POSC 333: The President and Congress
University of Tennessee at Martin
Fall 2013

Meeting time: MWF 12-12:50 pm
Meeting place: 33 Business Administration

Instructor: Dr. Bryan Parsons
Office: 20 Business Administration
Office Hours: MW 2-5 pm
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Course Description

This course is designed to provide a broad overview of the institutions of the American Congress and Presidency. Although the topics covered this semester are often divided into two courses, we will address the conflicts that arise when these two institutions in the American political system.

The course is divided into three parts. The first four weeks will provide an overview of the American Congress including topics such as, the electoral incentives of members of Congress and the role of parties in constraining legislative behavior. The second three weeks will provide an overview of the American Presidency including topics such as, the evolution of the constitutional powers of the president and theories of presidential power. The remaining eight weeks of the course will examine how these two institutions interact, cooperate, and frequently experience significant conflict in the policymaking process.

Required Course Texts


*Additional readings will be assigned throughout the semester and are listed in the course schedule. Some readings will be made available on Blackboard and others are available online.

Course Grades and Requirements

This course is an upper-level reading and discussion seminar. Students are expected to complete all of the assigned readings before class and arrive prepared to discuss the week's topic. Students will be evaluated by the following criteria:

1. **Attendance (40 points)** Students are required to attend all class meetings. Students can earn 1 point for each attended, which amounts to 40 points of the overall course point total.
2. **Midterm (100 points)** Your mid-semester progress will be evaluated by an open-book midterm examination. Make-up exams will be given only in extreme circumstances (verifiable proof of emergency is required) and on a case-by-case basis determined by me, and at my convenience.

3. **Analytical papers (250 points)** Students will complete five short analytical writing assignments (50 points each) based on various topics and/or in-class exercises throughout the semester. These assignments will often involve a short summary of reading assignments combined with an application to real-world political conflicts.

   *Paper Guidelines:* Follow all instructions provided with each writing assignment. All papers must be typed and double-spaced in Times New Roman 12pt font with 1” page margins on all sides. Put your name on the first line and start the paper on the second line - no exceptions. I expect the paper to use coherent spelling and grammar. *Any paper not meeting these requirements will be penalized accordingly.* As always, any time you reference an external source, a complete bibliography must be included at the end of the paper.¹

   All papers must be submitted to me in class on the due date (see course schedule). **I will not accept e-mailed papers unless you have received permission from me in advance.**

4. **Group project (150 points)** Students will complete a semester-long small group project on a substantive topic relevant to presidential-congressional problem solving (based on the Adler and Wilkerson text) and present their findings in an oral presentation as a final exam. The project will consist of a paper (75 points) and oral presentation (75 points).

**Grading and Late Assignments**

A = 90-100   B = 80-89   C = 70-79   D = 60-69   F = 59 and below

There are a total of 540 points available in this course. Your final grade will be calculated using the following formula: \( \text{Final grade} = \frac{\text{points}}{540} \times 100 \)

Course grades at the end of the semester will be rounded up a half-point if they are at .5 or higher. For example, an 89.5 will become a 90 and an A. However, an 89.499 is a B. There will be no other adjusting of grades or curving of grades. If you send me an e-mail asking to increase your grade from a B (89.49) to an A (89.50), I will say no.

**Course Conduct**

**Students with disabilities** should contact me during the first week of the session about their needs and any assistance or arrangements that may be necessary. Students with disabilities should also contact the Office of Disabilities Services (ODS) at 731.881.7719 to learn about the programs and services the University provides. Additional information can be found online.

**Cheating and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated.**² Students’ work in this course is expected to be their own. The University’s commitment to academic integrity is detailed in the Standards of Conduct.

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¹You can use either the bibliographic styles of the American Political Science Association or American Psychological Association.

²If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please feel free to ask me. Also, there are several websites that offer helpful information and provide different examples of plagiarism, as well as some tips on how to avoid it. For example, see www.plagiarism.org.
Information on violations of academic honesty and integrity and the University’s punishments for these violations can be found in the responsibility to be aware of and adhere to the Standards of Conduct, which can be found online.

**Please put all mobile phone on silent (or vibrate) mode.** Use of your mobile phone in class serves as a distraction to you and your classmates. If I observe you using your mobile phone in class (e.g., texting), I will ask you to leave class for the day. Also, keep side conversations to a minimum. If your conversation with your friend next to you becomes distracting to me (most likely) or your classmates, I will ask you to leave class.

**Compose professional e-mails.** As faculty members at an institution of higher learning, one of our jobs is to sufficiently prepare you with skills that will be valuable in the real world and in your career. One of said skills is the ability to effectively communicate in writing, as you will be doing so with future colleagues, employees, and/or employers. The past several years, I have noticed students communicating with me (and other faculty) in a less-than-professional manner. Read these tips for: composing professional e-mails.

**Course Schedule**

Revisions to the schedule may be made and additional readings may be assigned at my discretion. Readings should be completed before we begin each topic.


Week 2 [9.2-9.6] Theories of presidential power and leadership.

- 9.2 - No class, Labor Day.


• **Monday, 9.16, assignment 1 due.**


• Davidson, Roger H. “The Presidency and Congressional Time.” In Rivals for Power, ch 5.
• Adler and Wilkerson, “Problem-Focused Voters and Congressional Accountability,” ch 2.

Week 6 [9.30-10.4] Party politics in Congress.

• **Monday, 9.30, assignment 2 due.**

Week 7 [10.7-10.11] The politics of problem solving in Congress.

• **Friday, 10.11, midterm examination.**


• **10.14 - No class, fall break.**

• **Friday, 10.18, assignment 3 due.**

  
  
  

Week 9 [10.21-10.25] Budgetary politics in presidential-congressional relations.


• Adler and Wilkerson, “Rethinking Committee Reform,” ch 6.


• Sides, John, “Presidential Patronage Makes for Bad Managers,” The Monkey Cage , April 22, 2013.


Week 11 [11.4-11.8] Constitutional conflicts between the president and Congress.


• **Monday, 11.11, assignment 4 due.**

• Oleszek, Mark J., and Walter J. Oleszek. “Congress and President Obama: A Perspective.”
• Patty, John, “Want It Now? Oh, We’ll Give It To You... Later,” Math of Politics, July 16, 2013.


• 11.27-11.29 - No class, Thanksgiving.
• Monday, 11.25, assignment 5 due.
• Patty, John, “A Byrd in the Hand, or the 3 R’s of the Senate: Reid, Rules, & Retribution,” Math of Politics, July 12, 2013.

• Friday, 12.6, group research paper due.
• Thurber, James A. “Assessing Presidential-Congressional Relations: A Need for Reform?” In Rivals for Power, ch 15.

Group presentations will be held during scheduled final exam: see here