

THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

St. Lawrence University

Instructor:	Zachary McGee, Ph.D.	Class Time:	TTh, 10:10 - 11:40 a.m.
Email:	zmcgee@stlawu.edu	Class Location:	Hepburn Hall 19
Office Location:	Hepburn Hall 213	Office Hours:	Tu, Wed, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.
Course Number:	GOVT 309		

Course Description:

The United States Congress we see and study today is the product of generations of changes made by our fellow Americans who dared to run and serve their neighbors and friends in one of the most powerful legislative institutions in modern history. To succeed in this course students must identify and understand two key aspects of that opening sentence. First, Congress is a social institution made up of people, which means that to understand the actions of the Congress we need to summarize and analyze the variable behavior of 535 people at once. This is a lofty goal to say the least and it highlights one of the most difficult challenges of social science. That is, how can we categorize the diversity of the human experience in search of generalizable answers to important questions such as, how does a bill become a law and why? Who are the people representing us in Congress and how were they successful in getting there? Who holds members of Congress accountable and how effective are they at doing so? We will tackle these questions and many others in this course. To answer them we will observe Congress and its members directly as well as tap into the research conducted by scholars of American politics.

The second aspect one must understand in this course is that Congress is a critical, and ever-evolving, institution of American government. Congress is tasked not only with legislating but also with checking the power of other national political institutions. The Congress of today is not the Congress of 1789 and changes in how the institution fulfills its core constitutional duties, how it approaches the writing of laws, and its processes for providing oversight of the federal government are each the result of ambitious members fighting for influence. Understanding the dynamic nature of Congress as an institution will help us unpack even bigger questions about American government. Is Congress still the most powerful branch of American government? Why do party leaders wield so much power over decisions? Will legislative gridlock ever end? These questions too will be answered in this course.

This course will involve digging deep into the modern Congress as it operates today as well as congresses of the past. We will explore both how the actions of the (mostly) men who served in Congress decades ago are partially responsible for the Congress we have today and how modern members of Congress continue tweaking the rules to serve their (and their constituents') goals. Given these lofty aspirations, it is recommended that students have a familiarity with the American national government before enrolling in this course. We will begin the course with ruminations on colonial America and Article I of the U.S. Constitution that situates Congress in the national government, but a working knowledge of the other branches and the general ideals of the American founders will make the critical analysis expected in this course much easier.

Three primary objectives shape the design of this course. The first is to provide students with an intimate understanding of how Congress works today. Only through truly familiarizing oneself with the mechanics of legislative institutions can we understand the politics that consume it. When someone in your life hears you are taking a course on Congress my goal is for every student to be able to discuss some aspect of the modern Congress that really amuses or frustrates them and explain why. The second objective is to develop analytical skills by which to understand complex relationships and phenomena. Students' critical thinking skills will be tested and refined through a series of assignments meant to help students actively engage with

the lecture material, assigned readings, and the perspectives of their classmates.

The final objective is to introduce the work of political scientists by concentrating on the paradigms and techniques of the discipline. Some scholars claim that the literature on the United States Congress is the most developed in all of the subfield of American politics. I happen to agree and, as much as possible, we will ponder what scholars have said about Congress and its trajectory in American political life. We will engage in regular class discussions where students will be asked to apply contemporary scholarship or editorial perspectives to the content covered in class and debate the ideas therein. Ideally, this course will shape students into more thoughtful citizens and consumers of political information about Congress. And, ultimately, it should help students attain a more sophisticated understanding of the politics of the United States both today and in the recent past.

Course Expectations:

I expect students to come to class prepared to engage the lecture material or the relevant discussion of the day. We have limited time together and every second counts. Readings listed on the course schedule are due the day they are listed. Students will note that there is not a formal attendance policy in this class, but participation in class discussions is part of every student's grade. Moreover, at least half of each exam will be derived directly from material covered in lecture. Policies about preparedness for class and the required materials to be successful are detailed below.

Written Work: All written assignments should be turned in on Sakai (see below) and should be double spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. Page margins should be 1 inch on all sides. Work can be submitted as Microsoft Word documents, PDFs, or Pages documents. I will not accept work via email or hard copy in class. Students should retain their own copy of all submitted work for at least one year following the completion of this course.

Sakai: All information for this course can be accessed on the St. Lawrence Sakai web page for this course. To navigate to it, go to [this link](#), log in, and select the tab for GOVT 309. All assignments should be turned in electronically via Sakai.

Email & Appointments: The best way to contact me during the semester is via email (zmcgee@stlawu.edu). I cannot promise to respond to any messages sent via Sakai. I respond to emails during regular business hours (i.e., Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.) and strive to respond to all emails within 24 hours. I cannot promise replies at night or on weekends. If you would prefer to speak in person, and my regularly scheduled office hours conflict with your schedule, please let me know and we can set up an appointment that fits both of our schedules.

Optional Materials:

The textbook listed below is optional but can serve as an aid if students feel as though they need additional context or instruction on a given topic. In some cases I may discuss topics or concepts not covered in this text and therefore the book alone will not serve as a substitute for attending class. I am sensitive to the realities of scholarly and textbook costs and because of this I have created PDF scans of all relevant books and articles to distribute to all students for free via Sakai at least one week prior to the class date listed on the course schedule.

- Theriault, Sean M. and Mickey Edwards, "Congress: The First Branch" (1st Edition). New York: Oxford University Press (2019).

Grading:

Discussion Participation	5%
Response Paper	15%
Research Paper Outline & Bibliography	10%
Final Research Paper	20%
Research Paper Presentation	15%
Midterm	20%
Final Exam	15%

All items listed above are detailed below. I will utilize the following cutoffs when evaluating grades:

4.0 (A)	93%
3.75 (A-)	90%
3.5 (B+)	88%
3.25 (B+/B)	86%
3.0 (B)	83%
2.75 (B-)	80%
2.5 (C+)	78%
2.25 (C+/C)	76%
2.0 (C)	73%
1.75 (C-)	70%
1.5 (D+)	68%
1.25 (D)	64%
1.0 (D-)	60%
0.0 (F)	≤ 59%

Participation Discussion: (5%)

Students are expected to engage in the small and large group discussions we will have on a variety of different topics throughout the course. I have done my best to find accessible reading material that should serve to stimulate an interesting and informative discussion around the topic at hand. The discussions will be framed either as two sides of an argument related to the topic or will present an important idea or concept for students to ponder and react to. I will serve a facilitation role during discussions but each discussion will begin with predetermined discussion leaders leading small group discussions wherein they summarize the arguments of the reading(s) and share initial thoughts and questions they have. After those small group discussions we will have a larger discussion with the entire class driven by the highlights of the small group discussions led by the discussion leaders. Most of your participation grade will be determined by your participation in discussion on the week you are a discussion leader. That being said, if I notice you choosing not to contribute in other discussions you should not expect full credit for this portion of your grade.

Discussion leaders will be scheduled by the end of the first week of class. Adjustments will be made as students add and drop during the shopping period. Students may sign up on Sakai for any week to lead discussion, but all weeks must have at least two students leading discussion. If necessary, I will ask for volunteers to switch weeks to achieve this goal and ultimately move students if no volunteers emerge. All reading material will be posted on Sakai at least one week before the discussion occurs. I am happy to meet with discussion leaders in office hours to hear their thoughts about the readings before they lead the class in discussion. Of course, I cannot do the work for you. Instead, consider me as a reasonable sounding board for your thoughts and I will do my best to nudge students in productive directions to facilitate a meaningful

class discussion for all.

To get full credit for participation in this class students will ask questions when necessary during lectures and contribute meaningful thoughts, arguments, and questions during the discussions of assigned readings. It is not merely a matter of raising your hand every class (we won't have time for everyone to participate every class period anyway), but demonstrating that when you do participate it is useful in clarifying a concept in lecture or advancing an argument in the discussion. The greatest benefit you can get from this class is not simply increased knowledge about American politics, but also hearing the perspectives of your peers and wrestling with arguments you might not agree with immediately.

Response Paper: (15%)

As noted above, in the "Participation Discussion" section of the syllabus, there will be discussion leaders for each topic. Discussion leaders sign up for their respective topic on Sakai during the first week of class. In addition to leading discussion, on the day you are a discussion leader, you must also submit a response paper. The response paper should concisely articulate your position on the documents you read. Some weeks this may mean agreeing with one author over the other and explaining why. Other weeks, when we read only one piece, it may mean briefly summarizing the author's argument and reacting to it. A broad range of responses and reactions will be accepted. When writing your draft keep in mind that the main goals of this assignment are to confirm you understood what you read and to evaluate your thoughts on the topic as they relate to our lectures in class, current events, or your personal experiences.

Students are encouraged to meet with me in office hours if they are struggling to understand the arguments being made or need help clarifying their thoughts. I will not summarize the article(s) for you, but I am happy to serve as a sounding board for your thoughts and nudge you in the right direction to stimulate an interesting discussion in class (and for your response paper). This assignment should be at least two pages (excluding any title page or bibliography) and should include a bibliography for any works cited. See the instructions about submitting your work under "Course Expectations" in the syllabus.

Research Paper Outline & Bibliography: (10%)

A core component of this course is drafting a research paper that will explore a particular facet of Congress or congressional behavior in detail and with theoretical sophistication. Early in the semester, we will discuss good research topics and I will make myself available to you for consultation. I will accept a wide range of potential paper topics and ideally your topic will be something you find personally interesting, amusing, or frustrating about the U.S. Congress or its members. To help you succeed in writing a successful paper I require that students submit an outline and bibliography at approximately the midpoint of the semester. The outline should provide some background on your topic of choice, what you expect to find based on what you already know, and a general structure for your paper. The bibliography must contain at least 5 scholarly sources.

This assignment is due on Thursday, October 7th. See the instructions about submitting your work under "Course Expectations" in the syllabus.

Final Research Paper: (20%)

The final paper should be a minimum of 15 pages (excluding any title page or bibliography) and should include a bibliography containing no fewer than 10 scholarly sources. See the section above for expectations of the paper in general. The final paper is due on Thursday, November 11th. See the instructions about submitting your work under "Course Expectations" in the syllabus.

Research Paper Presentation: (15%)

Each student will prepare and present a 10-12 minute presentation detailing their research paper. The presentation should cover your research question and motivation, a summary of your major findings, and close with a reflection on what you learned about your given topic and how it has shaped your perspective of the U.S. Congress. The final presentations are due on the day you sign up to present during the weeks of November 30th and December 7th.

Midterm Exam: (20%)

The midterm exam will be made up of two sections. The first section is composed of a combination of multiple choice and short response questions. The second section requires students to respond to essay prompts. The essay section will contain a variety of different prompts based on the content covered in the class and students will select a subset of them to respond to. The essay prompts may ask students to answer a question, define terms, justify a position, or any combination thereof. This exam will be closed-note and must be completed independently. The exams in this course are not cumulative, but building knowledge about Congress throughout the course will certainly aid students in performing better as the course proceeds.

Short of extraordinary circumstances, you will not be allowed to make up exams in this course. If you have planned circumstances that you believe qualify as extraordinary (e.g., a non-flexible academic or university-sanctioned commitment), you must contact me regarding these circumstances *at least two weeks in advance* of the exam in question. Otherwise, students will only be allowed to make up an exam in the event of extreme and unpredictable circumstances (e.g., a hospitalization or a sudden death in the family) and then only if documentation is provided will a make up exam be scheduled.

Final Exam: (15%)

The final exam will be a take-home exam and you will be permitted to refer to your notes. The exam will take place on Sakai and will be timed. Further information about the time allotted will be discussed later in the semester. **The deadline to submit the exam will be the end of the scheduled final exam period for this course, which is 4:30 p.m. on December 16th.**

Late Assignments:

All assignments listed above (with the exception of the exams) are due at the beginning of class on the due date listed in the course schedule. All assignments are to be submitted electronically via Sakai. Assignments will **not** be accepted via email. In the absence of extreme circumstances (with documentation), assignments turned in after the beginning of class on the due date will be accepted but penalized based on how late the assignment is. In other words, turning in an assignment after class has begun will receive a minor penalty, but an assignment turned in a week late could be penalized as much as a full letter grade (or more).

Grade Appeals:

I understand the pressure many students are under to succeed in every single course they take. I am happy to meet with any student during office hours to discuss the appeal of any grade earned **within seven days of the grade being posted**. If a student feels a grade has been evaluated incorrectly they should come prepared with a substantive argument about why they feel they should have earned additional points. Once the appeal has been made and I render my final decision the grade I assign will be final.

COVID-19:

Despite the policies just listed, the ongoing global pandemic does call for a more flexible set of expectations

for us all. As the semester goes on, you may find yourself in a situation where, due to multiple pressures on your time, you may consider taking a short cut in order to turn in an assignment by the deadline. If this is the case, the thing to do is to **drop everything and contact me via email immediately** regarding your situation. I can help relieve some of the pressure related to my class in a way that is equitable for the other students in the class as well. Always remember, to struggle is human, and I grade the assignments, not the person. However, I cannot do anything for you once you commit an act (knowingly or negligently) of academic dishonesty. So, again, if you find yourself in a panic, please get in touch with me- we will work through it together with no judgement.

Title IX:

Title IX mandates that all students, men, women and gender nonconforming, should be able to study in an atmosphere free of harassment, sexual violence, and gender discrimination. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted here on campus, you can find the appropriate resources here:

- SLU Advocates: 24/7 student-run Helpline. Conversations are confidential. (315) 244-5466
<http://www.stlawu.edu/volunteer-services/slu-advocates>
- SLU Title IX coordinator: Lisa Cania, (315) 229-5567, lcania@stlawu.edu
- Counseling Services, Sexual Assault Support Group: Tara Tent (315)229-5392, ttent@stlawu.edu

Personal Pronoun Preference:

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with students' legal names. I will gladly honor any request to address students by a different name. Please inform me of any preferred names, nicknames, or gender pronouns as early as possible so I can adopt them for the entirety of the semester and onward. For your reference, my pronouns are he/him/his. If there are further accommodations that will make you feel more comfortable in class, please come to office hours so we can discuss them.

Student Accessibility Services:

If you have a specific learning profile, medical and or mental health condition and need accommodations, please be sure to contact the Student Accessibility Services Office right away so they can help you get the accommodations you require. If you need to use any accommodations in this class, please meet with me early and provide me with your Individualized Educational Accommodation Plan (IEAP) letter so you can have the best possible experience this semester.

Although not required, I would like to know of any accommodations that are needed at least 10 days before a quiz or test. Please be proactive and set up an appointment to meet with someone from the Student Accessibility Services Office.

Color Vision Deficiency:

If you are color vision deficient, the Student Accessibility Services office has on loan glasses for students who are color vision deficient. Please contact the office to make an appointment.

For more specific information about setting up an appointment with Student Accessibility Services please see the options listed below:

Telephone: 315.229.5537

Email: studentaccessibility@stlawu.edu

For further information about Student Accessibility Services, you can check the website at:
<https://www.stlawu.edu/student-accessibility-services>

Writing Assistance:

The WORD Studio offers both online and face-to-face tutorials for your papers, speeches, posters, and reading assignments. They are here want to make you the best writer and speaker you can be at SLU. Their tutors are thoroughly trained and friendly peers who can:

- Help you understand an assignment
- Help you build an argument or structure in papers and oral presentations
- Help you expand your vocab and work on sentence structure
- Work with you on a powerpoint or poster
- Refine your reading skills
- Help you learn to avoid plagiarism through proper citation

The WORD Studio offers ESL and science writing specialists, but all of their tutors are trained to assist with any communication assignment. The WORD Studio is open until 9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday and until 2 p.m. on Fridays, but appointments are required (no walk-ins). Schedule a tutorial by going to the WORD Studio website. If you have any questions about their services, please email them at wordstudio@stlawu.edu

Academic Integrity:

I expect everyone to conduct themselves with integrity and honesty in this class. All of the work you do in this class must be your own original work. Please don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. Don't take short cuts. As stated in SLU's Constitution of the Academic Honor Council, all of the work that you submit in this course must have been *written for this course and not another, and must originate with you in form and content* with all sources fully and specifically cited.

If you commit an act of academic dishonesty, I am bound to follow the procedures outlined in the St. Lawrence University Student Handbook. The Handbook describes what constitutes academic honesty and penalties for violation on pages 104-110. If you have a question about what is considered plagiarism or how to cite sources properly, come talk to me or visit The WORD Studio in ODY.

Course Outline:

The table below shows the course outline, including reading assignments, assignment deadlines, and the dates for all exams. Everything is required unless otherwise noted. All non-book readings will be available on Sakai, under Files. You should do each day's readings before that day's class.

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
Th 8/26/21	<i>Course Introduction; Colonial America and the Establishment of Congress</i>	- Syllabus - The Declaration of Independence
Tu 8/31/21	<i>Governance by Legislature and the Structure of Congress</i>	- Federalist No. 39 - Article I of the U.S. Constitution
Th 9/2/21	<i>Discussion: If the U.S. is a Republic, Can it also be an Oligarchy?; Expectations of Constituents</i>	- Winters, Jeffrey A. and Benjamin I. Page. 2009. "Oligarchy in the United States?" <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> . 7(4): 731-751.
Tu 9/7/21	<i>Expectations of Constituents; Being a Member of Congress</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 2, "The Power of the People" <i>Note: The textbook is optional for this course but these readings will be listed for any students who opted to purchase it for additional context or assistance. All other readings not by "Theriault and Edwards" are required.)</i>
Th 9/9/21	<i>Being a Member of Congress; The Development of American Political Parties</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 4, "Being a Member of Congress"
Tu 9/14/21	<i>The Development of American Political Parties; The Culture of Congress Throughout History</i>	- Freeman, Joanne B. 2018. <i>The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War</i> . "Chapter 2: The Mix of Men in Congress: Meeting Place of North and South"
Th 9/16/21	<i>Discussion: Congress as a Mirror for Societal Strife; Congressional Elections</i>	- Freeman, Joanne B. 2018. <i>The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War</i> . "Chapter 4: Rules of Order and the Rule of Force: Dangerous Words and the Gag Rule Debate (1836-1844)" - French, David. 2020. "The Growing Danger of Political Violence Threatens to Destabilize America." <i>TIME Magazine</i> . - WATCH: A Reporter's Footage from Inside the Capitol Siege — The New Yorker
Tu 9/21/21	<i>Congressional Elections</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 3, "Getting Elected to Congress"
Th 9/23/21	<i>Discussion: Contemporary Congressional Campaigns and Fundraising; Congressional Committees</i>	- Miller, Kenneth. 2021. "Members of Congress are Listening to Out-of-District Donors." <i>3Streams</i> . - Langer, Andrew. 2021. "The Democrats' Threat to Donor Privacy." <i>The National Review</i> . - Goldmacher, Shane. 2021. "How Deceptive Campaign Fund-Raising Ensnarers Older People." <i>The New York Times</i> .

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
Tu 9/28/21	<i>Congressional Committees</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 7, "The Committees"
Th 9/30/21	<i>NO CLASS</i>	NO CLASS
Tu 10/5/21	<i>Congressional Committees; Political Parties in Congress</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 8, "Political Parties"
Th 10/7/21	<i>Political Parties in Congress</i>	- Research Paper Outline & Bibliography Due
Tu 10/12/21	<i>Discussion: How Much Does Ideology Matter within Political Parties?; Exam Review Day</i>	- Lee, Frances E. 2009. <i>Beyond Ideology</i> . University of Chicago Press. "Chapter 1: Ties That Bind: Untangling the Roots of Congressional Partisanship" - Bade, Rachael and Erica Werner. 2020. "Centrist House Democrats lash out at liberal colleagues, blame far-left views for costing the party seats." <i>The Washington Post</i> .
Th 10/14/21	<i>Mid-Semester Break</i>	NO CLASS
Tu 10/19/21	MIDTERM EXAM	
Th 10/21/21	<i>NO CLASS</i>	NO CLASS
Tu 10/26/21	<i>Textbook Congress Legislative Process</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 5, "The Legislative Process"
Th 10/28/21	<i>Textbook Congress Legislative Process</i>	
Tu 11/2/21	<i>Discussion: Is Congress Concerned with Solving Policy Problems or Not?; The Modern Legislative Process</i>	- Lewallen, Jonathan, Sean M. Theriault, and Bryan D. Jones. 2016. "Congressional dysfunction: An information processing perspective." <i>Regulation & Governance</i> . 10: 179–190. - Fagan, E.J. and Zachary A. McGee. 2020. "Problem Solving and the Demand for Expert Information in Congress." <i>Legislative Studies Quarterly</i> . Forthcoming.
Th 11/4/21	<i>The Modern Legislative Process</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 6, "Modern Developments in the Legislative Process"

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
Tu 11/9/21	<i>Discussion: Centralized Congressional Power and Its Limits; External Influences on Congress</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curry, James M. 2015. <i>Legislating in the Dark</i>. University of Chicago Press. "Chapter 8: Representation in the Dark." - Wallach, Philip. 2018. "How intraparty organizations reshape Congress. A review of Building the Bloc: Intraparty Organization in the U.S. Congress, by Ruth Bloch Rubin (Cambridge University Press, 2017)." <i>LegBranch.org</i>
Th 11/11/21	<i>NO CLASS</i>	- Final Research Paper Due
Tu 11/16/21	<i>External Influences on Congress</i>	- Theriault and Edwards Chapter 8, "External Influences on the Legislative Process"
Th 11/18/21	<i>Discussion: Where is the Line Between Influence and Corruption?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Koerth, Maggie. 2019. "Everyone Knows Money Influences Politics...Except Scientists." <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>. - McGee, Zachary A. and Philip R. Moniz. 2021. "Gift Travel in the U.S. House of Representatives." <i>Political Research Quarterly</i>. Forthcoming.
Tu 11/23/21	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	- NO CLASS
Th 11/25/21	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	- NO CLASS
Tu 11/30/21	<i>Paper Presentations</i>	
Th 12/2/21	<i>Paper Presentations</i>	
Tu 12/7/21	<i>Paper Presentations; What does the future hold for Congress?</i>	- Edwards, Mickey. 2017. "We No Longer Have Three Branches of Government." <i>POLITICO</i> .
Th 12/9/21	<i>Exam Review Day</i>	- FINAL CLASS DAY
Th 12/16/21	FINAL EXAM	- Must be submitted on Sakai by 4:30 p.m.
		<p><i>Note: This syllabus is subject to change at any time without written notice. Changes will likely be announced in class and via Sakai, but it is your responsibility to verify that you always have the most current version of the syllabus for this course.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Version: 08-20-21</i></p>