

Political Science 225  
Congress and the Presidency  
Fall 2008

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**Class meetings: T, Th 12:50 to 2:00**

**Office Hours: M, W, F 9:30 to 10:30; T, Th 10:30 to 11:30**

## **Introduction**

As the United States stands on the threshold of the 2008 national elections, a promise of significant change in the way that government conducts its affairs has been made by the presidential candidates of both the Democratic and Republican Parties. They do so in response to public frustration derived in part from high levels of partisanship, the consequences of globalization, an unpopular war and soaring energy prices. The frustration with these circumstances has reached a peak with the intentionally divisive policies of the Bush administration. Expectations that the federal government would play a smaller role in the lives of Americans as promised by both Presidents Clinton and Bush evaporated with attacks of September 11, 2001 and with the repeated nationalization of congressional elections for the purpose of serving national party agendas. Furthermore, the politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have been marked by an explicit effort to strengthen the national executive and grow the powers of the federal government in national security affairs. The globalization of the economy, profligate consumption of energy, the ongoing march of global warming and a national financial crisis promise to continue to require the national government to undertake broad scale policy actions necessary to respond to such problems.

In this context, it is very important for Americans to understand how their national institutions work. Public frustrations derive in part from a limited understanding of the structures and processes that characterize how the President and Congress do their jobs and how power is exercised within these institutions. This limited understanding also obscures recognition of the resources and capacities available to address this nation's public problems. Finally, there is a need to understand how the operations of the national government reflect a particular conception of democratic government in the United States and where that conception of democracy has been challenged by abuses of power.

This course seeks to address these concerns through the following objectives:

- Students will examine the constitutional foundations of the Congress and the President.
- Students will examine through research the interactions between the interests of the public and the behaviors of their elected officials in Washington.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the legislative process and the role of both Congress and the President in enacting law.
- Students will report on the capacities and limitations of the President in the conduct of policy leadership, the conduct of foreign policy and war and as Chief Executive.

## Required Books

Roger H. Davidson, Walter J. Oleszek and Frances E. Lee, **Congress and Its Members**, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2008)

Michael A. Genovese and Lori Cox Han, editors, **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006)

Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, **The Broken Branch**, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

James P. Pfiffner and Roger H. Davidson, **Understanding the Presidency**, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007)

## Attendance

Students are required to attend all classes. Attendance will be part of the instructor evaluation grade. Students missing class for legitimate reasons can be excused but the instructor reserves the right to judge the legitimacy of the excuse. Common courtesy also requires that students inform the instructor as soon as when absences will be unavoidable.

## Cell Phones

Cell phones should be turned off and stored away during class. Students whose cell phones are visible will be asked to put them away. Students who answer them or use them **in any way** during class time will be asked to leave.

## Evaluation of Student's Performance

The student's final grade will be based on a 400 point system.

Reading notes	60 points
Policy research paper	100 points
Legislative memorandum	100 points
What Every Citizen Should Know About the Presidency	100 points
Instructor evaluation	40 points

Final grades will be assigned according to the following schedule:

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>POINTS</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
A	375	C	300
A-	360	C-	280
B+	345	D+	270
B	335	D	260
B-	320	D-	240
C+	310	F	<240

## Reading Notes

The assigned readings in this course are intended to help the students achieve the course objective listed above. Developing the capacity to comprehend and summarize readings is also a critical skill in the development of the student's writing skills. With these things in mind, students will complete a set of reading notes corresponding to class assignments and submit them to the instructor for examination.

These reading notes will consist of 10 **typewritten** submissions. Each submission will focus on a different assigned reading. The readings on which the notes will be submitted will be selected by the student from those listed on the syllabus. Any reading that is at least 5 pages is eligible for selection. The notes for the selected reading **are due on the day for which the reading is assigned**. A set of notes will be kept in a folder by the instructor for evaluation.

The reading notes should include the following elements:

1. A heading that states the title and author of the reading.
2. A one paragraph summary of the principal thesis of the chosen reading.
3. One paragraphs identifying observations, data or arguments provided by the author to illustrate or support the principal thesis of the reading.

Submissions will be evaluated on the basis of three criteria:

1. Comprehension of the essential content of the reading
2. Thoughtfulness and judgment in selecting the observations, data or arguments used as illustrations of the thesis of the reading.
3. Clarity in the writing of the notes

## Policy Research Paper on the Financial Crisis Associated with Housing

This assignment requires students to write a seven to ten page research paper on the nature and possible legislative responses to the current financial crisis associated with the collapse of the housing market bubble. Consistent with the purposes of a writing intensive course, this assignment will be completed using the basic steps of writing as a process and the standard conventions of a research paper. Assignments will be structured and class time will be allocated to facilitate the effective completion of this assignment. The research paper will serve as the foundation for the **Legislative Memorandum** which constitutes an additional assignment for the course as described below.

**THIS RESEARCH PAPER IS NOT A PERSUASIVE ESSAY.** It should address the most important elements of the policy problem confronting the government and provide a foundation on which a citizen could evaluate the merits of possible policy options in response to the current situation. The final product should enhance the student's capability to comprehend the substance of congressional efforts to respond to these issues.

The student should make an effort to incorporate as many of the following elements into the final draft:

- A definition of the problem
- Data, references to studies, current events or other information indicating the parameters of the current problem
- Partisan positions on the problem
- The position of the Bush administration on the issue
- The status of public opinion on the issue
- The position or activities of interest groups regarding the issue
- Possible policy responses to the situation (including any that have already been taken)

### **Policy Problem**

Currently, the U.S. financial system sits at the threshold of a major crisis that has its roots in the collapse of the housing market bubble. These circumstances emanated in significant part from the development and proliferation of a set of new market mechanisms that expanded the pool of money available for housing mortgages and appeared to reduce the risk of bad investments. Changes in federal regulation reinforced these conditions. Together these actions resulted in a significant expansion in the availability of credit to purchase housing and reduced incentives for both lenders and borrowers to make prudent decisions in the housing market. Aggressive marketing campaigns by lenders amplified the problems being created. All of these factors contributed to the rapid escalation of housing prices and the expansion of debt that could not be repaid.

The consequences of these actions for consumers have included a reduction of the availability of affordable housing, a high rate of foreclosure on existing housing and the destabilization of neighborhoods and communities. For investors, the consequences include the bankruptcy of major mortgage lenders, falling earnings at major investment banks and the downgrading of the investment ratings of mortgage backed securities. Additionally, the burst of the housing bubble resulted in disincentives for foreign investors to acquire or hold U.S. mortgage backed securities which in turn reduces demand for U.S. currency and further erodes the declining value of the dollar. Taken all together, these conditions pose a major challenge for the national government.

For the purposes of this assignment, it is not expected that the student will become an expert on this policy problem. In preparing the research paper, however, it is necessary that the student think in terms of focusing on a possible policy response to the crisis. This does not have to be a comprehensive approach. Indeed, such an approach will be beyond the possibilities of the course. Rather, in developing your research paper, you should decide on a **specific policy approach** that will become the focus of **the Legislative Memorandum**. For example, students could focus on policies that might be directed at relief for borrowers facing foreclosure, policies that might be intended to protect the financial solvency of lenders or introduction of new regulations to prevent the continuation of imprudent or destructive lending policies. This list of possibilities is not considered exhaustive and the

student's research might identify other possible governmental actions that could serve the purpose of the assignment as well. Students should simply keep in mind that the research paper will create the foundation for the next major writing assignment by deciding which policy option will constitute the proposed law for which you will draft a legislative strategy.

Listed below are some sources (and the links to those sources) that can provide a good substantive introduction to these issues as they have been manifest in the congressional process. You will need to find **at least six additional sources** (for a minimum total of eight) to complete the assignment and no more than half of your total number of sources can come from the free web. Non free web sources include those that are found on library data bases as well as in printed texts. **DO NOT DISREGARD SOME SOURCES BECAUSE THEY ARE LONGER THAN OTHERS.**

**Initial sources:**

Marcia Clement, "Mortgage Crisis," **CQ Researcher**, November 2, 2007  
<http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/>

Kenneth Jost, "Financial Crisis," **CQ Researcher**, May 9, 2008  
<http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/>

Students should also be aware of the availability on line of **Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports**. The link for this publication is <http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/>. **CQ Weekly Reports** provides a weekly record of what has happened in Congress in that week regarding a wide range of policy issues. This includes reports on legislative proposals, committee activity, administrative actions as they pertain to the Congress and congressional action, floor action and final disposition of bills that become law. It is very useful for tracking the status of any issue and what Congress might or might not be doing on that issue over time.

To facilitate the completion of this paper, the deadlines listed below are to be observed. Failure to meet any deadlines will result in **five** points being deducted from the final grade for this assignment. The instructor will also assess the quality of the efforts and incorporate that judgment in the instructor evaluation grade.

<b>Task:</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Writing workshop: bibliography, working notes, drafting thesis	9/11
Outline	9/18
Rough Draft	9/25
Writing workshop: peer editing	9/30
<b>Final Draft</b>	<b>10/9</b>

## Legislative Memorandum

Each student will write a "memorandum" on how to get a particular policy proposal enacted into law. For the purpose of this assignment, students should assume that the memorandum is written during the current Congress. Preparation of this memorandum will utilize the information developed in the research paper as well as through materials presented in class and course readings (e.g. Who are the targets of the policy benefits to be bestowed? What committees have jurisdiction over the issues? What interest groups might be involved? What executive branch agencies?). The content of the memorandum will be a discussion of a strategy to pass legislation addressing the policy problem featured in the research paper.

In preparing the strategy, the student should assume that they have been hired as a legislative staff consultant whom is an expert on the legislative process, not as an expert on the financial crisis. In assuming this role position, the student can choose (and must specify) to have been hired by one of the following:

- Democratic Party leadership in Congress
- Republican Party leadership in Congress
- The White House Chief of Staff

The principal who has hired you as a consultant has asked that a memorandum be prepared presenting **an analysis and recommendations on how to pass a version of the chosen policy response to the issue of the housing finance crisis.** In doing so, the student should specify key provisions of the legislative proposal and provide advice on the strategic considerations necessary to succeed in getting a bill signed into law.

To complete this assignment, the memorandum should include an effort to address as many of the concerns listed below as possible. These include:

- What are the legislative and policy goals of the principal who has hired you?
- How might the partisan and ideological divisions in Congress pertain to determining what might pass?
- Who are the key congressional actors (party leaders, committee leaders, individual policy entrepreneurs) who might influence the outcome of the legislation?
- What are the key elements of the legislative process that must be recognized and "negotiated" to assure passage of the legislation? What strategic advice might be offered to address the current structure and practice of the congressional process?
- What role might external interest groups or public opinion play in the success of the legislative initiative?
- Which individuals or elements of the executive branch might be important in the passage of the bill?

The final paper should be five to seven typewritten pages double-spaced and will be due on **November 6.**

## **The Seven Things That Every Citizen Should Know About the Presidency**

Each student will produce a “booklet” that identifies what he or she considers the most important things that he or she learned about the presidency, its powers and performance. The decision of what to write is a matter of the judgment of the student but that judgment should be made with an explicit and acute appreciation of the purpose and audience of the of the work, i.e. to educate the general public and make it better informed.

There will be **seven** entries or “chapters” in this booklet. Each will be at least one but no more than two typewritten pages long. Each entry should incorporate at least one of the reading assignments and that reading should be appropriately cited. An entry can entail references to more than one reading but it not required to do so. The entry should explain the essential nature of the element of the presidency under consideration and why it is important to know.

Students can submit this assignment as a set of short written essays or the student can package these essays as if they were to be published in book form for distribution to an outside audience. E.G. students can embellish the final product with graphics or other things that would enhance visual presentation. Such embellishments are not required but will be considered in the determination of the instructor evaluation grade.

### **Instructor Evaluation**

Each student will be evaluated by the instructor for his or her participation, involvement in and contributions to the course. This portion of the grade will reflect all activities in the course that are not otherwise specified in the syllabus including attendance and participation in class discussion.

### **Course Outline and Reading Assignments**

I Introduction (8/26)

II The Congressional institution

- A. Constitutional foundations, Mann and Ornstein, **The Broken Branch**, Introduction and Ch. 1 and 2 (8/28)
- B. Functions of Congress, Davidson, Oleszek and Lee, **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 1 and pp. 27-37 (9/2)
- C. Congressional development, **The Broken Branch**, Chapter 3 (9/4)
- D. Representation, **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 3 or 4 (to be assigned individually) and Ch. 5 (9/9)

**Writing workshop (9/11): Discussion of research topic, drafting thesis**

### III Congressional structures

- A. Party leadership **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 6 (9/16)
- B. Committees, **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 7 (9/18)
- C. Interest groups and Congress **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 13 (9/23)
- D. Procedures and rules **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 8 (9/25)

### Writing workshop (9/30): Peer editing

- E. Deliberation and decision making **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 9 (10/2)
- F. Congressional divisions and decline, **The Broken Branch**, Chapter 4 and 5 (10/9)

### IV Constitutional foundations and presidential power

- A. The President and the Constitution, Pfiffner and Davidson, **Understanding the Presidency**, Readings 1 -3 and Genovese and Han, **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, Ch. 1 (10/14)
- B. Nature of presidential power, **Understanding the Presidency**, Readings 6-8, 10-11 (10/16)

### V The President and the Public

- A. Presidential selection, **Understanding the Presidency**, Readings 12, 13 and 18 (10/21)
- B. The public presidency and the permanent campaign, **Understanding the Presidency**, Readings 19 and 22, and **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, Ch. 6 (10/23)
- C. The public presidency and the media, **Understanding the Presidency**, Readings 20, 21 and 23 (10/28)

### VI The Policy Process

- A. The Congress and the President, **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 31 and **Congress and Its Members**, Ch. 10 (10/30)
- B. Conflict in the policy process **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 33 and 38 (11/4)

### VII The President and International Affairs

- A. Presidential leadership in foreign policy: constitutional issues **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 39 and **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, Ch. 8 (11/6)
- B. The conduct of foreign and security policy **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 40 and **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, Ch. 2 and 7 (11/11)

- C. Presidential war powers, **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, Ch. 4 and 5 and **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 41 (11/13 and 11/18)
- D. Presidential secrecy and abuse of power **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 42 and **The Presidency and the Challenge of Democracy**, Ch. 3 (11/20)

IX The President as Chief Executive

- A. The President and the bureaucracy **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 29 and 26 (11/25)
- B. The Institutionalized presidency **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 25 and 28 (12/2)

X Change and continuity **Understanding the Presidency**, Reading 46 and 48 and **The Broken Branch**, Ch. 7 (12/4)

XI Course evaluation (12/6)