

POSC 101: U.S. Congress

Department of Political Science

Instructor: Nick Jenkins

Summer 2021

Office Location: Sproul Hall 2228

Classroom: CHASS 1020

Office Hours: W: 4-5pm; TH: 1:30-3:30pm

Class Times: MW: 10-12:50pm

Email: nicholas.jenkins@email.ucr.edu

Course Description

Congratulations on winning your election to Congress! Yes that's right, you ran for a seat in the House of Representatives and won! Take a minute to celebrate, but there is a lot of work to do. Don't worry though, in this course I will serve as your personal resource on the ins and outs of Congress and help you become a successful legislator.

Before you get to Congress, there are a few things you should know. Congress isn't a very popular organization. In [January 2021](#), [71%](#) of the American people disapproved of how Congress handles its job. It also has a reputation for gridlock and never getting anything done. Throughout your first term in office (which is the duration of our course), we will figure out why the public has such negative opinions of Congress, what it takes to enact policy, how to represent your constituents, and how to navigate the institution of Congress. In the end, you will understand why members do what they do and the role of Congress in the federal government.

Required Materials

This class will be unique because it will require you to play the part of a member of the House of Representatives (don't worry, we'll still talk about what your colleagues in the Senate do all day). Throughout the term, we will create a simulation of Congress where you and your classmates are the members. This simulation will require you to represent your constituents, draft legislation, work with members of your party, and ultimately try to get a bill written into law. This simulation will take place through a platform called [LegSim](#). This simulation will require you to move beyond memorizing facts about the rules and organization of Congress to actually thinking like a member.

LegSim costs \$16 and you will need to register at www.legsim.org. **Here are the instructions**

on how to register for LegSim:

1. Everyone must create a LegSim user account and pay a \$16 registration fee (credit card). Your account must have a unique (and valid) email address.
2. To create your account, go to www.legsim.org, select our session (UCR Summer 2021) from the dropdown box, click 'create new account.' Complete the form including pasting the authorization code:
3. Write down your user name and password you will need them later!
4. After you complete and submit the form, you will be redirected to a secure on-line payment processing system. Please provide the same email address.
5. **Once you have completed payment, LegSim sends a confirmation email includes an activation link. You must click on the link in the email to login for the first time. You cannot just login.**
6. If you dont receive the activation email after a few minutes, check your email trash/junk folder. Still cant find it? Contact support@legsim.org

Fortunately, the [Congressional Research Service](#) (CRS) is ready to help you get situated. The CRS is a legislative agency within the Library of Congress that is designed to assist Members of Congress, Committees, and Staff with their daily activities in Congress. To learn the material that you need to be successful, we will be reading a series of CRS reports that are available for free. If you want to learn more about a topic in Congress that we don't address in class, you can search for CRS reports here: <https://crsreports.congress.gov>.

Finally, we will use <https://slack.com> to organize all communications. Slack is an instant messaging service that will make it much easier for you to talk with your colleagues, party and committee leaders, and me about Congressional activities and any questions that you have. Click on this link to join the Slack channel: https://join.slack.com/t/posc101-summer2021/shared_invite/zt-pz9gsuz9-QGZrbgIKKKnIEJZqEaH3fw

Course Promises

In this course, I will make the following promises to you. By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

1. Explain how public policy is made in the U.S.

2. Describe the key factors that interfere with the passage of legislation.
3. Identify the strategies members use to win elections and keep their approval high.
4. Engage in respectful debate with your colleagues to advance your understanding of Congress.

Course Expectations

This course will only fulfill these promises if you promise the following in return:

1. **To attend class.** I have designed this class for the readings and lectures to complement one another. As a result, attending lecture will be an essential component for your to develop a mastery of the course material.
2. **To read the assigned materials.** Similar to the lectures, the readings will provide additional details on each topic that may not be covered in lecture. They will also give you an opportunity to practice applying your knowledge of American government to understand real world decisions that have been made.
3. **To be attentive and participate in class.** Participation does not only mean speaking aloud in class. Students should participate by actively following class discussions and engaging with the simulation activities.
4. **To complete the required simulation assignments in a timely fashion.** The assignments in this course are designed to create an effective simulation of Congress. This will require all students to complete their assignments by the assigned dates so that we can move through the simulation as a class. We don't want any of our colleagues to fall behind!

Assignments and Evaluation

The majority of this course will be based on our simulation. Your assignments will consist of activities that contribute to the flow of our Congress with your number one goal being to become an "effective legislator." To accomplish this goal, we use class time and readings to help you learn the skills that you will need to succeed. Previous knowledge of the U.S. Congress not required to be successful - you will learn everything you need in the class.

All of the assignments in the course are geared towards preparing you for the Final Report on Legislative Accomplishments so but sure to always have that in mind throughout the simulation!

You will probably be excited to know that **there will not be any exams in the course**. Your grade will consist of your activities as a member of the House. This means, however, that **you will have short assignments due every week**. This is necessary to keep things moving through the legislative process! The overview and due dates for each assignment are listed below (the due dates are also listed in the course schedule). **The complete details for each assignment will be posted to iLearn.**

I expect your essay responses to demonstrate that you have been attentive to the lectures and assigned readings. Be sure to include appropriate citations (including page numbers where relevant).

Assignments with Due Dates:

1. **Register for LegSim:** Go here for information on how to register for LegSim: <http://info.legsim.org/students/>. **You will need to do this by June 22nd.**
2. **Constituency Research Assignment:** To complete your LegSim profile, you will need to research and select which district you will represent. *Your constituency must be from a state that is within one letter of your last name (e.g. Jenkins can choose a I, J, or, K (yes, there is no state that starts with J)).* **You will need to do this by June 23rd.**
3. **Propose your Legislative Agenda:** To propose your legislative agenda, you will need to identify the key issues that you intend to focus on during your term in Congress. **You will need to do this by June 28th.**
4. **Justify your Committee Requests:** Decide which committees you would like to serve on and submit them to your party leaders. Hopefully you get what you/your constituents want! **You will need to do this by July 2nd.**
5. **Draft and Submit a Major Piece of Legislation:** Now you will write a major piece of legislation on a major issue that you think is important and submit it for consideration. You want this to become a law! In order for your bill to pass, you will need to get support from your colleagues. **You will need to do this by July 9th.**
6. **Prepare Debate Remarks** To get your bill passed on the floor, you will need prepare for a legislative debate. Your goal is to make a persuasive case for why your bill should be passed and defend it from any objections. You will prepare for a floor debate on one of the bills scheduled to be debated in class. **You will need to do this by July 20th.**
7. **Legislative Accomplishment Report** For the final assignment, you will write a report summarizing your legislative accomplishments in a **6 page double-spaced report**. Oh,

also there will be one student watching you throughout the simulation and will hold you accountable for your actions and decisions. **This is due on July 25nd.**

Assignments without Dues Dates:

1. **Committee Report:** In preparation for a floor vote, bills reported from committee come with a report that summarizes what the bill is about. Your committee chair is responsible for submitting a committee report for each bill that goes to the floor for a vote but the report can be completed with the help of all members. **The report will be completed in class and as a committee during your committee meeting.**

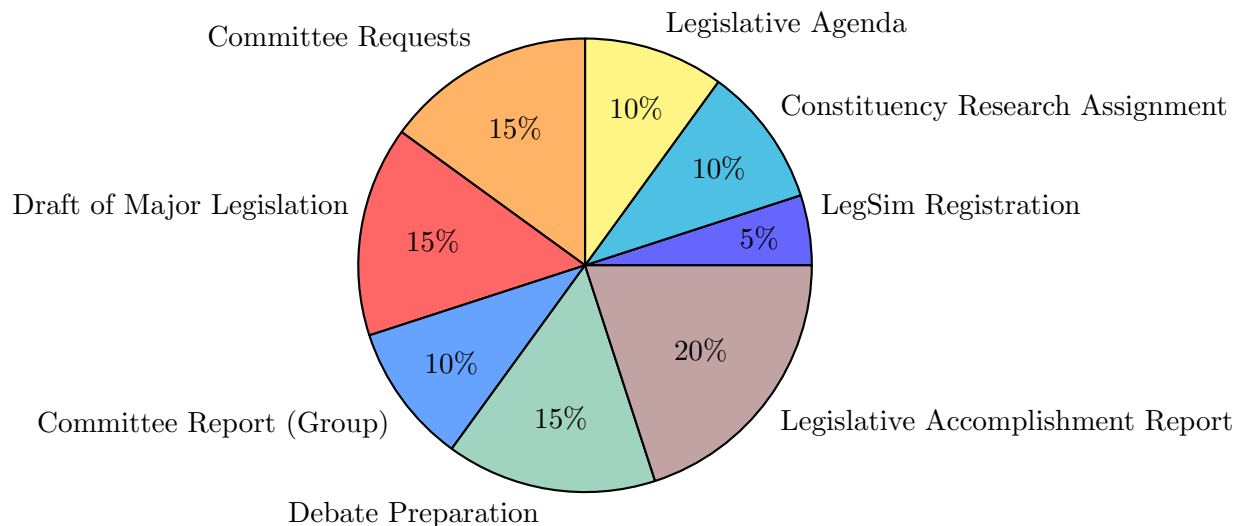
The Section You Are Looking For: Extra Credit

1. Get elected to a leadership position:
 - 5 points for a chamber leader
 - 3 points for a committee chair
2. Earn a Leadership PAC Contribution:
 - The chamber leader awards 3 points to 3 different legislators
 - Each committee chair awards 2 points to 2 different legislators
3. 1 point for writing a “Dear Colleague” letter correctly and for a specific purpose
4. 1 point for introducing an appropriate resolution or joint resolution

The chamber leader and committee chairs have complete discretion on how to award PAC contributions. These might be able to be used strategically...

Evaluation

These assignments will constitute your grade in the course and the weight of each of assignment are as follows:



The letter grades will be assigned according to these percentages:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------|----|--------|----|--------|----|--------|---|-------|
| A+ | 97-100% | B+ | 87-89% | C+ | 77-79% | D+ | 67-69% | F | 0-59% |
| A | 93-96% | B | 83-86% | C | 73-76% | D | 63-66% | | |
| A- | 90-92% | B- | 80-82% | C- | 70-72% | D- | 60-62% | | |

Classroom Decorum and Academic Discourse

I believe very strongly that the classroom is a place to expand our knowledge and experiences safely, while being respected and valued. I support the values of UCR to the urgent, sustained, and comprehensive work of creating a campus climate of mutual respect and communal vision at the University of California, Riverside. I strive to uphold the values articulated by the Office of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: We value a deep, collective understanding that an institutional and personal commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is a true commitment to meaningful, lifelong learning. For more information, please visit: <https://diversity.ucr.edu>.

It takes courage to express alternative points of view. If we are truly interested in making good policy decisions (as opposed to just winning or getting reelected), then we need to encourage criticism. The framers of the Constitution believed in the power of information, which is why the first amendment protects freedom of speech (and why Congress is given the power to promote the progress of science and useful arts). A free and open exchange of ideas is one of the central reasons for Congress' [rules of decorum](#).

One of our most important goals is to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas. As part of learning, it is essential to discuss

topics with individual who have different viewpoints than your own and the only way we can better understand one another is if we can carry on a collegial discussion of the topic. Remember, the goal is to become better critical thinkers. To do so we must learn to listen to others and articulate our views in respectful ways. As such, the following principles will guide our discussions and simulations:

- Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion;
- Bring light, not heat;
- Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, it is not just encouraged, it is expected;
- No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate;
- You will not be graded on your opinions

Additionally, to build a classroom environment that maximizes everyone's ability to master the course material please be mindful to not distract your fellow learners with your phone, tablet, or computer. It's perfectly fine if you would like to use these devices to take notes during class, but don't use them to distract yourself or your peers! Similarly, if you come late (or must leave early) please to enter/depart the classroom in the least disruptive manner possible. This includes sitting near the door if you anticipate leaving early or taking a seat as near to the door as possible if you arrive late.

Academic Honesty

I expect that all work you produce for this course will be your own. If you plagiarize any material from outside sources for your written work or presentation in this course, or on the final exam, **it will result in a failure of the entire course.** There are no exceptions to this, and no second chances. Please refer to the university's [Academic Integrity Policies & Procedures](#) if you have questions about these standards.

Special Accommodations

If you need particular accommodations to help you succeed in mastering this course's material, please contact the [Student Disability Resource Center](#) on campus in Costo Hall 125 to get a personalized accommodation plan.

Course Outline

This syllabus is a working document and I may need to make changes to accommodate our simulations. I reserve the right to make changes to the assigned readings (additions or deletions) or to the order of topics we cover as I deem necessary. Announcements regarding schedule changes will be made in class, in discussion sections, or on iLearn.

Also note that this schedule lists the topics of discussion for each class. To master the course material, you should finish each meeting's readings before we discuss them in class. This schedule also indicates which course promise(s) each class contributes to. They are listed as **CP** followed by the specific promise's number (listed above).

Note: As of July 7th, everything needed to legislate is in place - knowledge of the process, organizational positions, and legislative proposals. Class time is available for the activities of the legislature, *but the chamber leader must request it (and announce an agenda) at least 24 hours in advance.*

Tentative Schedule:

| MONDAY | WEDNESDAY |
|--|---|
| <div>June 21st</div> <div>1</div> <div>CP 1</div> <div>Register for LegSim by June 22nd</div> <div>Lecture: Course introduction, How to use LegSim, Get to know Congress</div> <div>Read Before Class: The Federalist No. 51, U.S. Constitution Article I Section 8, LegSim Member Tutorial</div> | <div>23rd</div> <div>2</div> <div>CP 1</div> <div>Constituency Research Assignment Due</div> <div>Lecture: Representation, The Job of a Legislator, Apportionment</div> <div>Read Before Class: CRS-RL33686, CRS-IN11360</div> |

| MONDAY | WEDNESDAY |
|--|---|
| 28th 3 CP 1 Legislative Agenda Due Lecture: Organization in Congress: Parties, Leaders, and Committees Read Before Class: CRS-RS20881 , CRS-IN11036 , CRS-98-367 Simulation Exercise: Members meet in class. Students introduce themselves and discuss priorities. | 30th 4 CP 3 Committee Requests Due July 2nd. Lecture: How Laws are Made and What They Do, Drafting Legislation Read Before Class: CRS-R42843 , CRS-98-706 , CRS-R44001 Simulation Exercise: Members meet in class to select procedures for choosing leaders and making committee assignments. |
| <div>July 5th</div> Observance of Independence Day - No Class :(| 7th 5 CP 1 Draft Legislation Due on July 9th. Lecture: Decision Making, Coalition Building, Floor Procedures Read Before Class: CRS-RS22477 , CRS-RL34636 , CRS-R44734 , CRS-98-437 Simulation Exercise: Members meet in class to elect leaders and assign committee seats. |
| 12th 6 CP 1 & 3 Lecture: Interest Groups and Lobbying in Congress Read Before Class: CRS-RL34377 Simulation Exercise: Committees meet to review and research their jurisdictions. | 14th 7 CP 1 & 3 To receive consideration on the floor, all bills must be reported from committee before the beginning of class on the 16th. Lecture: The federal budget process Read Before Class: CRS-R46497 , CRS-R45104 Simulation Exercise: Committee Hearings and writing committee reports |
| 19th 8 CP 1, 2, & 3 Debate Remarks Due on July 20th. Simulation Exercises | 21st 9 CP 1, 2, & 4 Final Report Due on July 25th. Simulation Exercise: Debate and Voting |

The final meeting time will be on July 23rd from 10:30am-12:30pm