

York College of Pennsylvania
Department of History and Political Science
PS362 The Congress
TTH 9:30-10:45 in HUM 140
Spring 2012

Instructor	Dr. John A. Altman	Email	jaltman@ycp.edu
Office	HUM104	Course Website	https://blackboard.ycp.edu
Office Hours	MWF 9:00-11:00 and TTH 8:00-9:30	Faculty Website	http://faculty.ycp.edu/~jaltman
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Catalog Course Description. A study of the history and politics of the U.S. Congress. Topics include the constitutional vision of the founders, the evolution of Congress as an institution, the differences between the Senate and the House of Representatives, the norms and folkways of the Congress, leadership in the House and Senate, the legislative process, and the Congress and Presidential and Congressional elections.

Learning Goals. Students who devote a reasonable amount of time and effort to this course will be able to: describe fundamental political concepts and values and use them appropriately when engaging in contemporary political discourse; explain how current political events serve as examples of various fundamental political concepts and values; create thorough explanations of political phenomena by linking the various concepts, values, and theories presented throughout the course; appreciate differing perspectives regarding political values and opinions and develop a greater awareness of their own personal political values and opinions; distinguish facts from opinions and have a healthy skepticism about arguments and claims; and appreciate the value of political science as a discipline geared toward improving knowledge of American society and human behavior and promoting civic virtue.

Blackboard. I use Blackboard for course management. You should check Blackboard regularly. In addition to communications in class and through email, Blackboard is the main source for course information and material.

Email. In addition to communications in class and through Blackboard, I also use email. I will email you only at your ycp.edu email address. You should check your ycp.edu email regularly or have it forwarded to an email address of your choosing. Don't be alarmed if I reply to your email with a brief answer. I often reply using my Blackberry, so I keep my replies short.

Face to Face. I prefer to meet with you in person to answer your questions regarding the course. I think face to face communication results in clearer, more understandable explanations for the things about which you are wondering. Feel free to drop by my office anytime during my office hours. I'm also available to meet with you outside my office hours at mutually agreed upon days and times.

Required Texts. Roger H. Davidson, Walter J. Oleszek, and Francis E. Lee's *Congress and Its Members, Thirteenth Edition*.

Supplemental Material. Any other material that I would want you to explore, such as news articles, scholarly journal articles, videos, or websites will be provided on Blackboard.

Attendance (10%). This grade is based on the percentage of all 28 scheduled class meetings for TTH classes this semester for which you are present, assuming you arrive on time, remain in the room for the duration of the class, and are actively engaged in what is going on in the class. I record attendance at the beginning of each class meeting. No absence will be excused under any circumstance. It is your responsibility to come up to me after class and notify me if you arrived late so that I can record your presence. Let me know before class starts if you have to depart early. (See pages 53-54 in the College Catalog for a complete description of the College's attendance policy.)

Participation (10%). This grade is based on my subjective observations of whether or not you have completed the reading, whether or not you are actively engaged in what is going on in the class, and the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussion. I provide a list of reading questions on Blackboard. Obviously, in order to participate you have to attend the class. Therefore, the attendance grade will have some influence over the participation grade. The grade you earn for participation will be based on the grading criteria listed below.

Research Project Assignments (20%). You will complete 10 assignments, each worth 2% of the course grade. I provide a detailed description of each assignment on Blackboard. You must submit each assignment by the start of class on Tuesday of the week in which it is due. Some assignments will be submitted in class and others will be submitted on Blackboard. No assignment will be accepted late or via email. The grade you earn for each assignment will be based on the grading criteria listed below.

Research Project Paper (20%). You will write a 10 page research paper worth 20% of the course grade. I provide a detailed description of the research paper on Blackboard. You must submit the paper on Blackboard by the start of class on its due date. No paper will be accepted late, via email, or as a hard copy. The grade you earn for the paper will be based on the grading criteria listed below.

Midterm Exam (20%) and Final Exam (20%). Exams will be based on the readings, lectures, and discussions. Exams will consist of essay prompts that require you to explain, analyze, and synthesize the various ideas, concepts, and theories presented in the course. I provide a list of example essay prompts on Blackboard. Early or make-up exams will be given only under the most extraordinary circumstances. The grade you earn for each of your responses will be based on the grading criteria listed below. (See page 54 in the College Catalog for a complete description of the College’s examination policy.)

Course Standards and Grading Criteria. This is an upper level course that will enable students to pursue depth in the discipline of political science by focusing on the general nature of the US Congress. Students should already possess knowledge and an understanding of the American governmental and political system. (See pages 54-55 in the College Catalog for a complete description of the College’s grading policy.)

4	A	90-100	Superior	2	C	70-74	Average
3.5	B+	85-89	Excellent	1	D	60-69	Below Average
3	B	80-84	Good	0	F	0-59	Failure
2.5	C+	75-79	Above Average				

Warning Grades. I will post midterm grades on Blackboard by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, March 9. Your midterm grade will be based on the first five assignments, the midterm exam, and your attendance and participation up to that point. Midterm grades will serve as warning grades (grade of “U” meaning unsatisfactory) for those students whose midterm course average is less than 70. (See page 57 in the College Catalog for a complete description of the College’s warning grade policy.)

Communication Standards. York College recognizes the importance of effective communication in all disciplines and careers. Therefore students are expected to competently analyze, synthesize, organize, and articulate course material in papers, examinations, and presentations. In addition, students should know and use communication skills current to their field of study, recognize the need for revision as part of their writing process, and employ standard conventions of English usage in both writing and speaking. Students may be asked to further revise assignments that do not demonstrate effective use of these communication skills. (See pages 52-53 in the College Catalog for a complete description of the College’s communication standards.)

Academic Integrity. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated at York College. Academic dishonesty refers to actions such as, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabricating research, falsifying academic documents, etc., and includes all situations where students make use of the work of others and claim such work as their own. (See page 53 in the College Catalog for a complete description of the College’s academic integrity policy.)

Course Schedule, Reading Assignments, and Important Dates. Read each chapter in the text by the start of the week for which it is listed. Important dates and their respective activities and weights are listed in the three far right columns for the week in which they occur.

Week 1	1/16-1/20	The Dual Nature of Congress	Chapter 1			
Week 2	1/23-1/27	Foundations and Evolution	Chapter 2	1/24	Assignment 1	2%
Week 3	1/30-2/3	Apportionment and Redistricting	Chapter 3	1/31	Assignment 2	2%
Week 4	2/6-2/10	Congressional Elections	Chapter 4	2/7	Assignment 3	2%
Week 5	2/13-2/17	The Nature of Representation	Chapter 5	2/14	Assignment 4	2%
Week 6	2/20-2/24	Congressional Leadership	Chapter 6	2/21	Assignment 5	2%
Week 7	2/27-3/2	Winter Vacation (no classes)				
Week 8	3/5-3/9	Research Project Work on 3/8		3/6	Midterm Exam	20%
Week 9	3/12-3/16	Congressional Committees	Chapter 7	3/13	Assignment 6	2%
Week 10	3/19-3/23	The Legislative Process	Chapter 8	3/20	Assignment 7	2%
Week 11	3/26-3/30	The Legislative Process	Chapter 9	3/27	Assignment 8	2%
Week 12	4/2-4/6	The Legislative Process (no class 4/5)	Chapter 9	4/3	Assignment 9	2%
Week 13	4/9-4/13	Congress and the President	Chapter 10	4/10	Assignment 10	2%
Week 14	4/16-4/20	Congress and the Bureaucracy	Chapter 11			
Week 15	4/23-4/27	Congress and the Courts	Chapter 12			
Week 16	4/30-5/4	Congress and Interest Groups	Chapter 13	5/3	Research Paper	20%
Week 17	5/7-5/11	Exam Week		5/10	Final Exam 8:00	20%

I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO REVISE THIS SYLLABUS DURING THE SEMESTER AS NECESSARY