

# GVPT 473: THE U.S. CONGRESS

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Spring 2017  
T/Th 11AM-12:15PM  
TYD 0102

Professor Frances Lee  
301-405-4339 (Office)  
Flee1@umd.edu

Office location: TYD 3140N  
Office hours: T/Th 1:30-3:30  
and by appointment

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a comprehensive introduction to the workings of the contemporary U.S. Congress. We will examine who runs for and who wins seats in Congress, the lawmaking processes in the House and Senate, and the roles of parties and leaders in the two chambers. We will take stock of the changes in the operation of the House and Senate, especially problems associated with extended debate in the Senate. We will focus on Congress's role as a policymaker. How does Congress make public policy? What factors inhibit legislative productivity? Who has input into the process? Finally, we will assess the performance of Congress. Is policymaking too partisan? Is the public's disapproval of Congress justified?

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, and Frances E. Lee. 2016. *Congress and Its Members*. 15th ed. Washington, D.C.: Sage / CQ Press.

Selected readings available online via ELMS ([www.elms.umd.edu](http://www.elms.umd.edu)). Most of the readings will be from McKeldin Library's electronic course reserves, which can be accessed under the "Modules" tab on the site. Some other readings are available in hyperlinks embedded below.

## ASSIGNMENTS

Midterm examination:	25%
Group project:	10%
Reading Quizzes (6):	15%
Term Paper:	20%
Final examination	30%

## READINGS & READING QUIZZES

Reading assignments are specified on a calendar in this syllabus. Students will be expected to have completed the assigned reading before coming to class.

Reading quizzes will be given at the beginning of class on the days we discuss some of the most important readings for the course. Quiz dates are noted on the attached schedule. These quizzes will be short and completed in the first 5 minutes of class. Students' lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

## EXAMINATIONS

Examinations will include both objective components (multiple choice or short identification items) and essays. Students will be provided with review materials to aid in preparation for the exams.

A make-up exam will only be given if justified by a written excuse accompanied by appropriate documentation. The following are legitimate reasons for requesting a make-up exam: illness (self or dependent), religious observance, participation in university sponsored activities, or compelling circumstances beyond a student's control. If none of these apply, no make-up exam will be granted.

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Course grades will be adversely affected by lack of attendance.

0-3 absences..... no penalty on grade

4+ absences ..... 3 points subtracted from course grade for each unexcused absence after 3. (An excused absence requires written documentation verifying the reason for the absence—e.g., a doctor's note or letter describing your participation in university-approved activities. A phone call or e-mail to the instructor is not enough to excuse the absence.)

Students are expected to engage with class while attending lectures and discussion section meetings. This means refraining from web surfing, texting, emailing, etc.

## GROUP PROJECTS

Students will be assigned to one of the group projects listed below.

### **Communications Strategy Project—February 28, 2017**

Students assigned to this project will be divided in two teams. Each team will act as consultants to advise a member of Congress—Mike Coffman (R-Co.)—on how to enhance his communications with constituents.

The communications strategy should do three things:

- 1) diagnose communications challenges the member faces,
- 2) identify the key groups he needs to target and ways to reach them, and
- 3) articulate the major message(s) he needs to communicate.

Each team will have 15 minutes to make its "pitch." Feel free to use whatever bells and whistles (handouts, multimedia, etc.) in your presentation that might help you sell your strategy. The team can allocate presentation responsibilities in whatever way makes sense, provided that each student speaks to the class at some point.

After each presentation, the class will pose questions to the teams of consultants. At the end of class, they will also vote on which team developed the better communications strategy.

### **Legislative Portfolio Project—March 7, 2017**

Students assigned to this project will be divided into two teams. Each will be asked to act as consultants hired to advise Sen. Chris Van Hollen, Jr. (D-MD) on developing a legislative initiative that will raise his profile both in the Senate and at home.

- 1) Identify and explain one major legislative initiative that will draw favorable attention in Congress and the state,
- 2) Articulate an argument for pushing the issue (Why is it timely now? How does it fit in with or develop the senator's image?), and
- 3) Provide advice on what the senator can do to push the issue in the current congressional environment.

Each team will have 15 minutes to make its "pitch." Feel free to use whatever bells and whistles (handouts, multimedia, etc.) in your presentation that might help you sell your strategy. The team can allocate presentation responsibilities in whatever way it chooses, provided that each person speaks to the class.

After each presentation, the class will pose questions to the teams of advisors. At the end of class, they will also vote on which team developed the better legislative portfolio.

## Debates

For each debate, students will be divided into two teams, one taking the affirmative position on the resolution, the other arguing against it. Each debate team will assign its own members' duties and responsibilities. (Each member is required to actively participate).

### Debate Format

The debate will be chaired by a student volunteer who is not a member of either debate team. The chair's duties include keeping debaters to time limits, keeping order on the panel, and recognizing questions from the floor during question time.

The debates will start with brief opening statements (7 minute limit) from each team.

Then each team will offer a rebuttal of the others arguments (3 minute limit).

Each team will then offer a closing statement (2 minute limit).

At the conclusion of the debate, the two teams will answer questions from the floor.

The class will vote on which team was more convincing in making its case.

### **On Senate filibuster — May 4, 2017**

The debate will center on this question: *Should Senate procedures be reformed so that a simple majority can bring debate to a close?* Team 1 will argue "yes" and Team 2 will argue "no."

### **On Congress's role in military affairs—May 9, 2017**

The debate will focus on this question: *Does the contemporary Congress fulfill its constitutional responsibilities over military affairs?* Team 1 will argue "yes" and Team 2 will argue "no."

## RESEARCH PAPER:

Write a 10-page research paper on one of the topics below. Papers should be double-spaced in 12-point font, with one inch margins. A separate cover page should include the student's name, date, the title of the paper, and the Honor Code pledge. Papers are due at the start of class on **May 2, 2017**. Students must document all sources used in writing the research paper according to an accepted style guide.

### **Topic 1: Representation**

Choose two members of Congress (House or Senate) from the same state. Compare and contrast their home styles and Washington styles. How are their "presentations of self" and choices in Washington shaped by electoral results, the nature of their district or state (homogeneity, heterogeneity, partisanship, etc.) and/or prior political experience?

### **Topic 2: Leadership**

Choose a leader in the contemporary Congress (Senate majority or minority leader or House Speaker, majority leader or minority leader). Analyze his/her leadership style. How centralized is decision making in the party under his/her leadership? What resources does the leader possess to influence the legislative process? What are the constraints and difficulties that the leader faces? Provide illustrative examples in your response to each of these questions.

### **Topic 3: Committee Decision Making**

Choose a standing committee of Congress (either House or Senate) to analyze. Identify its agenda in recent congresses. What are the goals and policy preferences of its membership? Does the committee's membership appear to be representative of the larger chamber? Describe the character of decision making on the committee. Is it bipartisan or partisan? Centralized or decentralized?

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

Students with disabilities who are registered with Disability Support Services (301-314-7682) are encouraged to meet with the instructor early in the semester to arrange appropriate academic accommodations.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER**

Exams will be rescheduled for the next class meeting if the university is officially closed because of inclement weather. Similarly, any assignments due should be turned in at the next class meeting. Official closures and delays are announced on the campus website (<http://www.umd.edu/>) and snow phone line (301-405-SNOW), as well as local radio and TV stations.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY & HONOR CODE PLEDGE:**

The University of Maryland, College Park has a Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information, please visit <http://www.shc.umd.edu/SHC/Default.aspx>.

Academic honesty is taken very seriously in this course. Plagiarism and any other infractions will be taken up with the appropriate university judicial proceedings.

Students should write and sign the following statement on the cover page of each paper they submit in this course, "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance ON this assignment."

## SCHEDULE OF LECTURES & ASSIGNMENTS

### **PART ONE:** REPRESENTATION AND ELECTIONS

01/26 (TH): Introduction and Congress over time

**READ:** C&M chapters 1 and 2

01/31 (T): Political ambition

**READ:** C&M chapter 3

Greenfield, Meg, *Washington* (New York: Public Affairs), 21-54. (ELMS)

Young, James Sterling, *The Washington Community: 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 41-64 (ELMS)

02/02 (TH):

Political ambition

**READ:** Fox, Richard L. and Jennifer Lawless, "To Run or Not to Run for Office: Explaining Nascent Political Ambition," *American Journal of Political Science* (July 2005): 642-659. (ELMS)

Thomsen, Danielle M. "Ideological Moderates Won't Run" *Journal of Politics* 76 (July 2014): 786-797. (ELMS)

**READING QUIZ**

02/07 (T):

Congressional elections and incumbency advantage

**READ:** Jacobson, Gary C. and Samuel Kernell, *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 19-34; 49-59. (ELMS)

**02/09 (TH):**

Congressional campaigns (ALP)

Video: "The Political Education of Maggie Lauterer"

02/14 (T):

Congressional elections

**READ:** C&M chapter 4

Fiorina, Morris P., "The (Re)Nationalization of Congressional Elections," A Hoover Institution Essay on Contemporary American Politics, 2016,

[http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/fiorina\\_renationalizationofcongressional\\_elections\\_7.pdf](http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/fiorina_renationalizationofcongressional_elections_7.pdf)

Jacobson, Gary C., "Partisanship, Money, and Competition: Elections and the Transformation of Congress Since the 1970s," *Congress Reconsidered*, 11th edition (Washington: Sage / CQ Press, 2017), 89-118. (ELMS)

**READING QUIZ**

02/16 (TH):

Representation

**READ:** C&M chapter 5

Mayhew, David R., *Congress The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 12-69.

02/21 (T):

Topic continued

**READ:** Fenno, Richard F., "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71 (3, 1977): 883-917. (ELMS)

Fenno, Richard F., *The Challenge of Congressional Representation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 138-184. (ELMS)

**READING QUIZ**

### **PART TWO:** CONGRESSIONAL ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURES

02/23 (TH):

Legislative process and strategy

**READ:** C&M chapter 8

- 02/28 (T): Congressional committees  
**READ:** C&M chapter 7  
**FIRST GROUP PROJECT: Communications strategy**
- 02/02 (TH): House floor procedure  
**READ:** Crowley, Michael, "Oppressed Minority," *The New Republic*, June 23, 2003. (ELMS)
- 03/07 (T): Senate floor procedure  
**READ:** Sinclair, Barbara, "The New World of U.S. Senators," *Congress Reconsidered*, 11th edition (Washington: CQ Press, 2017), 1-28  
**SECOND GROUP PROJECT: Legislative portfolio**
- 03/09 (TH): Congressional parties & polarization  
**READ:** McCarty, Nolan. 2014. "What We Know and Don't Know About Our Polarized Politics." *Washington Post*, January 8, 2014 (online). [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/08/what-we-know-and-dont-know-about-our-polarized-politics/?utm\\_term=.e9c755f386dd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/08/what-we-know-and-dont-know-about-our-polarized-politics/?utm_term=.e9c755f386dd)  
Lee, Frances E. "Legislative Parties in an Era of Alternating Majorities," in *Governing in a Polarized Age: Elections, Parties and Political Representation in America*, Alan S. Gerber and Eric Schickler, eds (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 115-142. (ELMS)
- 03/14 (T): **MIDTERM EXAM**
- 03/16 (TH): **Visit to class from former Rep. Martin Frost (D-TX) and Tom Davis (R-VA)**
- 03/21 (T): **SPRING BREAK**
- 03/23 (TH): **SPRING BREAK**
- 03/28 (T): Leadership in the House and Senate  
**READ:** C&M chapter 6  
Cooper, Joseph, and David W. Brady, "Institutional context and leadership style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn," *American Political Science Review* 75 (2, 1981): 411-425. (ELMS)  
Polsby, Nelson W. *How Congress Evolves: Social Bases of Institutional Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7-35 (ELMS)  
**READING QUIZ**
- 03/30 (TH): Topic continued  
**READ:** Selections from *Master of the Senate* by Caro (ELMS)

### **PART THREE: CONGRESSIONAL POLICYMAKING**

- 04/04 (T): Lobbyists' influence  
**READ:** C&M chapter 13  
Levine, Bertram J. *The Art of Lobbying: Building Trust and Selling Policy* (Washington: CQ Press, 2009), 10-50. (ELMS)
- 04/06 (TH): Individual members in the power structure (ALP)  
**READ:** C&M, Chapter 9  
Lipinski, Daniel (D-Ill.), "Navigating Congressional Policy Processes: The Inside Perspective on How Laws Are Made," *Congress Reconsidered*, 9th edition, Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, eds. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2009), 337-360 (ELMS)
- 04/11 (T): The president's influence  
**READ:** C&M chapter 10  
Lee, Frances E. 2009. *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 74-102. (ELMS)

- 04/13 (TH): Interbranch relationships  
**READ:** C&M chapters 11 & 12  
 Mayhew, David R. *Partisan Balance: Why Political Parties Don't Kill the U.S. Constitutional System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 34-79. (ELMS)  
**READING QUIZ**
- 04/18 (T): Effects of divided government  
**READ:** Binder, Sarah A. 2014. "Polarized We Govern?" Center for Effective Public Management. Brookings Institution. ([https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BrookingsCEPM\\_Polarized\\_figReplacedTextRevTableRev.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BrookingsCEPM_Polarized_figReplacedTextRevTableRev.pdf))
- 04/20 (TH): Bargaining and negotiation  
**READ:** Binder, Sarah. A. and Frances E. Lee, "Making Deals in Congress," *Political Negotiation: A Handbook*, Jane Mansbridge and Cathie Jo Martin, eds. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 91-120.  
 Waxman, Henry, *The Waxman Report* (New York: Twelve, 2009), 127-142. (ELMS).
- 04/25 (T): Congressional budgeting  
**READ:** C&M chapter 14

#### **PART FOUR: ASSESSING CONGRESS**

- 04/27 (TH): Is Congress responsive to the American public?  
**READ:** Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). (ELMS)  
 Strategy memos by Frank Luntz (under "Assignments" on ELMS course website)  
**READING QUIZ**
- 05/02 (T): Public Assessments of Congress  
**READ:** Hibbing, John R. and Christopher W. Larimer, "What the American Public Wants Congress to Be," *Congress Reconsidered*, 8th edition. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, eds. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2005), 55-75  
**DUE: RESEARCH PAPERS**
- 05/04 (TH): Does Senate procedure need reform?  
**READ:** Mayhew, David R. *Parties and Policies: How the American Government Works* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008), 273-287. (ELMS).  
 Smith, Steven S. *The Senate Syndrome*, Issues in Governance Studies, 2010,  
[https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06\\_cloture\\_smith.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06_cloture_smith.pdf).  
**THIRD GROUP PROJECT: Debate on the Senate Filibuster**
- 05/09 (T): Assessing Congress's Role in Foreign Policy  
**READ:** C&M chapters 15  
 Howell, William G. and Jon C. Pevehouse. "When Congress Stops Wars." *Foreign Affairs* 86 (5, 2007): 95-107.  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=26258102&site=ehost-live>  
**FOURTH GROUP PROJECT: debate on Congress's role in military affairs**
- 05/11 (TH): Assessing Congress's Role in American Democracy  
**READ:** C&M chapters 16  
 Mayhew, David R., *Parties and Politics: How the American Government Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 227-272
- 5/13 (SAT) **FINAL EXAM, 8:00AM-10:00AM**