

**San José State University**  
**Department of Political Science**  
*Congress*  
**POLS 105, Section 1, SJSU Catalog Code 25039**  
**Spring 2020**

**Instructor:** Donna Crane  
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**Office hours:** Mondays 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Wednesdays 9 a.m. to noon  
**Class days/time:** Mondays/Wednesdays 3 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.  
**Classroom:** Dudley Moorhead Hall 160

**Course Description:**

Examines politics and policymaking in the U.S. Congress. Topics include party leadership, interest groups in Congress, congressional committees, political representation, redistricting and congressional elections, party polarization, and the process of how a bill becomes a law.

**Political Science Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):**

Upon completion of the Political Science major program, students should be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

PSPL01: Breadth: Students should possess a broad knowledge of the theory and methods of the various branches of the discipline.

PSPL02: Application and Disciplinary Methods: Students should be able to formulate research questions, engage in systematic literature searches using primary and secondary sources, evaluate research studies, and critically analyze and interpret influential political texts. Students should be able to apply these techniques to identify, understand, and analyze domestic and international political issues and organizations.

PSPL03: Communication Skills: Students should master basic competencies in oral and written communication skills and be able to apply these skills in the context of political science. This means communicating effectively about politics and/or public administration, public policy, and law.

PSPL04: Citizenship: Students should acquire an understanding of the role of the citizen in local, state, national, and global contexts and appreciate the importance of lifelong participation in political processes.

**Course Learning Objectives (CLOs):**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

CL01: Demonstrate understanding of political science theories and concepts and theories that relate to the U.S. Congress.

CL02: Demonstrate the ability to critically think about the organization of Congress (including political parties and committees) and how organizational structures shape legislative outcomes.

CL03: Express an understanding of congressional campaigns and electoral systems and how they affect political representation in Congress.

CL04: Demonstrate knowledge of legislative processes and how a bill becomes a law in the contemporary U.S. Congress.

Mapping POLS 105 Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) to Political Science Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)	Program Learning Outcomes	Assessment
CL01: Demonstrate understanding of political science theories and concepts and theories that relate to the U.S. Congress	PL01, 2	Midterm and final exams, completion of 1000-word position paper, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments
CL02: Demonstrate the ability to critically think about the organization of Congress (including political parties and committees) and how organizational structures shape legislative outcomes	PL02, 4	Midterm and final exams, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments
CL03: Express understanding of congressional campaigns and electoral systems and how they affect political representation in Congress	PL02, 4	Midterm and final exams, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments

CL04: Demonstrate knowledge of legislative processes and how a bill becomes a law in the contemporary U.S. Congress	PL01, 2	Midterm and final exams, execution of simulation exercise, and completion of multiple short written (homework) assignments
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### Required Reading:

This course will draw from three main sources of material:

(1) *Textbook:*

- Davidson, Roger, Walter Oleszek, Frances Lee, and Eric Schickler (2018). *Congress and Its Members*. 16th ed. Sage Publishing.

(2) *Articles:* All items have been shared via Canvas. See course schedule for due dates.

(3) *Twitter Accounts:* Please sign up for a Twitter account (if you don't already have one) and follow these accounts. Check your Twitter feed at least once a day during our course to stay abreast of news about Capitol Hill:

- Identify and follow your two senators. (For most of you, that will be Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris: @SenFeinstein and @SenKamalaHarris.)
- Identify and follow your House member.
- Nate Silver, political statistician: @NateSilver538
- Cook Political Report: @cookpolitical
- Cornell Belcher, pollster: @cornellbelcher
- Ana Navarro-Cardenas, political strategist/commentator: @ananavarro
- Stuart Rothenberg, political analyst/commentator: @stupolitics
- POLITICO newspaper: @POLITICO
- Axios newsletter: @axios
- National Public Radio political desk: @nprpolitics
- PolitiFact, fact-checker: @PolitiFact
- CNN political desk: @CNNPolitics

### Library Liaison:

The library liaison for Political Science is available to answer questions and provide one-on-one help learning using the library for research:

Paul Kauppila

University Librarian (Political Science Liaison)  
408.808.2042  
Paul.Kaupila@sjsu.edu

### **Course Requirements and Assignments/Succeeding in a Four-Unit Course:**

At SJSU, students are expected to spend two hours outside of class for every hour of class time. Because this is a four-unit course, you can expect to spend a minimum of eight hours per week on this course, in addition to time spent in class. More information about SJSU student workload can be found [here](#).

Here are the main requirements for this course:

#### *Required Reading:*

Reading assignments listed in the course schedule below are required. Please complete them *before* the week noted, as we will be discussing this material in class on those dates. In order to stay current with news events, additional (usually brief) reading assignments may be announced in class and on Canvas.

#### *Position Paper:*

Each student will be responsible for writing a paper that persuasively advocates a public-policy position, due on May 4. (The process for selecting the topic and the position will be discussed at the beginning of the semester.) The position paper should be no less than 1000 words (about four pages, double-spaced). Additionally, if you give me a week's turnaround time, I am happy to review *either* an outline of your paper *or* a draft and provide general feedback, with no impact on the grade. Top scores will be awarded to position papers that explain the issue clearly and concisely; persuasively argue a point of view; use outside reference materials effectively and correctly; and are well-organized and free of grammatical errors. More instructions on this assignment will be provided. Maximum points possible: 100.

#### *Simulations:*

Over the course of the semester, we will hold four simulated congressional hearings and mark-ups. Each student will be randomly assigned to one of the four simulations, and assigned a role to play (member of Congress, congressional witness, lobbyist, etc). Students will need to prepare for their simulation by reading up on the issue; writing the items that the role requires (testimony, opening remarks, amendments, hearing questions, etc.); and carrying out the assigned role on the designated date in class ("testifying," asking questions of witnesses, offering/responding to

amendments, etc.). More details will be provided when assignments are given. Maximum points possible: 100.

#### *Homework Assignments:*

Over the course of the semester, I will give an estimated 6-8 homework assignments, to be announced in class and on Canvas. These will vary in format, topic, point values, and deadlines (from three days to a week or so). Homework assignments are designed to give students hands-on experience with a cross-section of tasks that are common in real-life congressional and political environments; these will also allow us to capitalize on the most current news of the day. Maximum points possible: 100.

#### *Midterm Exam:*

The midterm exam will test students on the material covered in the first half of the course. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and questions requiring short written answers. Please bring a Scantron 882 form, a pencil, and a pen to the exam. Notes are not allowed and all electronic devices must be put away for the duration of the test. Maximum points possible: 100.

#### *Final Exam:*

Here is SJSU's policy on [final exams](#). Our final exam will take place on Wednesday, May 13 from 12:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in our usual classroom: DMH 160. The final exam will test students on the material covered in the second half of the course. The exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and questions requiring short written answers. Please bring a Scantron 882 form, a pencil, and a pen to the exam. Notes are not allowed and all electronic devices must be put away for the duration of the test. Maximum points possible: 100.

#### *Class Preparation & Participation:*

Throughout the course, we will have in-class pop questions based on the reading assignments and previous class lectures/discussion. A question answered correctly receives four points; a question answered incorrectly receives two points; a question not answered at all receives no points. Each student's top 25 scoring responses will be counted. The questions are intended to encourage students to keep current with the reading and participate actively in class discussions, which are critical to success in the course. Maximum points possible: 100.

#### **Grading Information:**

Following are the course assignments, with associated point values. See below for further detail about each item:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Point value</b>
Position paper	100
Simulation	100
Homework assignments	100
Midterm	100
Final exam	100
Class preparation & participation	100
<i>Total points possible</i>	<i>600</i>

**Determination of Grades:**

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A plus	97 to 100 percent	579 to 600 points
A	92 to 96 percent	549 to 578 points
A minus	90 to 91 percent	537 to 548 points
B plus	87 to 90 percent	519 to 536 points
B	82 to 86 percent	489 to 518 points
B minus	80 to 81 percent	477 to 488 points
C plus	77 to 80 percent	459 to 476 points
C	72 to 76 percent	429 to 458 points
C minus	70 to 71 percent	417 to 428 points
D plus	67 to 70 percent	399 to 416 points
D	62 to 66 percent	369 to 398 points
D minus	60 to 61 percent	357 to 368 points

## Late Work and Make-Up Policies:

In an effort to be fair to all students, late work and exam absences will be handled as follows:

- *Position papers* are due during our class time on May 4, as indicated in the course schedule. Papers are considered on time if they are in my hands by 4:15 p.m. on the due date. If you must be absent from class that day, please either send your paper to class with a friend or verifiably email it to me by 4:15 p.m. Papers received after 4:15 p.m. on the due date will be considered late and will be deducted 10 points (equivalent to one full grade) each day.
- *Homework assignments* are due on the dates and times announced. A late assignment will be deducted points in accordance with the assignment's value (which will vary).
- If you face a serious illness that renders you unable to complete one or more of the written work assignments described above on time, you must notify me in person or by email before the assignment is due. Exceptions to this are only allowed in cases of documented medical emergency.
- *Simulations* will involve both advance written work and in-classroom role-playing. In order for simulations to work, all participants need to be present. Therefore, a student's absence from class on the date of his/her assigned simulation cannot be made up and will incur a deduction of at least 50 points (half the assignment's total value). For this reason, please check the date of your assigned simulation as soon as you receive it, and alert me immediately if you anticipate a scheduling problem. The only excuse for missing a simulation is a documented medical emergency.
- *Exams*: Students with a compelling reason requiring their absence from class on the date of the midterm or final exam must discuss this with me in advance and have the absence pre-approved - in which case we will agree on an alternate test date. Reasons that would merit a pre-approved absence are: a serious medical condition, religious holiday, pre-approved university-sanctioned event or activity, military orders, or family emergency. The only excuse for missing an exam without pre-approval is a documented medical emergency. With only these exceptions, a missed exam cannot be made up and will result in zero points. Therefore, please plan accordingly.
- Class preparation & participation points cannot be made up or turned in late. As noted above, each student's top 25 scoring responses will be counted.

Questions, concerns, or have a situation not addressed above? Please ask!

## **Classroom Protocol:**

Although class attendance per se cannot be a grading factor, students who prioritize attendance in this course will be at an advantage, because material covered in class will subsequently be tested in exams. Moreover, as noted above, pop questions will be given in class in order to encourage students to stay current in the course reading and lectures/discussion - so those not present will be unable to earn those points.

Please bring a smart phone, tablet, or laptop to class in order to answer pop questions. (We will use the iClicker system.) Please note that you must be present in class in order to answer the pop questions; attempts to circumvent the iClicker system or pop questions process will be considered a potential violation of academic integrity and dealt with accordingly.

I do not share my classroom slides but I will post a study guide for each main topic we discuss in class on Canvas (under "Modules"). Students report that these are valuable study tools for exam prep and I hope you will agree.

As a courtesy, please switch electronic devices to silent mode during our class time. If you choose to take notes electronically, please do so responsibly and don't allow use of your devices to distract you or your fellow students from classroom business.

## **Recording of Class and Public Sharing of Instructor Material:**

Recording in this class is allowed only with my written permission, and will be granted only on a class-by-class basis if the student justifies the need to record the lectures. Students must obtain a written permission of any guest speaker and every class member in order to record presentations or class discussions. As SJSU [policy](#) notes, "Course material developed by the instructor is the intellectual property of the instructor and cannot be shared publicly without his/her approval. You may not publicly share or upload instructor generated material for this course such as exam questions, lecture notes, or homework solutions without instructor consent."

## **Political Science Departmental Writing Policy:**

Students of political science should develop the ability to write in clear, grammatical English. Spelling and grammar count! Students must take care that appropriate citations are used. Direct quotations must be so indicated with quotation marks and a specific reference to the page in the source from which it was taken. Failure to cite your sources constitutes academic misconduct, which carries serious sanctions. A tutorial on citations is available at the library website [here](#). For assistance with writing, please see me or visit the Writing Center located in Clark Hall 126 or online, [here](#).



## University Policies:

As a reminder, SJSU has policies on [many important topics](#) including [attendance](#), and [academic integrity](#). If you have questions about any of this material, please ask.

## Course Schedule:

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Discussion topics</b>	<b>Reading assignments</b>  <i>(All "chapter" readings refer to the textbook. All non-textbook readings have been provided on Canvas.)</i>
January 27, 29	Introduction to the course  Introduction to Congress	Syllabus  Chapters 1, 2  Simon Tisdall, "American Democracy is in Crisis, and not Just Because of Trump," <i>The Guardian</i> .
February 3, 5	Members of Congress  Congress' main responsibilities	Chapter 5
February 10, 12	Internal mechanics: How the institution of Congress works  The legislative process	Chapters 6, 7, 8
February 17, 19	Campaigns & elections	Chapters 3, 4  Shane Goldmacher, "An Upset in the Making: Why Joe Crowley Never Saw Defeat Coming," <i>The New York Times</i> .  Burgess Everett, "Murkowski Bucks GOP as Trump Seizes Party," <i>POLITICO</i> .  "The 10 Most Vulnerable Senators in 2020: Republicans Play Defense," <i>Roll Call</i> .

February 24, 26	Interest groups	Chapter 13
March 2, 4	Congress' relationship with the executive branch	Chapters 10, 11  Josh Hawley and Seung-Min Kim, "Trump Tried to Make the GOP Border Emergency Fight About Him. He Lost Anyway," <i>The Washington Post</i> .
	Congress' relationship with the judicial branch	Chapter 12  Li Zhou, "It's Official: Brett Kavanaugh Just Became the Least Popular Supreme Court Justice in Modern History," <i>Vox</i> .
March 9	<b>SIMULATION #1</b>	
March 11	Legislative strategies/How members of Congress make voting decisions	Chapter 9  "Democratic Representation: Americans' Frustration with Whose Voices are Represented in Congress," The Associated Press - NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.
March 16	Midterm prep	
March 18	<b>MIDTERM</b>	No assigned readings. Come with any questions or requests to review material before Wednesday's midterm exam.
March 23	Congress & the public	Chapter 16
March 25	<b>SIMULATION #2</b>	
March 30, April 1	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK	
April 6, 8	Congress & the media  Congress in the age of political disinformation	Amber Herrie, "Regulating Fact from Fiction: Disinformation in Political Advertising," <i>Brookings</i> .  United States Senate, "Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on

		Russian Active Measures, Campaigns, and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election. Volume 2: Russia's Use of Social Media." (Read pages 1-22 only.)
April 13	<b>SIMULATION #3</b>	
April 15	Congress & the federal budget	Chapter 14
April 20, 22	Case studies of congressional decision-making	To be assigned
April 27	<b>SIMULATION #4</b>	
April 29	Capitol Hill culture	Adia Robinson, "A Brief History of How Maddening Capitol Hill Culture Is for Women (Still)," <i>Washingtonian</i> .  "What Is Daily Life Like for a Member of Congress or Congressional Staffer?" <i>Slate</i> .
May 4	<b>POSITION PAPERS DUE</b>	
May 6	Congress & ethics  Would the founding fathers recognize Congress today?	John Dingell, "I Served in Congress Longer Than Anyone. Here's How to Fix It," <i>The Atlantic</i> .
May 11	Final exam prep	
May 13, 12:15 p.m.	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	No assigned readings. Come with any questions or requests to review material before Wednesday's final exam.

Note: This schedule is subject to change with reasonable notice provided through Canvas and/or classroom announcement.