

PSC 22100-001: The Congress
City College of New York-CUNY
Department of Political Science
Autumn 2022 (08/25-12/21)
Tues and Thurs 2pm to 3:15pm online

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Office hours: By appointment

Introduction

Congress is a little loved, and little understood institution. At heart, it is a place where 100 senators (representing diverse 50 states), 435 representatives (from even more diverse districts), 5 delegates (DC, Virginia Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), and 1 resident commissioner (Puerto Rico) are put together and expected to cooperate on public policy, oversight, and more. Yet, love it or not, it is the heart of our national governance system, and its operations and health affect the whole of our political system.

This class aims to deepen students' understanding of the complexities of our national legislature, both in its concept and in its structure and operations. The course also intends to empower students with concepts, knowledge, and skills that enables students to better make sense of why legislators speak and act as they do, and how collective actions small and large can emerge from the interplay of individuals and interests. In short, you will study how a central component of the world's oldest democratic republic functions.

Classes and Readings

There is no book to purchase for this class and all readings will be provided online. They are hyperlinked below.

For this class to be fun and educational, you will need to read the assignments before class so you can come prepared to talk. It is not easy for most of us to pay attention during an online class, and it is harder still if you are not participating and instead are sitting and watching me lecture for 75 minutes. So let's have fun and come to class prepared to discuss!

Also: please find one or more persons in class who can brief you should you miss class. (I do not video record my classes or do I have notes to give. So if you miss a class, you'll need to get caught up by contacting a classmate.)

Assignments and Grading

- 20 percent of your grade is attendance and participation in class.
- 60 percent of your grade is 4 short essays (2 pages each). You will write 5 papers but the paper with the lowest score will be dropped/not counted toward your grade.
- 20 percent of your grade is the final exam (a 3-page paper).

Note: "Attendance" means being present with your camera on. Phoning in and listening to audio counts as a missed class. "Participation" means speaking up and adding substantively to the conversation.

Note: The short papers can be written during class, or you may draft them prior to class and then turn them in on the class date. When writing, please draw upon class reading materials as appropriate, and anything else that you believe is germane. Embed hyperlinks to supporting sources. (Example: The Congressional Budget Act was signed into law on [July 12, 1974](#).)

Course Schedule and Readings

Thurs. Aug. 25 Class 1: Intro to class

No reading. We'll cover who I am, who you are, how the class works, and help you find a classmate who can brief you should you miss a class.

Module 1. Conceptualizing Congress

Tues. Aug. 30 Class 2: Congress as the first among equals

Read: Articles I through III of the US Constitution,
<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>

Thurs. Sept. 1 Class 3: The complexity of representation

Read: “Congressional representation,” in American Government, at

<https://opened.cuny.edu/courseware/lesson/266/overview>

Watch: Sen. Ted Cruz, speech, January 6, 2021,

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?507698-2/senate-debate-arizona-electoral-college-vote-challenge-part-1&event=507698&playEvent> (Start at 20:12 of video, end at 21:05).

Tues. Sept 6 Class 4: Congress, limited government, and democracy

Read: Martin Diamond, The Declaration and the Constitution: Liberty, democracy, and the Founders,

https://www.nationalaffairs.com/public_interest/detail/the-declaration-and-the-constitution-liberty-democracy-and-the-founders

Thurs. Sept. 8 Class 5: Why Congress?

Read: Philip Wallach, “Congress indispensable,” National Affairs,

<https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/congress-indispensable>

Tues. Sept 13 Class 6: Essay #1 (2-page; double space, 12pt type, 1-inch margins) on previous readings. Subject: What are the roles of representatives and senators in our constitutional system? How are they alike and how do they differ?

Module 2. The Structure of Congress

Thurs. Sept. 15 Class 7: Leadership in the House

Read: Congressional Research Service, House Leadership Structure: Overview of Party Organization,

https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20030710_RS20930_00e81fd5f5e63b7e38699f00401318f102cfec62.pdf

Read: Congressional Research Service, The Speaker of the House: House Officer, Party Leader, and Representative, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/97-780.html>

Look at: Open Secrets, “Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee,”
<https://www.opensecrets.org/parties/totals.php?cycle=2020&cmte=DCCC>

Read: Max Greenwood, “Pelosi hosts largest individual donor fundraiser in DCCC history,” The Hill,
<https://thehill.com/news/campaign/3275519-pelosi-hosts-largest-individual-donor-fundraiser-in-dccc-history/>

Tues. Sept. 20 Class 8: Leadership in the Senate

Read: Congressional Research Service, Senate Leadership Structure: Overview of Party Organization, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RS20933.html>

Read: Congressional Research Service, The President Pro Tempore of the Senate: History and Authority of the Office, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL30960.html> (Read the introduction and pp. 7-11)

Read: James Wallner, “What makes Senate leaders so powerful?” LegBranch.org, <https://www.legbranch.org/2018-8-1-what-makes-senate-leaders-so-powerful/> (Stop reading right before the text, “PARTY LEADERS AND THE STANDING RULES.”)

Read: David M. Drucker, “Mitch McConnell super PAC banks \$72 million in fight for Senate majority,” Washington Examiner, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/mitch-mcconnell-super-pac-banks-72-million-in-fight-for-senate-majority>

Thurs. Sept 22 Class 9: The Committee System

Read: Congressional Research Service, The Committee System in the U.S. Congress, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RS20794.html>

Tues. Sept 27 NO CLASS

Thurs. Sept. 29 NO CLASS

Tues. Oct. 4: NO CLASS

Thurs. Oct. 6 Class 10: What are the legislative branch support agencies?

Read: Kevin R. Kosar, “Legislative Branch Support Agencies: What They Are, What They Do, and Their Uneasy Position in Our System of Government,” in *Congress Overwhelmed*, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11RkSO21RyXGK56DTM1vrfCwGfYgpCGIF/view?usp=sharing>

Tues. Oct 11 Class 11: Essay #2 (2-page; double space, 12pt type, 1-inch margins) on previous readings. Subject: Who is more powerful: the Speaker of the House or the committee chairpersons? Who should be more powerful?

Module 3. Congressional Process Basics

Thurs. Oct 13 Class 12: How Congress enacts a law

Watch in class: <https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process>

Tues. Oct 18 Class 13: How Congress funds the government (and much more!)

Read: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Introduction to the Federal Budget Process,” <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-7-03bud.pdf>

Listen: Tori Gorman, guest, Understanding Congress podcast, “How does the budget process work (and not work)?”

<https://www.aei.org/podcast/how-does-the-budget-process-work-and-not-work-with-tori-gorman/>

Thurs. Oct 20 Class 14: In-class essay #3 (2-page; double space, 12pt type, 1-inch margins) on previous readings. Subject: Why do you think Congress does not follow all the steps as set forth in the budget process? And can you think of any way to improve the budget process?

Module 4. What Congress does beyond lawmaking

Tues. Oct 25 Class 15: Nominations, treaties, and oversight

Read: Congressional Research Service, “Nominations to Cabinet Positions During Inter-Term Transitions Since 1984,” pp. 1-5, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42963>

Read: Congressional Research Service, “Senate Consideration of Treaties,” <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/98-384>

Read: Congressional Research Service, “Congressional Oversight and Investigations,” <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10015>

Thurs. Oct 27 Class 16: Community Project Grants (aka earmarks)

Read: Congressional Research Service, “Community Project Funding: House Rules and Committee Protocols,” https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2021-03-16_R46722_adc618e837f4bfb099f388a3780f89c9410f62c9.pdf

Tues. Nov. 1 Class 17: Constituent services and everything else

Read: Congressional Research Service, “Constituent Services: Overview and Resources,” <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R44726.html>

Read: Congressional Management Foundation, Life in Congress: The Member Perspective, https://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/life-in-congress-the-member-perspective.pdf

Thurs. Nov. 3 Class 18: No class

Tues. Nov 8. Running for re-election

Read: Elaine Kamarck and James Wallner, “Anticipating Trouble: Congressional Primaries and Incumbent Behavior,” Brookings Institution, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/GS_10292018_Primaries-and-Incumbent-Behavior.pdf

Thurs. Nov. 10 Class 19: In-class essay #4 (2-page; double space, 12pt type, 1-inch margins) on the previous readings. Subject: What does Congress do other than pass authorization and appropriations laws?

Module 5. What is Congress doing this year?

Tues. Nov 15. How to use Congress.gov; and Is Congress being productive this year?

No reading

Thurs. Nov. 17 Class 22: How are legislators assisting their constituents?

No reading

In-class: Review three House members' webpages (You choose!)

In-class: Review Community Grants Projects,

<https://appropriations.house.gov/transparency/fiscal-year-2022>

Tues. Nov. 22 Class 23: In-class essay #5 (2-page; double space, 12pt type, 1-inch margins) on previous readings. Subject: Name an important action Congress has taken, explain why it was significant, and how it was executed.

Thurs. Nov. 24 NO CLASS

Module 6. Upgrading Congress for the 21st Century

Tues. Nov 29 Class 24: Is the budget process broken?

Look at: Congressional Research Service, "Appropriations status tables, FY2023,"

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/AppropriationsStatusTable?id=2023>

Read: Peter Hanson, Restoring regular order in congressional appropriations, Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Download-the-paper-1.pdf>

Thurs. Dec. 1 Class 25: Is Congress polarized and gridlocked?

Watch in class: Frances Lee and James Curry, The Limits of Party: Congress and Lawmaking in a Polarized Era, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmAUTK9VKrE>

Tues. Dec. 6 Class 26: Should the membership of the House of Representatives be expanded?

Read: Lee Drutman et al., “The case for enlarging the House of Representatives,” American Academy of Arts and Sciences, pp. 1-16.

https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/2021_Enlarging-the-House.pdf

Thurs. Dec. 8 Class 27: Should Congress have a Congressional Regulation Office?

Read: Philip Wallach and Kevin R. Kosar, “The case for a Congressional Regulation Office,” National Affairs,

<https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-case-for-a-congressional-regulation-office>

**Tues. Dec. 13 Class 28: LAST CLASS/Final exam (3-page paper due by the end of class).
Subject: (To be announced on December 8!)**

Wed. Dec. 21 Fall term ends

Tues. Dec. 27 Deadline for Dr. Kosar to submit grades

Other Important Matters

Accessibility & Campus Resources

At City College, we strive to make all our classes accessible to every student, regardless of any disability (visible or non-visible; physical, cognitive, emotional, or learning) or any other special circumstances (such as a medical, personal, or housing emergency; family responsibilities; financial difficulties; legal difficulties; or immigration status) that may affect your ability to attend class and complete the coursework. Please speak with me in office hours or via email early in the semester or as soon as you're aware that you may need accommodations. I can't help, if I don't know what the problem is.

In addition, City College offers resources to students in a wide range of circumstances. We want all students to succeed and to take advantage of all the support the college has to offer.

Please let me know if you have registered with the AccessAbility Center/Student Disability Services (AAC/SDS) or have any *special needs, learning differences, or medical conditions* that may affect your coursework so that we can make the appropriate accommodations. If you believe you may need an accommodation, please do get in touch with the AAC/SDS. You can reach the AccessAbility office via email (disabilityservices@ccny.cuny.edu) or through their Zoom virtual front desk (<https://ccny.zoom.us/j/116151245>).

If you need a *computer, tablet, or wi-fi*, you can request them through an online form (https://portal.ccny.cuny.edu/depts/oit/cuny_loaner/login.php). You can also contact the iMedia Center via email (imedia@ccny.cuny.edu) or via their Zoom virtual front desk, Monday-Thursday, 11am-3pm (<https://ccny.zoom.us/j/2126505480>).

If you have any questions or concerns about your *immigration status* or that of your family members, please consult the CCNY Immigration Center for free and confidential advice via phone (212-650-6620) or email (meetu.dhar@cuny.edu).

If, for any reason, you are struggling with *personal issues, anxiety, depression, or stress*, there are a number of resources on campus.

- The Student Counseling Center in the Health and Wellness Center provides remote counseling that is free and confidential to students. You can contact them via phone (212-650-8222), email (counseling@ccny.cuny.edu), or their Zoom virtual front desk, Monday-Thursday 10am-4pm (<http://ccny.zoom.us/j/2126508222>). They also have links to a number of resources on their website (<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/counseling>).

- The Colin Powell School offers free, confidential peer mentoring with trained graduate

students on issues of stress management and self-care. To sign up, simply send an email (peernavigationccny@gmail.com) or sign up online

(<https://calendly.com/peernavigation/calendar?month=2020-10>).

If you are dealing with *food insecurity*, please visit Benny's Food Pantry in the Hoffman Lounge on the first floor of the NAC. The pantry is open even during the pandemic. To gain access on weekdays, just make an appointment online

(<https://calendly.com/bennysfoodpantry/benny-s-food-pantry-appointment-system?month=2021-08>).

If you are facing an *emergency shortage of funds*, please email Ms. Charlene Darbassie (cdarbassie@ccny.cuny.edu) or Dean Andy Rich (arich@ccny.cuny.edu) in the Colin Powell School Dean's Office. They will tell you how to apply for an emergency grant. Applying is quick and easy.

If you are experiencing or have experienced *domestic violence* or *violence that is sex-based, gender-based, or sexuality-based*; or if you are experiencing or have experienced *discrimination because of gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, or other reasons*, please report it to Diana Cuozzo in the Office of Affirmative Action, Compliance, and Diversity via email (dcuozzo@ccny.cuny.edu) or phone (212-650-7330). For a confidential discussion of these and related issues, please contact Sophie English via email (senglish@ccny.cuny.edu) or phone (212-650-8905).

If you are struggling in any of your classes, don't hesitate to get extra *academic support*. Just make an appointment with the Academic Resource Center (www.ccny.cuny.edu/sssp/tutoring-arc) or email Charlene Darbassie (cdarbassie@ccny.cuny.edu) in the Colin Powell School office of Academic Support Services.

The CCNY Writing Center (www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing) offers individualized *writing support* to all students.

To receive information and support about securing *internships* and planning for your *post-college career*, please contact Debbie Cheng (dcheng@ccny.cuny.edu) and Ashif Hassan (ahassan@ccny.cuny.edu) in the Colin Powell School Dean's Office. Also, take a look at the new Career Handbook that their office has created to help you start thinking about career and professional development

(<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/colinpowellschool/career-and-professional-development>).

For general *advising*, contact the Colin Powell School Advising Office

(<https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/colinpowellschool/office-academic-advisors>). At their website, you can make a virtual appointment with one of the advisors or you can find their email addresses so

you can send them a message.