

Instructor

NICK JENKINS
Contact via Slack
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Class Meetings

MONDAYS & WEDNESDAYS
10:00am - 12:50pm
Zoom

Office Hours

MONDAYS, 2:30 - 4:30PM
And By Appointment
Zoom

U.S. CONGRESS

Course Overview

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.

“All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives.”

Course Materials

LegSim

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



though 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 is free 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. 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: XXXXXXXXXX
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 don't receive the activation email after a few minutes, check your email trash/junk folder. Still cant find it? Contact support@legsim.org.

Congressional Research Service

Fortunately, the [Congressional Research Service](#) (CRS) is ready to help you get situated for your first term. 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>.

Slack



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. The link to join the Slack channel is available on iLearn.

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. Describe the committee system in the House and Senate and how it affects the passage of legislation.

2. Analyze the relationship between personal decision-making, representation and constituency.
3. Describe how a bill becomes law and the factors that interfere with the passage of legislation.
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 you activities as a member of the House. The 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 dues 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).

Assignment Due Dates:

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Register for LegSim	June 22	5
Constituency Research Assignment	June 25	25
Propose Your Legislative Agenda	June 28	25
Justify Your Committee Requests	July 2	25
Draft and Submit a Major Piece of Legislation	July 9	25
Committee Jurisdiction Research Assignment	July 13	10
Floor Procedures Quiz (3 Attempts)	July 13	15
Committee Report	July 19	10
Prepare Debate Remarks	July 20	25
Legislative Accomplishment Report	July 25	50
Total		215

Extra Credit (The Section You Are Looking For)

These are the opportunities for extra credit that you will have in this course:

Assignment	Points
Get Elected as the Chamber Leader	5 Percentage Points
Get Elected as a Committee Chair	3 Percentage Points
Earn a Leadership PAC Contribution from Chamber Leader	2 Percentage Points (x3)
Earn a Leadership PAC Contribution from Committee Chair	1 Percentage Point (x2)
Write and Submit a “Dear Colleague” Letter Correctly and for a Specific Purpose (3 Maximum)	1 Percentage Point
Introduce a Resolution or Joint Resolution	1 Percentage Point

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

Letter grades will be assigned according to these percentages, but keep in mind that the final letter grade is not an assessment of your intelligence, your abilities, or your value as a person—in fact, I will never grade “you” directly, and grading is never a reflection of who you are as a person. Rather, the grade reflects what you demonstrated that you learned in the course: no more, no less:

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 UCR’s mission 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 these values as well as those 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 project, 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 Schedule

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).

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.**

Introduction to Congress & Representation

June 21 (M) **Lecture:** Course Introduction, Governance and the Separation of Powers, Overview of LegSim
Read Before Class: Course Syllabus, [Federalist 10 Summary](#), [Federalist 51 Summary](#), [U.S. Constitution Article 1](#)
Register for LegSim by June 22

June 23 (W) **Lecture:** Representation, The Job of a Legislator, Apportionment
Read Before Class: [CRS-RL33686](#), [CRS-IN11360](#)
Constituency Research Assignment Due June 25

Parties & Committees

June 28 (M) **Lecture:** Organization in Congress: Parties, Leaders, and Committees
Read Before Class: [CRS-RS20881](#), [CRS-IN11036](#), [CRS-98-367](#), [CRS-7-5700](#)
Listen to Before Class: [Understanding Congress Podcast Episode 3](#)
Simulation Exercise: Members meet in class to give introductions and discuss priorities.
Legislative Agenda Due Before Class

Policymaking & Procedure

June 30 (W)	Lecture: How Laws are Made, Authorizations and Appropriations, Drafting Legislation Read Before Class: CRS-R42843 , CRS-R46497 , CRS-98-706 , CRS-R44001 , CRS-98-354 Listen Before Class: Understanding Congress Podcast Episode 8 Simulation Exercise: Members meet in class to select procedures for choosing leaders and making committee assignments. Committee Requests Due July 2
July 5 (M)	Observance of Independence Day - No Class :(
July 7 (W)	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. Major Legislation Due July 9
July 12th	Lecture: Interest Groups and Lobbying in Congress Read Before Class: CRS-R46251 Simulation Exercise: Committees meet to research their jurisdictions. Committee Jurisdiction Research Due July 13 Floor Procedures Quiz Due July 13

Campaigns & Elections

July 14 (W)	Lecture: Who runs for office and how do they do it? Read Before Class: Congressional Elections Simulation Exercise: Committee Hearings and Writing Committee Reports To receive consideration on the floor, all bills must be reported from committee by July 19
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LegSim Days

July 19 (M)	Simulation Exercise: TBD Debate Remarks Due July 20
July 21 (W)	Simulation Exercise: Debate and Voting
July 23 (F)	Lecture: The Legislature Adjourns <i>Sine Die</i> , Simulation Debrief Report on Legislative Accomplishments Due July 23
