So, let’s be honest; Congress these days doesn’t rank too high on people’s lists of most trusted institutions. According to many, what is supposed to be the “people’s branch” of government has drifted from its founding principles. Among other things, it is said that our national legislature doesn’t get enough done, is too controlled by unrepresentative interests and exhibits unreasonable levels of conflict and partisanship. In addition, too many members of the legislature manage to get themselves involved in scandals.

Are these charges fair? Is the branch of government to which the founders granted the most power and expected to be the most representative really doing such a poor job?

With a primary focus on the U.S. Congress, this course seeks to take a closer look to analyze these and related questions about how the U.S. Congress really works and to provide an introduction to the understanding of legislative processes.

The course is organized into three sections: 1.) the historical background and internal workings of Congress, 2.) the role of Congress as the representative voice of the people in their districts, and 3.) the role of Congress as an actor in the broader U.S. political system.

Within each of these areas, we will consider broader themes. Given that Congress is designed to be the “representative” branch of government, we will be examining in detail the complexity of the term “representation” and will be evaluating how representative we think the current U.S. Congress really is.

Second, there has been considerable change in the internal power structure of Congress as it has moved from a relative oligarchy in the 1950s and 1960s, to a chamber of “independent entrepreneurs” during the 1970s and 1980s, to a body dominated by strong partisanship in recent years. We will examine the reasons for these changes and consider their implications for American public policy.

Finally, throughout, we will be discussing the life of a congressperson: What does the job entail, what motivates individual members of Congress, and what implications do these characteristics of legislators have for the larger system of governance?

Therefore, the learning objectives of the course are to:

a. Develop a solid understanding of how the U.S. Congress and its legislators actually function
b. Compare/contrast the advantages/disadvantages of alternative forms of political representation and their consequences.

c. With reference to the historical roots, identify and evaluate the changes that have taken place in Congress over the last several decades.

d. Compare and contrast similarities and differences between the House, Senate and to a lesser extent other legislatures.

e. Compare/contrast alternative ways by which individual citizens and groups might influence members of Congress.

f. Locate yourself on continua: Where do you stand on some of the controversies and debates we will be discussing?

Books and Readings
There is no single text for this course but a variety of articles, book chapters and alternative perspectives on Congress are on blackboard and make up most of the reading material for this class. You are expected to complete at least one reading prior to the vast majority of class sessions. In addition, please purchase Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein, It's Even Worse Than It Looks (2012).

Some of the books that I have taken several readings from include:

Requirements

1. Two Midterm exams: (10/8), 15% and (11/12), 20%
2. Take Home Final Exam: (8 –10 pages; due Monday 12/15), 25%
3. 5 short papers (1.5 to 2 pages), 20%
4. Participation (attendance, discussion, occasional short writing assignments) and quizzes (both announced and unannounced), 20%

Note: For the series of short papers, you will be following a legislator (House Representative, Senator or State Legislator) throughout the course of the semester. You can either select a person of interest to you or you will be assigned a member of Congress. For each short paper (generally 1.5 to 2 pages), you will be collecting factual information about your legislator’s behavior illustrating important theories explored during the course. The purpose of the papers is to test out how concepts and ideas we study in class apply to the particular congress member you have chosen. Alternatively, some assignments may ask you to compare your legislator with the behavior of others or to think through concerns about broader aspects of Congress. Details and requirements for each assignment will be explained in class, and the directions for paper #1 are at the end of this syllabus. Please note that, for purposes of the short papers, any material taken directly or word for word from an outside source must be explicitly quoted and all sources must be cited in a bibliography. Papers
should be turned in via e-mail. The first paper will be due September 5. Thereafter, a paper will be due approximately every other week. Since your job is to do five, you can pick and choose topics, so you can spread the papers out across the semester. The papers must be turned in on time; you cannot wait till the end of the term to turn in all papers!

**Note:** Papers will be graded on a continuum from “minus” to “check” to “plus” (thus a scale of “1” to “5”).

**Plagiarism and Academic Honesty**

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me before submitting assignments for grading. Plagiarism violations will result in disciplinary action. Additionally, it goes without saying that students are expected to meet the broader standards of academic honesty expected of students at a major university.

See link on University policy: [http://www.albany.edu/eas/104/penalty.htm](http://www.albany.edu/eas/104/penalty.htm)

See also the UAlbany Library “Plagiarism 101” Tutorial: [http://library/albany.edu/usered/tut.html](http://library/albany.edu/usered/tut.html)

**Students with Disabilities**

If you need any class accommodations due to a disability, please utilize University resources as needed, and please let the professor know well in advance of any assignments requiring accommodation(s). It is a function of the University to provide such accommodations as needed.

**Class Topics and Readings**

* All readings except Mann/Ornstein are available on Blackboard.
** Dates subject to change depending on progress and interest; exam due dates are fixed.

**Part I: Introduction and Basic concepts (8/25-9/5)**

8/25: Introduction
8/27: Criteria to Evaluate congress
8/29: Issue Debate: CQ Researcher: Student Aid
  What role did Congress play on this issue? How did the role of Congress compare to that of other government institutions? What about actors outside government, e.g. the public, interest groups, etc.? What would you have liked these roles to be? What should happen next?
9/3 Basic concepts:
  Davidson, Oleszek and Lee, Ch. 1, *Congress and Its Members*
9/5 **First paper due/discussion of member backgrounds**
Part II: Inside Congress (9/8-10/10)

Week 3 Historical Development (9/8-9/12)
9/8 Zelizer Ch. 1 “From the Old Congress to the New,” The American Congress: The Building of Democracy
Zelizer Bios: Madison
9/10 Zelizer Ch. 3 “Democracy, Gentility, and Lobbying,” The American Congress: The Building of Democracy
Burden, Ch. 1 The Personal Roots of Representation (Princeton University Press, 2007),
Zelizer Bios: Clay, Webster, Calhoun, and Sumner

Week 4 Party and Party Leaders 9/15-9/19
9/15 Davidson, Oleszek and Lee, Ch. 6
9/17 Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein, It’s Even Worse Than It Looks (2012), preface- ch. 3
9/19 Robert Draper, ch. 1 When the Tea Party Came to Town
Zelizer Bios: Cannon and O’Neil
**Second Paper Due**

Week 5 Committees and Formal Rules (9/22-9/29)
9/22 Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee, Ch. 7
9/24 Frey, Ch. 25 Lehman, Inside the House: Former Members Reveal How Congress Really Works
Hall and Weyman, "Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias" The American Congress Reader, Steven S. Smith, Jason M. Roberts and Ryan J. Vander Wielen, eds. (2009)
Zelizer Bios: Chisholm
9/26 Davidson, Oleszek and Lee, Ch. 8
9/29 Ellis and Nelson, Ch. 12: “Resolved, Senate Rule XXII should be amended so that filibusters can be ended by a majority vote,” PRO: Steven S. Smith; CON: Wendy J. Schiller, Debating Reform
10/1 Class simulation part 1 (CQ Researcher article on issue of our choice for class simulation and
**One Page position paper due by e-mail before class)**
10/3 Class simulation cont. (part 2)
Zelizer bios: Rankin, Lodge, Powell
**Third Paper Due**

Week 7 review and first exam (10/6-10/10)
10/6 Kingdon, “Models of Legislative Voting,” The American Congress Reader
Frey, Ch. 8 Downy, Ch. 16 Bartlet, Ch. 36 and 28 Frey, Ch 30 Whitehurst, Inside the House: Former Members Reveal How Congress Works
10/8 **First Midterm**
10/10 No Class
Part III: Constituencies, Elections and Representation (10/13-11/14)

Week 8 Overview: Creating Districts and Getting Candidates to Run In Them
10/13 Overview; No reading
10/15 Davidson, Oleszek and Lee, Ch. 3, p. 41-56
10/17 Davidson, Oleszek and Lee, Chapter 3 pp. 56-63
Fowler and McClure, Ch. 4 and 5.

Week 9 Campaigns and Elections (10/20-10/24)
10/20 Jacobson Ch 3 “Candidates” The Politics of Congressional Elections
10/22 Jacobson Ch 4 “Campaigns” The Politics of Congressional Elections
10/24 **Fourth Paper Due**

Week 10 Home Style (10/27-10/31)
10/27 Friedman, Ch. 1 and 6, Dilemmas of Representation (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007)
Daniel M. Butler and David E. Broockman, Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators: American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 55, No. 3 (July 2011), pp. 463-477 Published by:
10/31 Women and Minorities in Congress,
**Fifth Paper Due**

Week 11 Reforming the Constituency Connection( 11/3-11/7)
11/3 Jacobson, ch. 5, The Politics of Congressional Elections (voters)
11/5 Election Simulation;
**Mandatory 1 page position statement; issue of our choice**
11/7 Ellis and Nelson, Ch. 7: “Resolved: proportional representation should be adopted for U.S. House elections,” PRO: Douglas J. Amy; CON: Mark Rush, Debating Reform
**Sixth Paper Due**

Week 12 review and second exam( 11/10-11/14)
11/12 **Second Midterm**
11/14 No Class

Part IV: Congress and the Larger Political System

Weeks 13-14 (11/17-11/24)
11/17 Davidson Chapter 10
11/19-11/21 CQ Researchers examining specific issue debates involving governmental institutions: what role for Congress?
**Seventh Paper Due**
11/24 Davidson Chapter 12

Weeks 15-16  Reforming Congress?
12/1 Ellis and Nelson, Ch. 9: “Resolved, the size of the House should be changed to 675 seats, **PRO:** Brian Fredericks; **CON:** G. Lawrence Evans, *Debating Reform*
Weissburg, “Collective vs Dyadic Representation in Congress” *The American Congress Reader*
12/3: How to Make Congress work Better Mann and Ornstein, ch. 4-end of book
12/5  **Eighth Paper Due and review**
12/8 Wrap up and final exam handed out,
12/15 **Final Exam Due.**

Short Paper Topics and Deadlines

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* Please note that although you have choice of topics, you are required to hand in at least 2 of the five papers BY 10/25
* Paper topics can only be submitted on the due dates outlined, they will not be accepted past this date.

**Paper #1: Member Backgrounds (mandatory for all)**

Due: 9/5
Approx. 2 pages.
Send via e-mail to sfriedman2@albany.edu
Note: if you e-mail as an attachment, please send as a “doc”, “docx”, “txt” or “rtf” file.
Note: use at least two sources.

**Suggested Sources:** websites of legislators (www.house.gov or www.senate.gov), campaign websites, *Almanac of American Politics* or *Politics in America* (reference section in library), the Thomas.gov website or material you obtain from searching the web; Lexis-Nexus is also a possibility. All directly quoted material needs to be in quotes and properly cited, and all sources used also need to be cited.

**Influence of Member Background:** Select a member of a legislature at the state or national level. The legislator may or may not represent your district and may or may not be from New York. Find out as much as you can about his/her background—family and roots, education, prior political experience, etc. Also research a few of the legislator’s major accomplishments in office. What is he known for? What does she spend time working on? What does he tell constituents he/she has accomplished? Based on this analysis, in what ways do you think that the background of the legislator has or has not influenced his/her activity as a public official?