

POLS 4340 – Congress and Legislation

Instructor: Lucas Lothamer

Time: T/Th 2:00-3:20p

Location: Cowan Fine Arts 2006

Office Hours: T/Th 9:00-10:30a & 12:30-1:30p and by appointment

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Course Description: Congress is overwhelmed! It is a dinosaur of an institution designed to handle simple, 18th century problems trying to tackle divisive issues in the 21st century. As time has passed Congress now lacks the resources, expertise, and the confidence of the people to do its most fundamental job – legislate! In this class we will cover how Congress was initially conceived, its leadership throughout time from its beginning to modern day, and its organizational structure and principles of governance. We will move on to discuss how the expectations of the people have evolved, how issues have become more complex and difficult to understand, how external actors now seek to exert power over its elected members, and how Congress is starved for much needed resources if it is to act on the wishes of their constituents.

Time Management

In order to do well in this course you **MUST** take responsibility for your work habits and ensure you do all the work. In other words, if you start to neglect your work, put things off, and fall behind it will be extremely difficult to do well in this course. For that reason, it is imperative you regularly check your email and make a plan on when you will work on your assignments, ensuring they will be completed by the posted deadline. Additionally, you should plan to study and prepare for all posted exams and the final.

Communication

I am always available to chat and happy to meet with students. If you ever need to chat you can either stop by during office hours or email me to make an appointment (either in office or online). You can also email me with any questions or concerns. When emailing, please allow 24 hours for a response (emails over weekends may not be responded to till Monday).

Be sure to only email me using your student email account. Due to FERPA, I will not be able to respond with course information to personal email accounts.

Assigned Readings

There are two books assigned for this course (listed below):

LaPira, Timothy M., Lee Drutman, and Kevin R. Kosar. 2020. *Congress Overwhelmed: The Decline in Congressional Capacity and Prospects for Reform* (First Edition). Chicago: Chicago University Press

Johnson, Michael S. and Jerome F. Climer. 2024. *Fixing Congress: Restoring Power to the People*. New York: Morgan James Publishing.

Both books are available in the bookstore, though you may be able to find cheaper options online. Any other readings such as academic articles will be made available in Canvas.

Course Attendance Policy

Students are heavily encouraged to come to every class to both participate in class discussion and take notes on all new material. Doing so drastically increases your likelihood of performing well on exams. Additionally, everyone is expected to be respectful and courteous throughout the course.

Assignments

Participation - 10%

Congress Paper & Presentation - 35%

- Paper topic - 5%
- Introduction - 10%
- Final Paper - 15%
- Group Presentation - 5%

Exam 1 - 15%

Exam 2 - 15%

Final Exam - 25%

Participation – The grade for this portion will be determined by your contribution to class discussion. This is NOT merely an attendance grade. Rather, students are expected to have done the reading and be prepared to discuss them in class. Students who make a good faith effort to come to class prepared, answer and ask questions, and participate in all class activities will receive an A for this portion of the grade.

Congress Paper & Presentation – This assignment has multiple parts and encompasses each student taking on the role of a U.S. congressional member and undertake an effort to get a bill passed through the full senate. Students will write a short paragraph explaining the topic the student intends to research (5%), write a 2-5 page paper fully detailing and explaining the problem (10%), add to this by proposing a solution to the problem, explaining any potential drawbacks opponents to the solution may raise, and why the solution is still warranted (2-5 pages) 15%. Students will be placed in a group assignment (committee) and work to decide which policy or policies they wish to vote out to the floor (class) 5%. Following presentations, the Senate (class) will meet to discuss legislation and vote on each bill.

Exams – There will be two in-class exams (Exam 1 & Exam 2) each worth 15% of your final grade. These exams will consist of open-ended and essay style questions that test students about material discussed in class.

Final Exam – There will be a take-home final exam which will be handed out following the last class day (11/20) before the Thanksgiving holiday. Students will be asked to write a 5-10 page essay addressing an open-ended prompt. There is no right or wrong answer to this prompt. Rather, students will be assessed based on the originality of their arguments, their use of course readings, their thoroughness in displaying their knowledge and mastery of the course material and their ability to use it to formulate an argument regarding the role of Congress in modern politics. More detailed

instructions for this assignment will be given when the prompt is distributed to students following the last class day.

Letter Grades

Final letter grades for this class will be awarded as shown below:

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 59 and below

I will round up to the nearest decimal point using .5 as the cutoff. This means students ending with an 89.5 will be rounded up to a 90. I will not make any exceptions to this policy.

Disability Services

I will abide by all accommodations approved by the university to ensure fair accessibility. It is the student's responsibility to meet with the instructor and inform them of the necessary accommodation on or around the first day of class. Do not wait to do so right before an exam!

To apply for services please follow the link below:

<https://www.uttyler.edu/academics/success-services/disability-services/>

Title IX Reporting

The University of Texas at Tyler is committed to the principle that the university's learning and working environment be free from inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment in any form will not be tolerated and individuals who engage in such conduct will be subjected to disciplinary action, whether on or off campus. I will report any and all behavior that fits the definition of sexual harassment to the appropriate office.

On-Campus Food Pantry

The Patriot Pantry is dedicated to helping students, staff, faculty and community members in need. Its mission is to provide food and personal care items to members of the UT Tyler community. Our pantry is completely donor funded, and it is our goal that no student goes to class hungry! For more information please visit <https://www.uttyler.edu/offices/service-learning/food-pantry/>

Student Counseling

Ut Tyler provides in-person and online counseling services to students. For more information please visit <https://www.uttyler.edu/student-life/health-wellness/student-counseling-center/>

Academic Dishonesty

I take cheating or plagiarism very seriously. If a student is suspected of academic dishonesty, the classroom instructor may ask the student to meet with him or her to discuss the incident. A student may admit to allegations of academic dishonesty, waive the right to a hearing and accept penalties

imposed by the instructor. The student may also deny all allegations and ask to see the Dean of Student Affairs. An accused student may accept the decision of the Dean of Student Affairs or ask for a hearing before an impartial hearing officer appointed by the university. Witnesses may be called and evidence presented. The hearing officer will consider all evidence and make a decision. The decision of the hearing officer may be appealed to the President by either the student or the Dean of Student Affairs. For a discussion of possible penalties, please see <http://www.utt Tyler.edu/mainsite/conduct.html>.

Academic dishonesty includes any instance where a student attempts to ignore exam instructions or to pass off material from a third party (including AI) as their own. When in doubt whether something consists of cheating or plagiarism please ask me!

Students Rights and Responsibilities

To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: <http://www.utt Tyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php> (Links to an external site.)

Artificial Intelligence Policy

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

AI is not permitted in this course at all. I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values.

Course Schedule

The following is the planned schedule for the semester. While I do not foresee any changes to this, I reserve the right to make necessary changes to the syllabus in order to accommodate unforeseen events or due to the pace of the course.

8/26 – Go over syllabus/class expectations

8/28 – Why We Hate Congress

Readings: Introduction of *Fixing Congress* (p. 1-7)

Introduction in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 1-10)

9/2 – Why Congress?

Readings: Chapter 1 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 9-20)

9/4 – Brief History of Congressional Development and Operation

Readings: Interview with Joseph Postell

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/blog/the-four-eras-of-congress-evolution-and-devolution/#:~:text=I%20argue%20that%20Congress%20has,described%20as%20%E2%80%9Cbubble%20town.%E2%80%9D>

Email paper topic to me no later than 9/6 by 11:59 pm CST

9/9 – Leadership, Structure and Sources of Power

Readings: Ch. 3 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 31-55)

9/11 – No Class (work on introduction of paper!)

9/16 – Constituencies, Campaigns, and Rules Affecting Congress

Readings: Ch. 7 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 87-109)

9/18 – Why Lawmaking Does (and Does Not) Happen

Readings: Ch. 5 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 67-75)

Ch. 6 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 77-85)

9/23 – Congressional Capacity and Legislative Functions

Readings: Ch. 2 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 11-33)

9/25 – Review for Exam 1

Introduction of paper due in Canvas by 9/25 at 11:59pm CST

9/30 – Exam 1

10/2 – Issues, Rules, and Dynamics Behind the Capacity Problem

Readings: Ch. 11 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 177-190)

Ch. 12 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 191-208)

10/7 – Go over Exam 1 & Congress and Special Interest Groups

Readings: Ch. 10 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 169-185)

10/9 – Congressional Staff

Readings: Ch. 4 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 57-65)

Ch. 13 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 209-224)

10/14 – Congress and the Presidency

Readings: Ch. 4 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 51-71)

10/16 – Centralization and Capacity

Readings: Ch. 14 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 225-238)

10/21 – Death of Bipartisanship?

Readings: Ch. 15 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 239-252)

10/23 – Efforts to Reform Congress

Readings: Ch. 14 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 241-263)

Ch. 16 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 255-267)

Final Paper due in Canvas by 10/25 at 11:59pm CST

10/28 – Should Congress be Reformed?

Readings: Ch. 15 of *Fixing Congress* (p. 265-269)

Ch. 17 in *Congress Overwhelmed* (p. 268-276)

10/30 – Review for Exam 2 and assign groups

11/4 – Exam 2

11/6 – Break into groups and begin group work

11/11 – Go over Exam 2 and continue Group work

11/13 – Group work and finalize presentation order

11/18 – Group presentations

11/20 – Floor action, deliberation, voting

11/25 & 11/27 – Thanksgiving Holiday! (No Class)

12/02 – 12/11 – Complete take-home final exam

- Final exam **MUST** be emailed to me no later than 12/11 at 11:59pm CST