

**PS 1214: U.S. Congress**  
Spring 2020

1:00-2:15 TTh  
213 Cathedral of Learning

Instructor: Jacob Schiller  
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Office Hours: 10:00-12:00 Wednesday, or by appointment

Congress scholar Richard F. Fenno, Jr. claimed in 1973 that all legislators held three goals: reelection, institutional influence, and good public policy. Since that time, few researchers studying Congress have questioned Fenno's assertion. In this class, we will consider the question of how individual legislators balance these three goals. In our attempt to answer that question, we will examine how legislators lead two political lives: one in their districts or states, and one on Capitol Hill. Sometimes these lives are distinct, but often they overlap. We will focus on what roles voters and fellow legislators play in the daily lives of legislators and how those relationships have changed since Fenno first made his claim.

A large part of your course work will revolve around a semester-long congressional simulation. The simulation is meant to give you a taste of how real legislators balance their goals. I expect that the simulation will be fun, and that it will be an opportunity for each student to apply the material we have learned in class. Because of the nature of the simulation and because the success of the class hinges on student participation, it is necessary that you keep current on the reading and attend each class ready to contribute.

**Books**

Books are available for purchase at the University Book Center.

Required:

Davidson, Oleszek, Lee, and Schickler (DOLS). *Congress and Its Members*, 17<sup>th</sup> ed. CQ Press.

Stewart. *Analyzing Congress*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. W.W. Norton.

## Course requirements

Although there is no prerequisite for this class, I expect that all members of the class will have some background in American politics. At the same time, specific knowledge of Congress is not a requirement. Further, I assume that all members of the class have an inherent interest in politics, or can at least fake such an interest for a few months. I expect all students to read a national newspaper (or online version) every day, as a source for political and electoral information.

All of the readings listed in the syllabus are required and should be completed before the class for which they are assigned. If you suspect you will not be attending class every day having done the readings and being ready to participate, you should drop the course now.

## Grades

Your grade is based on three components, weighted below.

Examinations	50%
Short assignments	10%
Simulation	40%

## Examinations

There are four examinations in this class. The midterms and the final exams will be “multiple-choice plus” format. Questions are in traditional multiple choice format, but a complete answer will include both the correct choice *and* a 3-4 sentence justification for that choice. Your grade for each answer is based equally on the choice and the justification. The good news: if you get a question wrong, but your justification shows some understanding of the subject matter, you get partial credit. The bad news: if you get a question right, but your justification is either wrong or absent, you get partial credit. The midterm will have ten questions, and the final will have twenty questions.

The fourth exam is a mini-exam on legislative procedure. The exam will be a traditional multiple choice format; here, I don’t care why you think it is right. The materials on this exam will be limited to those covered in the lectures on procedure and the sections in the books on legislative process. The exam will focus on the substantive, rather than the theoretical, side of legislative process.<sup>1</sup>

All of your examinations will be taken in class. They are NOT open book exams, though: Please do not consult other materials when you take these exams. You will have an hour to take each midterm, and two hours for the final; you will have 20 minutes for the mini-exam.

Therefore, the 50% of your grade based on exams is divided in the following manner:

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<sup>1</sup> Definition: The theoretical stuff is the stuff in the homework. The substantive stuff is the stuff from lecture and reading.

Midterm exams	20% (10% each)
“Mini-exam”	5%
Final exam	25%

*Will this be on the test?:* You’ll never have to ask this question in this class. I don’t believe in guessing games, so I tell you exactly what will be on the test at the beginning of each class session. I start out with a slide titled “Objectives.” These are the things *you* ought to be able to do by the end of the class. If you can do all those things, you’re set. That’s what’s on the test.

Homework

You will receive four problem sets<sup>2</sup> based on information from the Stewart book. These will be graded and handed back to you. Please feel free to work with one or two other people from the class. If you opt to do so, each of you should hand in your own copy of the homework, and you should note the names of the other people with whom you worked. Homework assignments will be available on the course web site. Due dates are noted on the schedule section of this syllabus.

Problem sets	10%
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Simulation

A good deal of our class time this semester will be devoted to a simulation of an actual session of Congress. Fully 40 percent of your grade is based on simulation activities. Each person in this class will play the role of a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. You will write bills, attend committee meetings, construct a strategy for dealing with constituents, and attempt to get positive attention from the “press.”

Your grade on the simulation will be based on three written assignments and on your level of participation in the simulation. First, you will write a district profile, describing your congressional district. Second, you will write an agenda, explaining your strategy for the simulation. And last, you will write a bill and an accompanying “Dear Colleague” letter explaining to your colleagues in the House and Senate why they should support the bill. Your participation grade will be based solely on the number of “power” points you accumulate over the course of the semester. See the simulation overview at the course web site for more information.

The 40% of your grade based on the simulation, then, is divided in the following manner:

District profile	10%
Agenda	10%
Bill	10%
Participation	10%

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<sup>2</sup> Problem sets? You mean like in a math class? Why, yes. Yes, I do.

## Course policies

*Students with disabilities:* If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, (412)648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412)228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

*Grading:* Again, I don't believe in guessing games. I make up fairly detailed grading rubrics for each assignment, and I grade accordingly. You can access these rubrics on CourseWeb.

*Attendance:* Students are responsible for attending class every day and understanding the material for that day. Yes, it *will* be on the test. That said, I will not regularly take attendance. Please do not attend class if you are not willing to pay attention, or at least to pretend to pay attention. (I can, in fact, see that newspaper you are reading.) If you prefer not to engage the material, please feel free to skip the class as much as you like. Doing so will make your work very poor, and therefore much easier for me to assess.

*Cheating:* Don't even try it. Seriously. If I catch you (and I will do everything in my power to catch cheaters), I will follow university procedures for reporting your offense. You will also receive a failing grade for the *course*. Read that last part again: You will fail the course, not just the assignment for which you went over to the Dark Side. You can familiarize yourself with the University of Pittsburgh's Code of Academic Integrity here: <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>. Know it.

*Late work:* I do not accept late work, nor do I reschedule exams, unless you have a *documented* excuse. If you know you will have trouble getting to the exams or coming to your assigned discussion date, you would be wise to drop the class now.

*Incompletes:* It is my policy not to give incompletes. I do so only in rare circumstances, such as a documented illness. (Note: Getting tired of school at the end of the term is not rare, and therefore is not a valid excuse for an incomplete.) Asking for an incomplete except in the direst of circumstances beyond your control only eats away at the precious moments we both have on earth.

*Cheating:* Seriously, don't do it. I've reported people before and I'll do it again. I firmly believe that the vast majority of students are honest, hard-working folks who wouldn't even think of cheating. And I'll get a real job where I actually have to produce something useful before I undermine the efforts of the honest majority by letting cheaters get away with it. Anyway, you will feel really bad if you have to live with yourself after such deceitful behavior. I don't want that for you. And neither do you.

## Topics and assigned readings

Jan 7: Course overview<sup>3</sup>

Jan 9: A standard introduction to Congressional behavior  
Read DOLS Ch. 1  
DISTRICT AND PARTY PREFERENCES DUE

Jan 14: A non-standard introduction: The unidimensional spatial model  
Read Stewart, Ch. 1 (pp. 1-23, 47-49)

Jan 16: Constitutional origins of Congress  
Read Stewart, Ch. 2 and Appendix B

Jan 21: The evolution and development of Congress  
Read Stewart, Ch. 3 and DOLS Ch. 2  
HOMEWORK ONE DUE

Jan 23: The multi-dimensional spatial model  
Read Stewart Ch. 1 (pp. 23-47)

Jan 28, 30: Candidacy decisions  
Read Stewart, Ch. 4 and DOLS Ch. 3  
DISTRICT PROFILE DUE JAN 28  
HOMEWORK TWO DUE JAN 30

Feb 4: MIDTERM ONE

Feb 6, 11: Voters and the constituency connection  
Read Stewart, Ch. 5 and DOLS Ch. 5  
LEADERSHIP SELECTION DUE BY FEB 6

Feb 13, 18: Parties and leaders  
Read Stewart, Ch. 7 and DOL, Ch. 6  
LEADERSHIP ANNOUNCES COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Feb 20, 25: Elections  
Read Stewart, Ch. 6 and DOL, Ch. 4  
AGENDA DUE FEB 25

Feb 27: MIDTERM TWO

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<sup>3</sup> If you have followed my instructions and read this far, the magic number is 7.7. Remember this.

Mar 3: Special Topics in Congress  
Read TBD

Mar 5: Committees in Congress  
Read DOL, Ch. 7 and Stewart, Ch. 8

Mar 10, 12: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

Mar 17, 19: Legislative process  
Read Stewart, Ch. 9 and DOL Chs. 8 & 9  
BILLS DUE Mar 17

Mar 24: PROCESS MINI-EXAM/ SIMULATION

Mar 26, 31: SIMULATION – FLOOR DEBATE

Apr 2, 7, 9, 14: SIMULATION – FLOOR DEBATE  
PROBLEM SET THREE DUE APR 2  
PROBLEM SET FOUR DUE APR 9

Apr 16: FINAL EXAM 12/14