

# PSCI 3110: The Legislative Process - Spring 2026

**Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 10:00 - 10:50 am – Wooten Hall 115**

**Instructor:** Lanie Richards

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**Office Hours:** M & W: 11:00 - 12:30 - WH 171

Also available by appointment on zoom

## Course Description

The U.S. Congress was designed to be the most powerful branch of government, and it plays a central role in shaping national policy, elections, and the functioning of representative democracy. However, today, some see it as weak, ineffective, and dysfunctional. We will critically assess this claim and consider whether Congress's power and productivity has diminished over time, and if so, why?

This course provides an overview of the U.S. Congress, with a particular emphasis on what factors shape legislators' behavior and impact the lawmaking process, and how Congress interacts with other political institutions. We will cover a wide variety of topics, including: the historical development of Congress; congressional elections (who runs, who wins, and why); how well legislators represent the characteristics and preferences of their constituents; key institutions (committees and parties) and procedures of Congress; polarization; and the relationship between Congress and other political actors, such as the executive and judicial branches, and interest groups. Through discussions and analysis, students will gain a deeper understanding of Congress's role in shaping public policy and its place within the broader democratic system.

Because this is an upper-division course, there will be a significant amount of reading and writing. Students will read and critically engage with the academic literature on Congress, quantitative and qualitative. Class periods will combine lectures with discussion of the readings. Active student participation is expected. A large portion of the course will involve a legislative simulation where each student will assume the role of a member of the U.S. House. Students will elect party leaders, write legislation, work in committee, and debate, amend (if the Rules Committee allows it!), and vote on legislation. Students will therefore learn about Congress by doing Congress.

Students are required to rent or purchase the following textbook:

Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek, Frances E. Lee, Eric Schickler, and James M. Curry. 2025. *Congress and Its Members*. 20th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Information on renting the e-book is posted on canvas.

Students are also required to purchase Article I, the software that we will use to organize and conduct our legislative simulation. It is available for \$10. Registration instructions are on Canvas.

Additional readings are provided on Canvas.

## **Course Assignments and Grades**

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade
A	90-100%	
B	80-89%	
C	70-79%	
D	60-69%	
F	0-59%	

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- **Participation (10%):** Attendance is not an official part of your final grade for this course. However, participation in class is, and in order to participate you must be present. Completing the readings and actively listening and participating in the class discussions and activities will not only help your grade, but it increases what you take away from the course.
- **Syllabus Quiz (5%):** The course syllabus contains information vital to your success in this class, and to encourage you to learn it, your first assignment is a 10-question syllabus quiz. This quiz is on canvas and you have unlimited attempts (20 minutes for each attempt) to get the correct answers. **This quiz is due on January 16th at 11:59 pm.** There are no makeups for this quiz.
- **Reading Quizzes (10%):** We will have 4 in-class reading quizzes, each with three multiple-choice questions, throughout the semester. They will be given at the start of class and cover only the assigned reading for that day. The quiz dates are **January 30th, February 20th, April 6th, and April 22nd**, and are listed on the course schedule as

well. I will drop the lowest grade at the end of the semester. There are no make-ups for these quizzes.

- **Congress Simulation (45%):** Throughout the semester you will learn about Congress by doing Congress! Through the Article 1 software, you will participate in a legislative simulation in which you assume the role of a member of the U.S. House, elect party leaders, write legislation, work in committees, and debate, amend, and vote on legislation. Collectively, this Congress simulation is worth 45% of your final grade, however, it is broken down into multiple assignments.
  - **Profile Memos (10%):** In preparation for the simulation, you will write two 2-page, double-spaced memos. The first will describe the congressional district you have chosen to represent (geography, demographics, politics, and key issues). The second will justify the committee assignments you have requested from your party leader. The due dates are **February 6th and February 27th.**
  - **Bill (15%):** Each student is required to write one original piece of legislation for the simulation. Your bill should not simply express broad policy preferences or opinions; rather, it must be a specific, actionable proposal that addresses a concrete policy issue. It should be written in legal terminology and include clearly structured sections outlining the bill's purpose, scope, implementation strategy, and potential funding mechanisms. **Your bill is due March 6th at 11:59 pm.** We will have a bill writing workshop in class.
  - **Simulation Final Memo (20%):** At the end of the simulation, students will write a 5-7 page, double-spaced report that recaps your experience in the simulation, and outlines a plan to win re-election. The strongest reports will draw heavily from the lectures and readings to defend your decision-making in the simulation. **It is due on April 10th at 11:59 pm.**
- **Final Exam(30%):** There will be a cumulative final exam in-person during finals week for this course. The exam will include a mixture of short answer questions and multiple choice questions. A study guide will be provided.

## Communication

The fastest way to reach me is via email, sent from your UNT email address, or by messaging me through canvas. If you contact me during the week I will do my best to respond within 24 hours, but during the weekend it may be closer to 48 hours. Please keep that in mind before sending a follow-up email. Throughout the semester I will also communicate with the class using canvas

messages and announcements. Therefore, it is important to regularly check the canvas. My office hours are listed on the top of the syllabus, but you are more than welcome to come in anytime my door is open. I am also available by appointment or over zoom if my office hours conflict with your schedule. I am excited to get to know you this semester.

## **Late Work**

Please make note of all the due dates listed in the syllabus and plan accordingly. If you have a valid excuse (illness, serious family emergency, or a religious holiday) with proper documentation and notice then late work will not be penalized. However, **the penalty for unexcused late assignments (excluding the syllabus quiz and reading quizzes) is 10 percentage points each day.** For example, an assignment that would have earned a 100 can only earn a 80 if it is turned in two days late. I am willing to be flexible and accommodate *reasonable* requests for extensions, but you must contact me *before* the due date.

## **Course Schedule**

*Tentative and subject to change*

### **Week 1: January 12th -16th**

**Monday (Jan 12th):** Introduction to the Course

**Wednesday (Jan 14th):** Introduction to Congress

**Friday (Jan 16th):** Introduction to Quantitative Political Science Research

- Read:
  - Green, Amelia Hoover. 2013. "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps."
  - Miller, Steven V. 2014. "Reading a Regression Table: A Guide for Students."
- Due:
  - Syllabus Quiz - due @ 11:59 pm

### **Week 2: January 19th -23rd**

**Monday (Jan 19th):** NO CLASS - MLK Day

**Wednesday (Jan 21st):** The Constitution and Historical Development of Congress

- Read:
  - Ch. 2 of Davidson et al

**Friday (Jan 23rd): The Constitution and Historical Development of Congress**  
**Week 3: January 26th -30th**

**Monday (Jan 26th): Congressional Elections**

- Read:
  - Ch. 3 of Davidson et al

**Wednesday (Jan 28th): Congressional Elections**

- Read:
  - Ch. 4 of Davidson et al

**Friday (Jan 30th): Congressional Elections**

- **Reading Quiz in class**
- Read:
  - Fox, Richard L., and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2014. "Uncovering the Origins of the Gender Gap in Political Ambition."
  - Gay, Claudine. "The effect of black congressional representation on political participation."

**Week 4: February 2nd - 6th**

**Monday (Feb 2nd): NO CLASS**

**Wednesday (Feb 4th): Representation**

- Read:
  - Ch. 5 of Davidson et al

**Friday (Feb 6th): Representation**

- Read:
  - Fenno Jr., Richard F. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration."
- Due:
  - **Profile memo 1 due @ 11:59 pm**

**Week 5: February 9th - 13th**

**Monday (Feb 9th): Representation**

- Read:
  - Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent Yes"

- Hawkesworth, Mary. 2003. "Congressional Enactments of Race–Gender."

**Wednesday (Feb 11th): Political Parties**

- Read:
  - Ch. 6 of Davidson et al

**Friday (Feb 13th): Political Parties**

- Read:
  - Sinclair, Barbara. "The emergence of strong leadership in the 1980s House of Representatives."

**Week 6: February 16th - 20th**

**Monday (Feb 16th): Political Parties**

**Wednesday (Feb 18th): Committees**

- Read:
  - Ch. 7 of Davidson et al
  - Shepsle, Kenneth A., and Barry Weingast. 1987. "The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power."

**Friday (Feb 20th): Committees**

- **Reading Quiz in class**
- Read:
  - Ban, Pamela, Justin Grimmer, Jaclyn Kaslovsky, and Emily West. 2022. "How Does the Rising Number of Women in the U.S. Congress Change Deliberation? Evidence from House Committee Hearings
  - Miller, Michael G. and Joseph L. Sutherland. 2023. "The Effect of Gender on Interruption at Congressional Hearings." *American Political Science Review* 117(1): 103-121

**Week 7: February 23rd - 27th**

**Monday (Feb 23rd): Processes and Procedures in the House**

- Read:
  - Ch. 8, pp 211-233 of Davidson et al

**Wednesday (Feb 25th): Processes and Procedures in the House – in the Senate**

- Read:
  - Ch. 8, pp 234-246 of Davidson et al

**Friday (Feb 27th):** Processes and Procedures in the Senate

- Read:
  - Lee, Frances E. 2000. "Senate Representation and Coalition Building in Distributive Politics." *American Political Science Review* 94 (1): 59-72
- Due:
  - **Profile memo 2 due @ 11:59 pm**

### **Week 8: March 2nd -6th**

**Monday (March 2nd):** Bill Writing Workshop - in class

**Wednesday (March 4th):** Bill Writing Workshop - in class

**Friday (March 6th):** Bill Writing Workshop - in class

- Due:
  - **Bill @ 11:59pm**

### **Week 9: March 9th -13th – SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS**

### **Week 10: March 16th -20th**

**Monday (March 16th):** Legislative Simulation - in class

**Wednesday (March 18th):** Legislative Simulation - in class

**Friday (March 20th):** Legislative Simulation - in class

### **Week 11: March 23rd -27th**

**Monday (March 23rd):** Legislative Simulation - in class

**Wednesday (March 25th):** Legislative Simulation - in class

**Friday (March 27th):** Legislative Simulation - in class

### **Week 12: March 30th - April 3rd**

**Monday (March 30th):** Legislative Simulation - in class

**Wednesday (April 1st):** Memo writing day – in class

**Friday (April 3rd):** Memo writing day – in class

### **Week 13: April 6th - 10th**

**Monday (April 6th):** Polarization and Productivity

- [Reading quiz in class](#)
- Read:
  - Barber, M. J., & McCarty, N. 2015. “Causes and consequences of polarization”. In *Negotiating Agreement in Politics*

**Wednesday (April 8th):** Polarization and Productivity

**Friday (April 10th):** Unorthodox lawmaking

- Read:
  - Curry, James M., and Frances E. Lee. 2020. “What Is Regular Order Worth? Partisan Lawmaking and Congressional Processes.” *Journal of Politics* 82 (2): 627-641
- Due:
  - [Simulation Final Memo @ 11:59 pm](#)

### **Week 14: April 13th - 17th**

**Monday (April 13th):** Congress and the Executive Branch

- Read:
  - Ch. 10 of Davidson et al

**Wednesday (April 15th):** Congress and the Executive Branch

- Read:
  - Ch. 11 of Davidson et al

**Friday (April 17th):** Congress and the Executive Branch

- Read:
  - Lowande, K., Ritchie, M. and Lauterbach, E. 2019. “Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress: Evidence from 80,000 Congressional Inquiries.” *American Journal of Political Science*, 63: 644-659

### **Week 15: April 20th - 24th**

**Monday (April 20th):** Congress and Interest Groups

- Read:
  - Ch. 11 of Davidson et al

### **Wednesday (April 22nd): Congress and Interest Groups**

- **Reading Quiz in class**
- Read:
  - Hall, Richard L. and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. "Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy." *American Political Science Review* 100 (1): 69-84

### **Friday (April 24th): Congress and the Courts**

- Read:
  - Ch. 12 of Davidson et al
  - Binder, Sarah A., and Forrest Maltzman. 2002. "Senatorial Delay in Confirming Federal Judges, 1947-1998." *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (1): 190-199

## **Week 16: April 27th - May 1st**

### **Monday (April 27th): Congressional Reform**

- Read:
  - Ch. 16 of Davidson et al

### **Wednesday (April 29th): Course Recap and Final Exam Review Day**

### **Friday (May 1st): Reading Day - No Class**

## **Week 17: FINALS WEEK**

### **Saturday (May 2nd): 7:30 - 9:30 am**

## **Additional Information and Policies**

### **Technology in Class:**

You will need a device, such as a laptop or tablet, to participate in the legislative simulation. If you are concerned about this please come and see me as soon as possible. Laptops and tablets are allowed in class to take notes, although I do not recommend you use them. Growing evidence indicates that taking notes by hand improves retention of materials and their understanding. The use of laptops and tablets often leads to checking email and social media or browsing the

internet. They may also distract from in-class discussion. If I find that devices become a distraction, I retain the right to ban them in class.

### **Civility in Class:**

Politics is often characterized by conflict. I do encourage students to participate in class discussions and express their opinions. However, I expect students to treat each other with tolerance and respect.

### **Academic Misconduct:**

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. In line with the UNT Honor Code, all work you submit must be your own. Using GenAI tools to complete assignments violates academic integrity and will be addressed according to university policy

Your first academic integrity violation is subject to a range of penalties, including failing the class. If you commit more than one academic integrity violation, your actions are subject to a review by the Academic Integrity officer. This may involve a hearing in which you are subject to expulsion.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act Statement:**

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and **must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class.**

For additional information see the [ODA website](#).

### **Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004):**

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The

University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

**Emergency Notification & Procedures:**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Survivor Advocacy:**

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at [SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at [oeo@unt.edu](mailto:oeo@unt.edu) or at (940) 565 2759.