liaison)
      408.808.2042
      Paul.Kauppila@sjsu.edu

Course Requirements and Assignments/Succeeding in a Four-Unit Course:

At SJSU, students are expected to spend two hours outside of class for every hour of class time. Because this is a four-unit course, you can expect to spend a minimum of eight hours per week on this course, in addition to time spent in class. More information about SJSU student workload can be found here.

Here are the main requirements for this course:

Required Reading/Viewing/Listening:

Reading, viewing, and listening assignments listed in the course schedule below are required. Please complete them *before* the week noted, as we will be discussing this material in class on those dates. In order to stay current with news events, additional (usually brief) reading assignments may be announced in class and on Canvas.

Position Paper:

Each student will be responsible for writing a paper that persuasively advocates a public-policy position on behalf of an interest group, think tank, or other stakeholder. (The process for selecting the topic and the position will be discussed at the beginning of the semester.) The position paper should be no less than 1000 words. Additionally, if you give me a week's turnaround time, I am happy to review *either* an outline of your paper *or* a draft and provide general feedback, with no impact on the grade. Top scores will be awarded to position papers that are engaging and interesting; explain the issue clearly and concisely; persuasively argue a point of view; use outside reference materials effectively and correctly; and are well-organized and free of grammatical errors. More instructions on this assignment will be provided. Maximum points possible: 100.

Simulations:

Over the course of the semester, we will hold four simulated congressional hearings and mark-ups. Each student will be randomly assigned to one of the four simulations, and assigned a role to play (member of Congress, congressional witness, lobbyist, etc). Students will need to prepare for their simulation by reading up on the issue; writing the items that the role requires (testimony, opening remarks, amendments, hearing questions, etc.); and carrying out the assigned role on the designated date in class ("testifying," asking questions of witnesses, offering/responding to amendments, etc.). More details will be provided when assignments are given. Maximum points possible: 100.

Homework Assignments:

Over the course of the semester, I will give an estimated 6-8 homework assignments, to be announced in class and on Canvas. These will vary in format, topic, point values, and deadlines (from three days to a week or so). Homework assignments are designed to give students hands-on experience with a cross-section of tasks that are common in real-life congressional and political environments; these will also allow us to capitalize on the most current news of the day. Maximum points possible: 100.

Midterm Exam:

The midterm exam, to be administered on Canvas, will test students on the material covered in the first half of the course. On the honor system, no notes or outside resources are allowed. Maximum points possible: 100.

Final Exam:

Here is SJSU's policy on [final exams](#). The final exam will test students on material covered in the second half of the course. On the honor system, no notes or outside resources are allowed. Maximum points possible: 100.

Class Preparation & Participation:

Throughout the course, I will post pop questions and discussion boards on Canvas, and assign small tasks that relate to our course work. These activities are intended to encourage students to keep current with the reading and participate actively in class discussions, which are critical to success in the course. Point values will vary but will be low-stakes. Moreover, although there is a cap on the number of participation points you can earn, I will offer more opportunities than the maximum points possible so an occasional class (or task) can be missed over the course of the semester without significant penalty. Maximum points possible: 100.

Extra Credit:

Typically, this course does not offer extra-credit opportunities, given the class' already-sizable workload. If an opportunity does arise, however, I will announce it in class and on Canvas (yet one more reason to make sure you set your Canvas alerts correctly). In addition, I may award extra-credit points (usually no more than five or 10 in total) to students who distinguish themselves by consistently, actively, positively participating in class discussions.

Grading Information:

Following are the course assignments, with associated point values. See below for further detail about each item:

Assignment	Point value
Position paper	100
Simulation	100
Homework assignments	100
Midterm	100
Final exam	100
Class preparation & participation	100
Total points possible	*600*

Determination of Grades:

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A plus	97 to 100 percent	579 to 600 points
A	92 to 96 percent	549 to 578 points
A minus	90 to 91 percent	537 to 548 points
B plus	87 to 90 percent	519 to 536 points
B	82 to 86 percent	489 to 518 points
B minus	80 to 81 percent	477 to 488 points
C plus	77 to 80 percent	459 to 476 points
C	72 to 76 percent	429 to 458 points
C minus	70 to 71 percent	417 to 428 points
D plus	67 to 70 percent	399 to 416 points
D	62 to 66 percent	369 to 398 points
D minus	60 to 61 percent	357 to 368 points

Late Work and Make-Up Policies:

In an effort to be fair to all students, late work and exam absences will be handled as follows:

Position papers are due on the date/time indicated on the Canvas assignment. Papers received after the deadline will be deducted 10 points (equivalent to one full grade) each day.

Homework assignments are due on the dates/times indicated on the Canvas assignments. A late assignment will be deducted points in accordance with the assignment's value (which will vary).

If you face a serious illness that renders you unable to complete one or more of the written work assignments described above on time, you must notify me in person or by email <u>before the assignment is due</u>. Exceptions to this are only allowed in cases of documented medical emergency.

Simulations will involve both advance written work and in-classroom role-playing. In order for simulations to work, all participants need to be present. Therefore, <u>a student's absence from class on the date of his/her assigned simulation cannot be made up and will incur a deduction of at least 50 points</u> (half the assignment's total value). For this reason, please check the date of your assigned simulation as soon as you receive it and alert me immediately if you anticipate a scheduling problem. The only excuse for missing a simulation is a <u>documented medical emergency</u>.

Exams: Students with a compelling reason requiring their absence from class on the date of the midterm or final exam must discuss this with me <u>in advance</u> and <u>have the absence pre-approved</u> - in which case we will agree on an alternate test date. Reasons that would merit a pre-approved absence are: <u>a serious medical condition, religious holiday, pre-approved university-sanctioned event or activity, military orders, or family emergency</u>. The only excuse for missing an exam without pre-approval is a <u>documented medical emergency</u>. With only these exceptions, a missed exam cannot be made up and will result in zero points. Therefore, please plan accordingly.

Class preparation & participation points cannot be made up or turned in late. As noted above, more than 100 points will be offered in order to allow an occasional missed answer/task without significant penalty.

Questions, concerns, or have a situation not addressed above? Please ask!

Classroom Protocol:

Although class attendance per se cannot be a grading factor, students who prioritize attendance in this course will be at an advantage, because material covered in class will subsequently be tested in exams. Moreover, as noted above, pop questions/discussion boards will be given/posted on Canvas - often during class time - in order to encourage students to stay current in the course reading and lectures/discussion, so those not present will be unlikely to earn those points.

I do not share my classroom slides but I will post a study guide for each main topic we discuss in class on Canvas. Students report that these are valuable study tools for exam prep and I hope you will agree.

Recording of Class and Public Sharing of Instructor Material:

Consistent with SJSU policy, because course material is my intellectual property, recording in this class is allowed only with my written permission, and will be granted only on a class-by-class basis if the student justifies the need to record the lectures. Similarly, students must obtain written permission from any guest speaker and every class member in order to record presentations or class discussions.

Political Science Departmental Writing Policy:

Students of political science should develop the ability to write in clear, grammatical English. Spelling and grammar count! Students must take care that appropriate citations are used. Direct quotations must be so indicated with quotation marks and a specific reference to the page in the source from which it was taken. Failure to cite your sources constitutes academic misconduct, which carries serious sanctions. A tutorial on citations is available at the library website [here](). For assistance with writing, please see me or contact the [Writing Center]().

Additionally: all the work produced in this class must be yours alone, and must be original to this course. If you would like to build on your own previous academic work, see me for the correct ways to do so. Failure to cite your own previous work may constitute academic misconduct.

University Policies:

As a reminder, SJSU has policies on many important topics including attendance and academic integrity. If you have questions about any of this material, please ask.

Course Schedule:

Dates	Discussion topics	Reading/Listening/Watching assignments *(All "chapter" readings refer to the textbook. All non-textbook readings have links below.)*
January 28	Introduction to the course	Syllabus
February 2, 4	Introduction to Congress Members of Congress	Read Article I of the U.S. Constitution Chapters 1, 2
February 9, 11	Four main legislative activities Internal mechanics: How a congressional office works	Chapter 5 Read this study and this blog post
February 16, 18	Internal mechanics: The people and offices that make Congress work The legislative process - part 1 (let's dissect a bill)	Chapters 6, 7, 8
February 23, 25	The legislative process - part 2 (how a bill moves) Campaigns & elections - part 1	Chapters 3, 4 Read this article and this news story
March 2, 4	Campaigns & elections - part 2 Interest groups - part 1	Chapter 13
March 9, 11	Interest groups - part 2 Congress' relationship with the executive branch	Chapters 10, 11 Read this news story
March 16, 18	**MARCH 16: SIMULATION #1** Congress' relationship with the judicial branch	Chapter 12 Read this article
March 23, 25	**MARCH 23: SIMULATION #2** **MARCH 25: SIMULATION #3**	n/a

April 6, 8	Midterm prep **APRIL 8: MIDTERM**	No assigned readings. Come with any questions or requests to review material before the midterm exam.
April 13, 15	Legislative strategies	n/a
April 20, 22	**APRIL 20: TERM PAPERS DUE** How members of Congress make voting decisions Congress & the federal budget - part 1	Chapter 9 Read this issue brief and this study Chapter 14
April 27, 29	Congress & the federal budget - part 2 **APRIL 29: SIMULATION #4**	n/a
May 4, 6	Case studies of congressional decision-making	To be assigned
May 11, 13	Is Congress broken? Proposals for reform Final exam prep	For Monday: Read this opinion piece and this opinion piece For Wednesday: Come with any questions or requests to review material before the final exam.
May 21, 9:45 am to noon	**FINAL EXAM**	

Note: This schedule is subject to change with reasonable notice provided through Canvas and/or classroom announcement.