

GOVT 215  
Congressional Policymaking  
Fall 2021  
SCIE 201  
Monday and Wednesday  
2:50 – 4:10 p.m.

Professor Logan Dancey

Office: 318 High St. Room 001

Drop-in Student Office Hours (Zoom): Tuesdays, 2:15-3:15 p.m.

By Appointment Student Office Hours: Thursdays, 9:45-11:15 a.m. (or e-mail me to set up another time)

Office phone: 860-685-3416

E-mail: [ldancey@wesleyan.edu](mailto:ldancey@wesleyan.edu) (please put GOVT 215 in the subject line)

### **Course Overview**

This course will provide an in-depth look at the U.S. Congress, with a specific focus on the changes that have taken place in the institution over the last several decades. In particular, we will analyze why the two parties seem more polarized today than in the past, how the policymaking process has changed as a result, and what the consequences are for lawmaking in the United States. Along the way, we will touch on longstanding topics of interest to congressional scholars, such as the motivations of members of Congress, the role interest groups play in the policymaking process, and the relationship between Congress and the other branches of government.

### **Course Objectives**

There are four main objectives to this course. By the end of the course you will be better able to:

1. Understand how the congressional policymaking process functions
2. Explain how the congressional policymaking process has changed over time
3. Identify the ways in which members of Congress seek to represent their constituents and secure reelection
4. Articulate a position on key debates about the state of the contemporary Congress

## Course Structure

Class meetings will be a mix of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to finish the required readings for each class session and come ready to engage in a discussion of the arguments and evidence presented in the readings.

I anticipate that the class or individual students may encounter unforeseen challenges brought on by the pandemic. I will do my best to ensure that class continues to run as smoothly as possible in the face of such challenges. If there are individual circumstances that prevent you from coming to class for an extended period of time or completing an assignment on time, please contact me so that we can discuss accommodations.

## Required Books

Curry, James M. and Frances E. Lee. 2020. *The Limits of Party: Congress and Lawmaking in a Polarized Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mayhew, David. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

## Course Website

You can access the course website through [moodle.wesleyan.edu](http://moodle.wesleyan.edu). Please check the course website regularly (i.e. at least twice a week).

## Assignments

**Two papers (22.5% each, 45% total):** You will complete two research papers for this course. Both papers will be 8-12 pages, double-spaced. In the first paper (due Oct. 22) you will research the legislative behavior and presentation of self (e.g., bill sponsorship, social media posts) of two members of Congress from the same party and compare/contrast their legislative styles. In the second paper (due Dec. 3) you will analyze the legislative history of a recent policy topic or bill. I will pass out assignment sheets with more information at least two weeks before the due dates. Given the research component of the papers, we will also have a few built-in dates for you to update me on your progress.

**Op-ed #1 (12.5%):** During the course of the semester you will write two op-eds (approximately 750-1,000 words in length). The purpose of these op-eds is for you to write an informed but

accessible take on a contemporary topic in congressional politics. The first op-ed is due Oct. 8, and I will provide you with more information by Sept. 27.

**Op-ed #2 (12.5%):** The second op-ed will be due Nov. 4. I will provide you with more information by Oct. 27.

**Final Essay (20%):** A final essay for the course is due Dec. 18 by 5 p.m. You will be asked to respond to an essay prompt related to a major course theme. It will be open note, open book and not require outside research.

**Moodle Posts (10%):** You are responsible for submitting 8 short (~1 paragraph) reading response posts to Moodle over the course of the semester. These should be **uploaded to Moodle by 2:30 p.m. the day of class. You can only do one per class.** Good response posts will not just summarize an argument. Instead, they will *respond* to a particular aspect of the reading. A good response might do one of the following 1) Identify a theoretical question that is sparked by the reading and how one might go about answering that question 2) Explain how some evidence from a previous reading supports or refutes an author's point; 3) Explain how some contemporary aspect of congressional politics supports or refutes an author's point; or 4) Identify an area of disagreement with the author and explain why you disagree. You are allowed to do one Moodle post on something not on the syllabus (e.g., a virtual talk you attend, relevant story you read in the newspaper (post a link to the story), or some experience you have with Congress that seems relevant to course themes).

### **Key Due Dates**

Oct. 8: Op-ed #1 Due  
Oct. 22: Paper #1 Due  
Nov. 4: Op-ed #2 Due  
Dec. 3: Paper #2 Due  
Dec. 18: Final Essay Due by 5 p.m.

### **Late Assignments**

**All students have an automatic 48-hour grace period this semester on due dates.** If an assignment is due Friday, Oct. 8 at 11:59 p.m. that means you can turn it in by Sunday, Oct. 10 at 11:59 p.m. without late penalty. After 48 hours, the assignment becomes one day late, after 72 hours it is two days late, etc. Your overall grade on an assignment will go down by 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g., B+ becomes a B-) for each day it is late (after the 48-hour grace period). You do not need to notify me if you are using the grace period for an assignment.

I do realize that this semester poses a variety of challenges brought on by the pandemic. I am happy to work with students who are facing difficulties or may need extra time on an assignment. Please reach out to me before an assignment is due if you anticipate not being able to submit it within 48 hours of the due date.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours are times set aside for student meetings. You can sign up for office hours on Thursdays from 9:45-11:15 a.m. using this Calendly [link](#). I am available to meet in person at my office (318 High St. 001) or on Zoom during these times.

I will also be on Zoom on Tuesdays from 2:15-3:15 p.m. on the office hours link posted on the course Moodle pages. There are no appointments for the Tuesday office hours. I will have the waiting room feature enabled, and you may need to wait a few minutes if I am talking with someone else when you arrive.

If you cannot meet during these times, please e-mail me and we can set up a meeting at another time.

### **Contacting the Instructor**

I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Dancey in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your papers are best dealt with in office hours where we can have a more productive conversation than over e-mail. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

### **Contested Grades**

If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation. This policy is meant to address disagreements with my assessment of your work. It does not pertain to calculation errors on my part. If you believe I

have made a mistake adding up points, converting your points to a percentage, etc. you can let me know immediately, and I will be happy to correct any mistakes.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021 or can be reached by email ([accessibility@wesleyan.edu](mailto:accessibility@wesleyan.edu)) or phone (860-685-2332).

### **Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources**

If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with me to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at [dleipziger@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dleipziger@wesleyan.edu) or any of the chaplains in the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at <https://www.wesleyan.edu/orsl/index.html>.

### **Academic Integrity**

I take plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct seriously. Please see this page for a description of the Wesleyan Honor Code:

<https://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/student-conduct/honor-code.html>

This semester I plan to use the Turnitin plagiarism detection feature on Moodle when you submit assignments. I will also spend time in class discussing citation and writing strategies. If you have questions about citing sources, acceptable collaborations, or other issues related to academic integrity, please don't hesitate to contact me.

## **Title IX**

If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at [dcolucci@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dcolucci@wesleyan.edu), or your class dean. Additionally, and if you are comfortable, you can work directly with me to make reasonable arrangements.

### **Course Schedule:<sup>1</sup>**

Readings noted with an asterisk (\*) are from assigned books. The rest of the material can be found on Moodle or by going to the url listed next to the reading.

### **Introduction**

Sept. 6: Introductions

- Dominus, Susan. 2019. "Hope and High Drama: A Year with Two New Democratic Congresswomen." *New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 18:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/magazine/ayanna-pressley-abigail-spanberger-democratic-women-congress.html>

Sept. 8: Congress's Role in the American Political System

- Whittington, Keith E. 2017. "The Place of Congress in the Constitutional Order." *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 40: 573.
- *Federalist Papers* 51, 52, & 62.  
<https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers>

Sept. 13: Design and Evolution

- Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee. 2012. *Congress and Its Members: 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, chapter 2.
- Binder, Sarah. *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock*, chapter 1.

### **Elections and Representation**

Sept. 15: Electoral Motivations

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<sup>1</sup> I reserve the right to make modifications to the course schedule during the semester. If I make changes I will both announce them in class and on the website.

- \*Mayhew, David. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection. Second Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 1-77 (part 1)
- Find the member of Congress who represents your hometown or Wesleyan (zip: 06459). Skim their website for examples of advertising, position taking, and credit claiming (press releases are a good place to search). Bring an example to class.

Sept. 20: Electoral Motivations, II

- \*Mayhew, pp. 81-180 (part 2).

Sept. 22: The Changing Electoral Environment

- Jacobson, Gary C. 2015. "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77(3): 861-73.
- Desilver, Drew. 2021. "Once Again, Nearly All Senate Elections Reflect States' Presidential Votes." *Pew Research Center*, Jan. 8: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/08/once-again-nearly-all-senate-elections-reflect-states-presidential-votes/>

Sept. 27: Congressional Staff (Potential Guest Speaker)

- Furnas et al. 2020. "The Congressional Capacity Survey: Who Staff Are, How They Got There, What They Do, and Where They May Go." In *Congress Overwhelmed*, eds. Timothy Lapira, Lee Drutman, and Kevin Kosar.

Sept. 29: Views of the District

- Fenno, Richard F. Jr. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71(3): 883-917.

Oct. 4: Polarization and Congressional Behavior

- McCarty, Nolan. 2019. *Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Chapter 3.
- Lee, Frances. 2014. "American Politics is More Competitive than Ever. That's Making Partisanship Worse." *Washington Post*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/09/american-politics-is-more-competitive-than-ever-thats-making-partisanship-worse/?utm\\_term=.820e09bb6482](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/09/american-politics-is-more-competitive-than-ever-thats-making-partisanship-worse/?utm_term=.820e09bb6482)

Oct. 6: Descriptive Representation

- Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes.'" *The Journal of Politics* 61(3): 628-57.
- Smooth, Wendy G. 2018. "Hyde-Smith and the Test of Women's Descriptive Representation." *Gender Watch* 2018, Dec. 6: <http://www.genderwatch2018.org/hyde-smith-test-womens-descriptive-representation/>

Oct. 8: Op-ed #1 Due

Oct. 11: Descriptive Representation Day 2 (all readings are pretty short)

- Swers, Michele L. and Danielle M. Thomsen. 2017. "This Explains Why There are So Few Republican Women in Congress." *Washington Post*, June 20: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/20/this-explains-why-there-are-so-few-republican-women-in-congress/?utm\\_term=.f634f44d111c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/20/this-explains-why-there-are-so-few-republican-women-in-congress/?utm_term=.f634f44d111c)
- Conroy, Meredith. 2020. "How a Record Number of Republican Women Will—And Won't—Change Congress." *FiveThirtyEight.com*, Nov. 16: <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-a-record-number-of-republican-women-will-and-wont-change-congress/>
- Gonzalez Juenke, Eric and Paru Shah. 2016. "Re-Thinking Minority Representation in the United States." *Politics of Color: Commentary & Reflections on Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*. <http://politicsofcolor.com/re-thinking-minority-representation-in-the-united-states/>
- Carnes, Nicholas. 2018. "Working-Class People are Underrepresented in Politics. The Problem Isn't Voters." *Vox.com*, Oct. 24: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/24/18009856/working-class-income-inequality-randy-bryce-alexandria-ocasio-cortez>

Oct. 13: A Case Study in Representation

- Watch Frontline documentary "Immigration Battle." <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/immigration-battle/transcript/>

## **MONEY AND INTEREST GROUPS**

Oct. 18: Money and Interest Groups, Day I



- Jacobson, Gary and Jamie L. Carson. 2016. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, pp. 77-105.

Oct. 20: Money and Interest Groups, Day 2

- Drutman, Lee. 2010. "The Complexities of Lobbying: Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Profession." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 43(4): 834-36.
- McKay, Amy Melissa. 2019. "Buying Amendments? Lobbyists' Campaign Contributions and Microlegislation in the Creation of the Affordable Care Act." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12266>

Oct. 22: Paper #1 Due

Oct. 25: Fall Break

Oct. 27: Money and Interest Groups, Day 3

- Grossmann, Matt. 2014. "Money Can't Buy you the NRA." *Sunlight Foundation Blog*, May 21: <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2014/05/21/money-cant-buy-you-the-nra/>
- Drutman, Grossmann, and LaPira. 2019. "The Interest Group Top Tier." In *Can America Govern Itself?*, eds. Frances E. Lee and Nolan McCarty.

## THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Nov. 1: "Unorthodox" and "Unconventional" Lawmaking

- Sinclair, Barbara. 2017. *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, Chapter 1, 6.
- Oleszek, Walter J. 2014. *Congressional Procedures and The Policy Process*, pp. 11-40.

Nov. 3: Legislating in the House

- Oleszek, Walter J. 2014. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*, pp. 160-191.
- Kosar, Kevin R. and Adam Chan. 2016. "A Case for Stronger Congressional Committees." *R Street Policy Study No. 66*. <http://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/66.pdf>

Nov. 4: Op-ed #2 Due

#### Nov. 8: Legislation and Nominations in the Senate

- Koger, Gregory. 2017. "Filibusters and Majority Rule in the Modern Senate." In *Congress Reconsidered, Eleventh Edition*, ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- American Bar Association. 2021. "Judicial Vacancies." [https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/governmental\\_legislative\\_work/priorities\\_policy/independence\\_of\\_the\\_judiciary/judicial\\_vacancies/](https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/governmental_legislative_work/priorities_policy/independence_of_the_judiciary/judicial_vacancies/)

#### Nov. 10: Budget Process

- Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, pp. 125-30.
- Reynolds, Molly E. 2020. "Members of Congress Have Lost Control Over Spending." *Washington Post*, August 27: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/27/members-congress-have-lost-control-over-spending/>

#### Nov. 15: Passing Legislation: Case Studies

- Sinclair, Barbara. 2012. "A Tale of Two Stimuli: The Bush-Pelosi-Boehner Stimulus and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009."
- Prokop, Andrew. 2014. "Beating the Odds. Why One Bill Made it Through a Gridlocked Congress—and So Many Don't." *Vox.com*, May 22: <http://www.vox.com/2014/5/22/5723878/how-a-bill-becomes-a-law-in-2014>

#### Nov. 17: Bipartisanship and Lawmaking

- \*Curry and Lee, *The Limits of Party*, chapters 1-2

#### Nov. 22: Congressional Problem Solving

- \*Curry and Lee, *The Limits of Party*, pp. 53-70, 85-99, 123-127, 137-150.

#### Nov. 24: Thanksgiving Break

### CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT

#### Nov. 29: Congress and the President, Day 1

- Lee, Frances. 2008. "Dividers, Not Uniters: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004." *Journal of Politics* 70: 914-28.
- Ryan, Joshua M. 2020. "Congress and the Executive in the Age of Trump." In *New Directions in Congressional Politics*.

Dec. 1: Congress and the President, Day 2

- Watch Frontline documentary "Cliffhanger":  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/cliffhanger/>

**Dec. 3: Paper #2 Due**

Dec. 6: Congress and the President, Day 3

- Howell, William G. and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2007. "When Congress Stops Wars: Partisan Politics and Presidential Power." *Foreign Affairs* 9 86(5): 95-107.
- Reynolds, Molly E. 2019. "Improving Congressional Capacity to Address Problems and Oversee the Executive Branch." Brookings: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Big-Ideas\\_Reynolds\\_Congressional\\_Capacity.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Big-Ideas_Reynolds_Congressional_Capacity.pdf)

Dec. 8: Wrapping Up

- Current events readings TBD

**Saturday, Dec. 18: Final Essay Due by 5 p.m.**