**Department of Government**

**Dartmouth College**

**Government 34**

**Congress and the American Political System**

***Professor:*** Amy Semet

***Class Times:*** Tuesday/Thursday 10A; 10-11:50a.m.; X-hour, Wednesday 3-3:50p.m.

***Office Hours:*** I would like to get to know you all, and hope you will come see me during office hours or by appointment. My official office hours will be Wednesday 1-3 in Silsby 229.

***Phone:*** 603-646-0766; 215-767-0041 (cell)

***Email:*** [Amy.Semet@dartmouth.edu](mailto:Amy.Semet@dartmouth.edu;)

***Course Objective:*** The goal of this class is two-fold: First and foremost, students will learn how to read scholarly articles and write analytically. While in this particular class Congress is the subject matter, the skills learned in this class in how to read and decipher scholarly articles will be transportable to other subjects. Moreover, learning how to critically think about an issue and to identify strengths and weaknesses in other’s arguments is a key skill that will be of benefit to you no matter what your chosen career path. Secondly, students will gain a greater appreciation of Congress as an institution and of the American political system more generally so that they can become better and more well-informed citizens. Upon completion of this course, students will gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of congressional politics so that they can better analyze news media coverage of Congress and of the American political system more generally.

The American public’s approval of Congress is currently at its lowest level in history, with less than 15% of the American electorate approving of the way Congress is doing its job. In this class, we will focus on studying Congress as an institution and we will explore the way that Congress interacts with other institutions in American government as well as how its members interact with the American electorate. We will study the following questions: How did Congress develop historically as an institution? How does Congress really work? What do Congressman/women actually do, what do they want to achieve and who do they really represent? How does Congress’ institutional configuration affect policy outcomes? What legislative reforms and institutional changes would cause Congress to run better? How do political parties affect Congress? What really goes on behind congressional power struggles between Congress and the executive, judiciary and bureaucracy? How can we put the recent Congress in historical perspective?

***Prerequisites***: Govt 3 (Introduction to American Politics) or permission of the instruction. If you did not take Govt 3 yet, please meet with me and we can discuss what background you have in American politics.

***X hours:*** The x-hour is on Wednesday, 3-3:50. We will use a few of the x-hours early in the semester to build up some classes in case we have to cancel classes later in the semester for weather, etc. In return, you will have “off” class during 1 or 2 of the regular sessions near busy times like Midterm week and one of the last weeks in the semester leading up to final papers.

***Class Requirements:***

▪ ***Attendance and panel/class participation (15%):*** Attendance is mandatory at all classes unless there is an approved reason in advance like illness, death in the family, a religious observance or an out of town sporting event if you are a varsity athlete. Attendance, participation and effort will be used as deciding factors if you end up in between grades. You are also expected to keep up to date on major developments in Congress.

Although everyone is required to do the readings before class in order to get the most of the class, we will use the panel system to ensure that a few students in the class know that particular class’s readings especially well. The number of times you are “on panel” will depend on the size of the class, but it will probably be 2-3 days over the course of the semester, and you can pick the days you are “on panel” depending upon your interest in the topic and your obligations in your other classes; there will be no panel during “Midterm week.”

When you are on panel, you will give a 2-3 minute overview of the readings at the beginning of class so that everyone has a basis to participate in the discussion. You should especially note the following: What is the theory being tested? How strong is the evidence supporting that theory? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the argument being tested? How does that theory fit in with what we are discussing in class? Also, when you are on panel you will be required to look at the news online and report what is happening in Congress that week.

The readings and work are more front loaded toward the beginning of the term when students are less busy. There are less readings toward the end of the term so you can work on your papers. At the end of each class, I will note which pages of the reading are the most important to focus on and I will post these pages on the home page on Canvas.

▪ ***Midterm (25%)***: We will have a midterm during “Midterm week” which is the week before Winter Carnival. The midterm will be in-class; it will consist of IDs, short answer and an essay question. You will have some choice in what questions you answer.

▪ ***Research Paper (30%)***: Students will be required to write a research paper of between 10-12 pages double spaced. Students will have a choice on what they would like to do; I will give a list of suggested topics and students can pick one of those, or they can choose to do another topic of interest to them. Students can also choose to pick an issue being debated during the current Congress and write a paper discussing the issue and analyzing the issue with respect to the theories learned during the class. Out of fairness to all students in the class, there will be no extensions except in the case of extenuating circumstances. Students will write up a one page paper proposal due on Jan. 27. You will then submit a draft of your paper by March 3 for review and the final paper will be due on March 10, the last day of class. The more detailed your draft is, the better the comments I am able to give you. The quality of the draft paper will count 5%, with the remaining 25% being determined by the final paper.

▪ ***Take Home Final Exam (30%)***: We will have a take home final exam due on March 14.

***Guest Speakers***: This being New Hampshire, we are fortunate in that former US Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) will be coming to class on January 13 to talk about Congress. If there are any topics you would like the Senator to address during his visit, please let me know and I can discuss it with him when I talk to him before his visit. In addition, I hope that we have other guest lecturers through the semester. If anyone has a connection with someone in Congress, please let me know and we can see about getting other people to speak either in person or through Skype. It is also possible that some Congressman may be on campus in advance of next year’s New Hampshire primaries.

***Textbooks****:* There are three required textbooks for the class which you can get at the Dartmouth Bookstore, Wheelock Bookstore or online where they are significantly cheaper. The books will also be available on reserve. The most important books to purchase would be Davidson and Stewart. I believe the Davidson and Dodd/Oppenheimer are available as a course pack. In addition I may post some articles from JSTOR or other online databases on Canvas. The Dodd/Oppenheimer book is the Reader and consists of short scholarly articles. To save on costs, you can get the 9th edition of Dodd/Oppenheimer if you choose and I will try to post online any articles that may be different from the more expensive 10th edition. Other readings may also be added.

Davidson, Roger, Walter Oleszek and Frances Lee. 2011. *Congress and Its Members*, 14th Ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press).

Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, *Congress Reconsidered*, 10th Ed. (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press) (“Reader”); You can also get the 9th edition online to save on costs. I will post any articles that are different.

Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress* (New York: W.W. Norton 2011), 2nd edition.

***Grading Policies:*** Students must take the midterm and submit required papers on time as scheduled unless the student receives advanced permission based on an extenuating personal circumstance or illness. Points will be deduced for a late paper. Out of fairness to all students in the class, there will be no extensions except in the case of extenuating circumstances.

***Computer Policy***: Students may only use a laptop computer and other electronic devices (ipad, phone, etc.) for notetaking or other classroom-related exercises.

***Academic Honor Principle:*** Students are responsible for understanding Dartmouth’s academic integrity rules. Explanations of the integrity rules and principles can be obtained at [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~uja](http://www.dartmouth.edu/%7Euja).  Ignorance of the Academic Honor Principle will not be considered an excuse if a violation occurs.  Beyond any penalties imposed as a consequence of an Academic Honor Principle investigation, any student found to have cheated or plagiarized on homework, tests or the research project will receive a failing grade in the class.  Details on citing sources are available at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources.

***Students with Disabilities:*** Students with learning, physical or psychiatric disabilities enrolled in this course that may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible.

***Religious Observances:*** Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the class, please speak with me to discuss appropriate accommodations.

***Class Schedule***

1. **History of Congress and Its Institutions**

Tues., Jan. 6: Introduction/Modern Trends

Wed., Jan. 7 (x hour): Constitutional and Historical Origins of Congress

▪ Davidson, Chapter 1 (Chapter 2 optional)

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapters 1-2 (Sinclair/Dodd & Oppenheimer)

▪ Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, Chapters 2-3

Thur., Jan. 8: Historical Development of Congressional Institutions (continued)

Tue., Jan. 13: Senator Judd Gregg’s visit. Please make an extra effort to come to class on time.

1. **Parties and Party Leadership**

Wed., Jan. 14 (x hour): Parties and Party Leadership

▪ Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, Chapter 7

Thur., Jan. 15: Parties and Party Leadership (continued)

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapter 6

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 7 (Smith & Gamm)

▪ Smith, Steven et. al. 2009. The American Congress Reader, Chapter 15 (Cox & McCubbins),

pages 193-200

1. **Committees and Subcommittees**

Tues., Jan. 20: Committees and Subcommittees

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapter 7

▪ Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, Chapter 8

Wed., Jan. 21 (x hour): Committees and Subcommittees (continued)

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 8 (Aldrich et al.) (Chapter 10 if you have 9th edition)

▪ King, David. 1994. “The Nature of Congressional Committee Jurisdictions.” *American Political Science Review* 88:48-62.

1. **Congressional Rules and Procedures**

Thurs. Jan. 22: Congressional Rules and Procedures

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapters 8-9

▪ Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, Chapter 9

Tues., Jan. 27, Thurs. Jan. 29: Congressional Rules and Procedures (Continued): The Filibuster

**One Page Paper Proposal Due; Midterm Review**

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapters 9 (Koger), 10 (Volden & Wiseman) (see online if you have the

9th edition)

▪ Schichler, Eric and Greg Wawro. 2004. “Where’s the Pivot? Obstruction and Lawmaking in the Pre-Cloture Senate?” *American Journal of Political Science* 48: 758-774.

Thur, Jan. 29: Midterm Review

1. **Congress and Elections**

Tues., Feb. 3: **MIDTERM (Estimated)**

Wed., Feb. 4: Congress Members

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapters 4-5

▪ Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, Chapter 4

Thurs., Feb. 5: Congress Members (continued)

Tues., Feb. 10: Congress and Elections: Voters and Elections

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 4 (Erikson & Wright)

▪ Smith, Steven et. al. 2009. The American Congress Reader, Chapter 10 (Mayhew), pages 126

140

▪ Cox, G.W. and J.N. Katz. 1996. “Why did the Incumbency Advantage in U.S. House Elections Grow?” *American Journal of Political Science. 40:* 78-97.

Thur., Feb. 12: Campaign Finance/Lobbying

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapter 13

▪ Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, Chapter 6

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 5 (Jacobson), Chapter 6 (Bernhard & Sulkin) (see online if you have the 9th edition)

1. **Congress and Other Political Actors**

Tues., Feb. 17: Congress and the Executive/Bureaucracy

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapters 10-11

▪ McCubbins, Matthew and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms.” *American Journal of Political Science* 28: 165-179.

Wed., Feb. 18 (x hour): Make up x hour if needed

Thurs., Feb. 19: Congress and the Judiciary

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapter 12

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 11 (Binder & Maltzmann)

1. **Congress and Public Policy**

Tues., Feb. 24: Congress and the Budget Process

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapter 14

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 14 (Rudder) (or Chapter 12 in 9th edition) & 18 (Dodd & Oppenheimer) (see online if you have the 9th edition)

Thurs., Feb. 27 or Tues., Mar. 3 (No class probably on Feb. 27): Congress and Public Policy/Foreign Policy

**Paper draft due March 3**

▪ Davidson, *Congress & Its Members,* Chapter 15

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 15 (Howell & Kriner) (Chapter 14 in 9th edition)

▪ Binder, Sarah. 1999. “The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 93: 519-533.

Wed., Mar. 4 (x hour): Make up x hour if needed

Thurs., Mar. 5: Continue discussion of Congress and public policy/discuss papers/discuss other topics of interest

Tues., Mar. 10: Closing Remarks

**Papers due**

▪ Davidson, Chapter 16

▪ Dodd & Oppenheimer, Chapter 16 (Cooper) (see online if you have the 9th edition), Chapter 17 (Dodd & Schraufnagel)

Sat., Mar. 14: **Take Home Final Exam due 3PM**