

**U.S. Congressional Politics**  
**Political Science 456**  
Summer 2003  
314 Eliot Hall  
MTWT 11:00 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Instructor: Ryan J. Vander Wielen  
Office: Weidenbaum Center  
Office Phone: 935-5676  
Email: [rjvander@artsci.wustl.edu](mailto:rjvander@artsci.wustl.edu)  
Office Hours: Monday 1:00-3:00 p.m. and by appt.

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“Congress is the great commanding theater of this nation”  
*Thomas Jefferson*

“Congress is so strange. A man gets up to speak and says nothing. Nobody  
listens – and then everyone disagrees”  
*Boris Marshalov*

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**Course Description:**

This course offers a broad survey of the U.S. Congress by examining the electoral and internal politics thereof. Among the various topics to be covered in this course include the election of members, institutional dynamics, parties and leaders in Congress, congressional committees, rules and procedures, voting behavior, and the legislative process.

**Texts:**

*There are five required texts for the course:*

Deering, Christopher J. and Steven S. Smith. 1997. *Committees in Congress*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.

Jacobson, Gary C. 2001. *The Politics of Congressional Elections, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*. New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman.

Rhode, David W. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sinclair, Barbara. 2000. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press.

Smith, Steven S., Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2003. *The American Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Online Version)*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Additional required readings will be made available either through J-Stor or library reserve.

## **Assignments and Grading**

- Current Events, Participation, and Attendance = 70% of course grade.
- Writing Assignments (2) = 30%

Class participation and attendance are required. Students are expected to have read the assigned readings prior to class and be prepared to discuss the content of the readings.

### *Writing Assignments:*

1. Students will complete a *member profile* of their member of the U.S. House of Representatives providing such information as the member's committee assignments, margin of victory in the past election, bill(s) introduced, and ideological reputation. This will be a 2-4 page assignment that students will then present to the class.
2. Students will be assigned two legislative committees to profile. This assignment should include information such as the membership patterns of the committee, committee jurisdictions, committee prestige, and a comparison of the two committees. This will be a 2-4 page assignment that student's will then present to the class.

### *Current Events:*

1. Students are expected to be attentive to current events relating to the U.S. Congress and other materials we cover in class. As time permits, we will discuss pertinent current events during class time. There are many different means of keeping up with current events. The following are often the most comprehensive: Roll Call, The Washington Post, and The New York Times.
2. Students will present two analyses of current events during the course of the semester. A proper analysis should involve a brief synopsis of an relevant article (including a discussion of the actors involved), and a discussion of how the article relates to concepts explored in class or in readings.

## **Academic Integrity**

No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this course. Discussion of course material with fellow students is a valuable learning technique and is strongly encouraged. However, copying or plagiarizing another person's work or cheating on an assignment or an examination is unacceptable. Anyone found guilty of cheating, plagiarism or of any other violation of academic integrity will automatically receive a grade of 0.0 for the assignment or exam. Depending on the circumstances, a course grade of 0.0 may be given with the matter referred to the University Dean for further action.

**Course Outline:**

Readings denoted with \* are available through J-Stor)

- July 14**                    **Introduction**  
Distribution of course materials, documentary.
- July 15**                    **Congressional History and Evolution**  
U.S. Constitution  
Federalist Papers 10, 51  
Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen Ch. 2
- July 16**                    **Representation in Congress**  
Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen Chs. 1, 5
- July 17**                    **Representation in Congress (cont.)**  
\*Fenno, *U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies*  
Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection (excerpt)*
- July 21**                    **Congressional Elections**  
Jacobson chs. 1,2  
Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen ch. 4
- July 22**                    **Congressional Elections (cont.)**  
Jacobson chs. 3,4  
Mayhew, *The Case of the Vanishing Marginals (Optional)*  
Fiorina, *What Ever Happened to the Median Voter (Optional)*
- July 23**                    **Congressional Elections (cont.)**  
Jacobson ch. 5
- July 24**                    **No Class – Work on writing assignment**
- July 28**                    **Congressional Process and Procedure**  
Presentation of member profiles (writing assignment 1)  
Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen ch. 8
- July 29**                    **Congressional Process and Procedure (cont.)**  
Sinclair chs. 1-4
- July 30**                    **Congressional Process and Procedure (cont.)**  
Sinclair chs. 5,6,12
- July 31**                    **Congressional Process and Procedure (cont.)**  
Select one case study from Sinclair (chs. 7-11) and present in class
- August 4**                    **Congressional Committees**

Smith, Robert, and Vander Wielen ch. 7  
Deering and Smith ch. 1

**August 5**

**Congressional Committees (cont.)**

Deering and Smith ch. 3

\*King, *The Nature of Congressional Committee Jurisdiction*

**August 6**

**Congressional Committees (cont.)**

Presentation of committee profiles

Deering and Smith ch. 5

**August 7**

**Parties and Leaders**

Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen ch. 6

Aldrich, *Why Parties?* (excerpt)

**August 11**

**Parties and Leaders**

Rohde chs. 1-3

Smith and Gamm, *The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress*

**August 12**

**Parties and Leaders**

Rohde chs. 4-6

Aldrich and Rohde, *The Logic of Conditional Party Government*

**August 13**

**Congress and other Branches**

Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen chs. 9-11

**August 14**

**Final Exam**

*The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus in a timely fashion.*