

# GOV 371I: The U.S. Congress

Spring 2023

MW 2:30-4:00pm, UTC 3.104

Professor: Alison Craig  
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## Course Description

In this course we will engage in an in-depth study of the United States Congress. The first portion of the class will focus on the relationship between members and their constituents, from what it takes to get elected to Congress to how members represent their district or state in Washington, DC. The remainder of the course will be devoted to the legislative process and the behavior of legislators within Congress. To better understand the challenges of lawmaking and the role of Congress in society, students will participate in a “mock Congress” simulation to gain firsthand experience with the choices and challenges that members face.

## Course Requirements and Grading

Your grade in this course will be based on six components as follows:

Midterm	20%
Member Profile	15%
Legislative Agenda	15%
Major Bill	15%
Class Participation	15%
Final Report	20%

### Midterm

**The midterm exam will be an in-class exam on Monday, February 27th.** The exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions drawn from material covered in readings, lectures, and class discussions.

### Simulation

Much of the course will be devoted to a simulation of the United States Senate. Students will select a state to represent in our mock Senate and will decide how to represent their constituents. The member profile, legislative agenda, and major bill assignments will each

be short (2-3 page) writing assignments based on the state you have chosen to represent and the type of senator you have decided to be. The final report is a longer accounting of your legislative accomplishments and a plan for your reelection campaign. Additional details for all assignments will be posted on Canvas.

There will be multiple opportunities for extra credit for students who take on additional work in the simulation, including students elected to leadership positions.

## Late Assignments

The assignments are an integral part of our simulation so it is important that work be submitted on time. **Assignments are due by the start of class (2:30pm Central) on the date specified. Assignments submitted after the due date will be penalized with a 10 percentage point deduction for every day that it is late.** If you are struggling to complete an assignment for any reason, please reach out to the TAs or me before the due date so we can help.

## Participation

**Participation in simulation activities, including organizational sessions, committee meetings, and floor debates will constitute 15% of the grade.** Students can earn points through a variety of activities, from attending simulation meetings to giving floor speeches. A full list of participation activities will be posted on Canvas.

## Grading Scale

In allocating grades, the following scale will be used with final grades rounded to the nearest whole percentage point:

A	≥ 93%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	< 60%

If you wish to dispute your grade on an assignment, you must submit a request to Professor Craig in writing within one week of receiving the grade that details the reason(s) you think your grade should be changed.

## Required Materials

- Sean M. Theriault and Mickey Edwards. *Congress: The First Branch*. Oxford University Press, 2019
- Subscription to <https://www.legsim.org/> (You must register and pay the \$16 nonrefundable fee. I will post the session code on Canvas.)
- Various news and journal articles that will be made available via Canvas

## Administrative Issues

### Academic Dishonesty

All violations of university academic conduct guidelines, including plagiarism, will be referred to the Dean of Students and result in a zero on the assignment or exam in question. Plagiarism is the use of others' ideas or work without credit and/or presenting derivative work as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to, copying from someone else's work or an internet source (including AI), failing to identify exact quotes, failing to cite a source for information that is only available from that source, failing to cite a source for an idea or argument you borrowed from that source, and turning in work that is not your own.

### Disability Accommodations

Students with disabilities should request appropriate academic accommodations from UT Disability and Access (D&A). If you are already registered with D&A, please send your accommodation letter to me as early as you can so we can discuss your accommodations.

### Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## Course Outline

This is an approximate schedule that is subject to change depending on how quickly we move through the material. Any changes to the schedule will be announced via Canvas.

### January 9: Introduction

### January 11: The First Branch

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 1
- The Constitution of the United States

**January 16: MLK DAY - NO CLASS**

**January 18: Representation and Home Style**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 2, pp.40-54
- Mia Costa. Ideology, Not Affect: What Americans Want from Political Representation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2):342–358, 2021

**January 23: Whose Views Matter?**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 2, pp.54-69
- Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Matto Mildemberger, and Leah C. Stokes. Legislative Staff and Representation in Congress. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1):1–18, 2019

**January 25: Congressional Elections**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 3, pp.70-81
- Nate Cohn. 2022 Review: How Republicans Lost Despite Winning the Popular Vote *New York Times*, December 13, 2022

**January 30: Running the Campaign**

- Legsim Member Profile due
- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 3, pp.82-107
- Lynn Vavreck. Unable to excite the base? Moderate candidates still tend to outdo extreme ones. *New York Times*, May 8, 2018

**February 1: Members' Goals**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 4, pp.108-119
- Lisa Hager. Are members of Congress simply 'single-minded seekers of reelection'? An examination of legislative behavior in the 114th Congress. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 51(1):115–118, 2018
- Tracy Sulkin and William Bernhard. Style and substance in the U.S. House of Representatives. *LegBranch*, September 20, 2018

**February 6: The Textbook Congress**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 5
- Craig Volden and Alan Wiseman. Workhorses, not show horses: Five ways to promote effective lawmaking in Congress *The Conversation* August 29, 2022

**February 8: Legislative Organization**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 8, pp.258-279
- Jeffrey Lazarus. Democrats are bringing earmarks back. Aren't earmarks bad? *Washington Post*, February 18, 2021
- Matthew Green and Douglas Harris. Yes, McCarthy is still House Republican leader. Who's the new GOP whip? *Washington Post*, November 17, 2022

**February 13: Simulation**

- Legsim Legislative Agenda due
- New member reception

**February 15: Committee System**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 7, pp.210-236
- Issue One. The Price of Power 2017
- House Republican Conference Rules of the 118th Congress

**February 20: Simulation**

- Submit committee requests (via LegSim)
- Leadership elections

**February 22: Committees at Work**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 7, pp.236-243
- James M. Curry. Knowledge, Expertise, and Committee Power in the Contemporary Congress. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 44(2):203–237, 2019
- Maya Kornberg. Plenty of congressional hearings are not circuses. Here’s how we know. *Washington Post*, August 14, 2018

**February 27: Midterm Exam**

**March 1: Unorthodox Lawmaking: House**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 6, pp.168-189
- James M. Curry. Congressional Processes and Public Approval of New Laws. *Political Research Quarterly*, 2018
- House rules package for the 118th Congress

**March 6: Unorthodox Lawmaking: Senate**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 6, pp.189-209
- Sarah Binder. Will the Democrats’ big bill get past the hurdles of reconciliation? *Washington Post*, August 6, 2022
- Gregory Koger. Is the Senate filibuster a “Jim Crow Relic”? No. *The Monkey Cage*, July 12, 2021

**March 8: How a Bill Actually Becomes a Law**

- Legsim Major Bill due
- Sarah Binder. Goodbye to the 117th Congress, bookended by remarkable events. *Washington Post*, December 29, 2022

**March 13-17: SPRING BREAK**

**March 20: Simulation**

- Committee meetings

**March 22: Simulation**

- Committee meetings

**March 27: Life in Congress**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 4, pp.120-139
- Kathy Goldschmidt. State of the Congress: Staff Perspectives on Institutional Capacity in the House and Senate Report of the Congressional Management Foundation, 2017.

**March 29: Simulation**

- Floor debate

**April 3: Simulation**

- Floor debate

**April 5: Simulation**

- Floor debate

**April 10: Simulation**

- Committee meetings

**April 12: Parties and Polarization**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 8, pp.244-258
- James M. Curry and Frances E. Lee. Non-Party Government: Bipartisan Lawmaking and Party Power in Congress. *Perspectives on Politics*, 17(1):47–65, 2019

**April 17: Simulation**

- Floor debate

**April 19: Simulation**

- Floor debate

**April 24: The Broken Branch?**

- Theriault and Edwards, Chapter 10
- Gregory Koger. How to fix Congress: Start with the basics. *Vox*, November 28, 2017

**Legsim Final Report due by 5pm April 28**