Regardless of your point of view, it’s a new president, and he finds himself in the historically unusual and for him happy situation of having a majority of each House of Congress controlled by his party.

Will Republicans hang together to pass the president’s agenda? What kind of opposition will the Democrats provide? More generally, what incentives do individual members have to toe the party line or when do they seek to go it alone? What factors impact the relationship between Congress and the president, and what of tried and true factors like connections between legislators and their constituents??

Questions like these take center stage when examining the U.S. Congress. Thus this course, an introduction to the workings of the legislative process, 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 sections, we will consider broader themes. Given that Congress is designed to be the “people’s branch” and the “representative” branch of government, what exactly does the term “representation” mean? we will be examining in detail the complexity of the term, and we will be evaluating how representative we think the current U.S. Congress actually 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 and party polarization in recent years. What factors account for these changes, and what are the consequences?

Finally, and 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 in Washington and in their districts

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.

Books and Readings
--Article packet available on Blackboard
--You will be expected to complete at least one reading prior to the vast majority of class sessions.

Requirements
1. Midterm exam. 3/9. 20%
2. Final Exam. Scheduled by the university 5/17. 10:30-12:30, 25%
3. 4 short papers (approximately 2 pages each), 20%
4. Attendance/Participation/Short prep work prior to some classes (including some 1 page writing assignments), 20%.
5. Quizzes (both announced and unannounced; ranging from 5 to 20 minutes), 15%

Note: For the series of short papers (approximately 2 pages each), 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. For each short paper, 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. Details and requirements for each assignment will be explained in class, and due dates are at the end of the syllabus. You will be expected to complete at least 1 of the 4 papers prior to the 3/9 midterm. Papers graded on a 1-10 scale.

At several points in the semester, beginning immediately (see end of syllabus) you will also be asked to write a 1-1.5-page paper. Directions for work due for 2/2 class 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.

Course Policies

Attendance:
This course has a great deal of in class and interactive work. You have to come to class. Attendance, participation and quizzes together are worth 35% of your grade. Please let the professor know prior to class if there is an emergency circumstance preventing you from coming.

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. 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/cas/104/penalty.htm](http://www.albany.edu/cas/104/penalty.htm) See also the UAlbany Library “Plagiarism 101” Tutorial [http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1](http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1)

*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**
* Dates subject to change depending on progress, interest and the course of current events. Be sure to check your email for notifications. Exam and paper due dates are fixed.

**Part I: Introduction and Basic concepts**
1/24. Introduction  
1/26. Criteria to Evaluate congress  
2. Davidson, Ch. 1; Ch. 5, section “Independent Judgment or Constituency Opinion”  
1/31. Constitutional Roots.  
   Davidson, Ch. 2 (Up to institutional evolution; Ch. 5, section “Who are the legislators?”)  
2/2. 1-1.5-page paper **Due (Mandatory)member backgrounds; directions at end syllabus**

**Part II: Inside congress: Overview of the Institution and the Legislative Process**
2/7. Historical Development; Davidson, Ch. 2 from section “institutional evolution” to end of chapter.  
2/9. Even Stable Institutions Change  
   Davidson, Ch. 6; Ch. 9, section “party and voting”  
   Alexander Alduncin et al, “Foreign Junkets or Learning to Legislate,” *The Forum date*  
   Friedman, dilemmas of Representation; read 2 profiles of the 3 in ch. 4  
2/21-2/23. The Legislative Process  
   Davidson, Ch. 7, 8  
   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*  
2/28-3/2. Putting It Together: Simulation on issue of class choice  
   CQ Researcher article on issue of our choice for class simulation  
   Davidson, ch. 9  
3/7. Examples and Review  
   Frey, Ch. 8 Downy, Ch. 16 Bartlet, Ch. 36 and 28 Frey, Ch 30 Whitehurst.  
3/9. **Midterm (followed by spring break)**

**Part III. Adding in the districts: Constituencies, Elections and Representation**
Davidson, Ch. 3. 
Debate: Ellis and Nelson, Ch. 10: “Resolved, the redistricting process should be nonpartisan,” PRO: Michael P. McDonald; CON: Justin Buchler Congress Really works Fowler and McClure, Political Ambition: Who Decides to run for congress Ch. 4 and 5. 

Davidson, Ch. 4,5 
Friedman, read one of Ch. 3, 6 Dilemmas of Representation (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007) 

4/11. No class 
4/13. Election Simulation 
*Mandatory 1-page position statement on issue of class choice t 
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 

Part IV: Congress, Public Policy and the Larger Political System 
In this part of the course, we will examine the role of Congress in the handling of several specific issues, particularly as compared to the president and the courts. 
Reading T.B.D. 
Final exam, 5/17, 10:30-12:30 (as scheduled by University) 

Short Paper Topics and Deadlines; You need to do 4 out of 7 approximately 2-page papers. Graded on a 1 to 10 scale. 

First in Class Assignment: Member Backgrounds, Due 2/2, 1-1.5 pages (not counted towards your 4 papers) 

Topic 1: Partisanship in Congress, Due 2/16 
Topic 2: Inside Congress, Due 3/2 
Topic 3: Elections, Due 3/30 
Topic 4: Home Styles, Due 4/6 
Topic 5: Comparing Legislatures, Due 4/18 
Topic 6: President, Congress, and Policy, Due 4/27 
Topic 7: Wrap-up, Due last day of class 

*Please note that although you have choice of topics, you are required to hand in at least 1 of the 4 papers by 3/9. 
*With some flexibility, Paper topics can only be submitted on the due dates outlined; papers will be downgraded half a grade per day for the next two days; then they will not be accepted past this date.
Assignment. Member Backgrounds (mandatory for all)
Due: 2/2; Approx. 1-1.5 pages.
Send via e-mail and provide hard copy.
Note: If you e-mail as an attachment, please send as a “doc”, “docx”, “txt” or “rtf” file.
Note: Use at least two sources.
Graded: minus, check, plus

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 influenced his/her activity as a public official?

For purposes of this assignment, you may provide lists of (1) the most important or interesting 3 or 4 things you found out about the member’s background and (2) the most important 3 or 4 things you found out about what the member does. Then write a paragraph or two thinking through whether you think there is a connection between the legislator’s background and his/her activities.