POS 3424-0070: The U.S. Congress

Department of Political Science
College of Science, University of Central Florida

COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor:	Dr. Daniel Marien	Term:	Fall 2011
		Class Meeting Days	Wed.
Phone:	ORL: 407-823-2608 COC: 321-433-7952	Class Meeting Hours:	6:00 - 8:50 p.m.
E-Mail:	danielmarien@yahoo.com	Class Location:	BCC Bldg 3, rm 235

INSTRUCTORS' OFFICE HOURS	OFFICE LOCATION	OFFICE PHONE NUMBER
Mondays 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	UCF Cocoa; BCC bldg 3, room 223	321-433-7912
Tuesdays 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.	UCF Orlando; Philips Hall, room. 313	407-823-0113
Wednesdays 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	UCF Cocoa; BCC bldg 3, room 223	321-433-7912
Thursdays 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.	UCF Orlando; Philips Hall, room. 313	407-823-0113

Notes:

Remember that a face to face meeting is the best way to deal with complex issues. The second best way is a phone conversation. Email communication works well for exchanging standardized information, but it is not an ideal method for resolving complex issues.

Phoning outside of office hours is not likely to be effective.

You **must** regularly visit your UCF knights email account. The instructor relies on it to update you on the course process, schedule, requirements, etc.

I. Generic University Course Catalog Description

POS 3424 COS-POLS 3(3,0)
"Congress and the Legislative Process: PR: POS 2041 or C.I. Examination of the Congress as an institution undergoing dynamic change; emphasis upon recruitment of legislators, institutional and informal rules, the committee system, legislative procedures."

II. Introduction

This is a propitious moment to study the U.S. Congress. Enduring economic difficulties, public anger at the institution and the emergence of the Tea party as a dynamic force in the House of Representatives invite a serious examination of this institution.

III. Specific Description of this Course

The national legislature stands at the intersection of the people's aspirations for democratic representation and accountability, dedication to the public interest and effectiveness in problem solving.

In this course we study the Congress' organization, functions, governing norms, the manner in which it both reflects and shapes broader trends in the political system. We look also at the Congress' role in shaping the distribution of income, wealth, and life chances among the population in the last thirty years. Students research these issues with a particular focus on the last ten years (Congress' behavior during the G.W. bush and Obama administrations).

IV. Course Structure

The course is structured as a seminar. Students will take turn in leading the discussion on assigned materials. Students summarize the days' assigned material's main conclusions and suggest questions for debate in oral statements (assisted by written notes).

Students also research a specific aspect of the Congress' impact on policies distributing material benefits in the last ten years. Examples include tax policies, economic and employment policies, student aid, health care, consumer protection, financial regulation, energy policy, immigration policy, etc.

At the end of the semester, students orally present their written research report to other course participants and field questions from the audience.

V. Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able:

1. To describe in specific terms the constitutional powers of the Congress, its organization, functions, and institutional norms.

2. To describe in specific terms trends in the distribution of material advantages in the United States and the connections between these trends and Congressional actions and inactions during the last thirty years.

3. To describe in specific terms the main legislative decisions and non-decisions of the Congress during the G.W. Bush and Obama presidencies.

4. To summarize clearly and precisely complex ideas in oral statements.

5. To collaborate productively with peers in the assemblage of a research report.

6. To respond orally in an effective manner to questions and challenges from oral interlocutors.

VI. Course Prerequisites

The successful completion of an introductory course in American Government. Keeping abreast of current affairs concerning the Congress through the regular reading of a serious newspaper.

VII. Course Credits

3.0 cr.

VIII. Required Texts and Materials

1. Stephen Frantzich and Claude Berube, *Congress: Games and Strategies*, **4th edition (2009).**

2. Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner Take All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned its Back on the Middle Class*, Simon and Schuster, 2011, ISBN: 978-1416588702.

3. Thomas E. Mann and Norman Ornstein, *The Broken Branch*, 2008, Oxford University Press, ISBN: 978-0-19-536871-0.

4. Additional materials will be assigned and put in library reserve as the course progresses.

IX. Basis for Final Grade

Assessment	Percent of final course grade
RAT Quizzes	20
Newspaper Reports on Congress	10
General Seminar Participation	20
Seminar Leaderships	20
Written Research Report and Oral Presentation	30

Discussion of Course Requirements

Seminar Leadership: Students take turn to briefly present the specific material assigned for the class. The oral presentation should be about 10 minutes long, should contain a clear summary of the main ideas, and should end with a comment or a searching question relating the material assigned for that day. A text of about 1-3 pages should also be submitted to the instructor by the seminar leader.

General Participation: Students are expected to contribute to the general discussion on a regular basis. Quality and quantity of interventions are considered.

Research Report and Oral Presentation: Students will write a research report in pairs and present its substance orally to the class. A Question and Answer period will follow. The research report must meet the usual standards of undergraduate papers. Ability to orally explain one's argument and to address questions and challenges thoughtfully will also play a significant role in the grading of this exercise.

Grading Scale (%)	
94-100	A
90-93	A-
87-89	B+
84-86	B
80-83	B-
77-79	C+
74-76	C
70-73	C-
67-69	D+
64-66	D
60-63	D-
0 - 59	F

X. Grade Dissemination

Graded tests and materials in this course will be returned individually only by request. You can access your scores at any time using the Grade Book function of Webcourses@UCF.

XI. Course Policies

The instructor will drop the two lowest scores in the calculation of the Readiness Assessment Test (RAT) quizzes.

Grades of Incomplete

The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next semester. Your instructor is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished by the end of the subsequent semester or the “I” will automatically be recorded as an “F” on your transcript.

Grading Policy

RAT Quizzes are graded individually. These short quizzes are meant to evaluate the student’s readiness to engage in group discussion. Quiz time will be limited. Students will have access to the materials and their notes during the quizzes.

XII. Course Policies: Technology and Media

Email: Use this email address to communicate with the instructor: danielmarien@yahoo.com. Allow up to 48 hours for a response. Repeat message if you haven't received a response within 48 hours.

Laptop Usage: All laptops and other electronic devices must be closed during seminar discussion. Laptop usage by the seminar note taker is authorized. Students observed using an unauthorized electronic device in class will be punished by the subtraction of one course point per observation. Students should consult the written and audio documents available at these URL for rationale justifying this policy:

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/technology/07brain.html?ref=homepage&src=me&pagewanted=all

http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=129384107&m=129398822

XIII. Course Policies: Student Expectations

Disability Access:

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Academic Conduct Policy:

Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult The Golden Rule, the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook (http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/) for further details. As in all University courses, The Golden Rule Rules of Conduct will be applied. Violations of these rules will result in a failing grade for the entire course and can also result in expulsion from the University

Turinitin.com:

In this course we will utilize turnitin.com, an automated system which instructors can use to quickly and easily compare each student's assignment with billions of web sites, as well as an enormous database of student papers that grows with each submission. Accordingly, you will be expected to submit your research report (contribution to group report) in both hard copy and electronic format via Turnitin. After the assignment is processed, as instructor I receive a report from turnitin.com that states if and how another author's work was used in the assignment. For a more detailed look at this process visit http://www.turnitin.com. Essays are due at turnitin.com the same day as in class.

XIV. **Schedule** (note: this schedule is subject to revision)

Date	Finish This Homework Before Class	Topics to be Discussed in Class
8/24	First day of class; no homework is due	Introduction of course goals and means.
8/31	Read: *Games*, Intro and ch. 1 Read: *Winner*, Intro and ch. 1 Read: *Broken Branch*, Preface and ch. 1 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
9/7	Read: *Games*, ch. 2 Read: *Winner*, ch. 2 Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 2 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
9/14	Read: *Games*, ch. 3 Read: *Winner*, ch. 3 Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 3 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
9/21	Read: *Games*, ch. 4 Read: *Winner*, ch. 4 Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 4 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
9/28	Read: *Games*, ch. 5 Read: *Winner*, ch. 5 Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 5 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
10/5	Read: *Games*, ch. 6 Read: *Winner*, ch. 6	RAT Quiz

	Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 6 Submit Newspaper Report	Seminar Discussion
10/12	Read: *Games*, ch. 7 Read: *Winner*, ch. 7 Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 7 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
10/19	Read: *Games*, ch. 8 Read: *Winner*, ch. 8 Read: *Broken Branch*, ch. 8 Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
10/26	Read: *Games*, ch. 9 Read: *Winner*, ch. 9 Read: Congress during Obama Adm. (TBA) Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
11/2	Read: *Games*, ch. 10 Read: *Winner*, ch. 10 Read: Congress during Obama Adm. (TBA) Submit Newspaper Report	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
11/9	Read: *Winner*, Conclusion Read: Congress during Obama Adm. (TBA)	RAT Quiz Seminar Discussion
11/16	Research	Research Planning
11/23	[No class]	[No class]
11/30		Oral Presentations
12/7	(Exam week)	Oral Presentations