

**Organization and Operation of the U.S. Congress:
Historical and Contemporary Issues**
FALL QUARTER 2021
Tu 10am-11:30am

Instructor: John Lawrence, Ph.D.

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Office hours: Following class or by arrangement

Instructor

John Lawrence has taught the Congress research seminar at UCDC since 2013 after spending 38 years as a staff person in the U.S. House of Representatives, the last eight as chief of staff to Speaker Nancy Pelosi. He is the author of *The Class of '74: Congress After Watergate and the Roots of Partisanship* (2018, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018) and the forthcoming *Arc of Power: Politics and Policy in the Pelosi Era 2005-2010* (University of Kansas Press, 2022), as well as articles on Congress and national politics. He blogs on American politics at **DOMEocracy** (johnlawrence.wordpress.com) and tweets at @johnlawrencedc. He also is the published author of Sherlock Holmes short stories. He has a Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of California (Berkeley), and an undergraduate history degree from Oberlin College.

Description

This course will focus on the organization and operations of Congress and the American government during a period of great economic, cultural and political disruption: the coronavirus pandemic and related societal disruptions; the 2020 election and the 2022 mid-term election; and the sharply divided public attitudes reflected in the hyper-partisan atmosphere of US politics and society more broadly.

Congress and other branches of the U.S. government were designed nearly two and a half centuries ago under circumstances and reflecting values and philosophies that bear little resemblance to contemporary America. All of these institutions have evolved over time in response to changing conditions domestically and internationally. The American electorate has undergone significant evolution as well, markedly during the last half century. All of these factors place dramatic and consequential pressures on government, elected officials and voters. How are they responding and what successes, failures and changes can we anticipate?

Class meetings will involve discussions of recent developments in the political landscape the transition to a new presidential administration and the 117th Congress; the implications of the election for relations between the branches of government; potential new directions for public policy resulting from the 2020 election results; and reform of the political system.

In addition to the instructor, there will be periodic online guest presenters including former members of Congress, congressional officers, congressional staff, journalists, congressional scholars and others.

Students should complete all readings and watch assigned videos for each week *prior to the class meeting*. Students are expected to be engaged participants in the seminar discussions.

Requirements and Evaluation

Course requirements are: (1) regular class attendance and participation; (2) one research paper 8-10pp on an assigned topic; and (3) two 3-4pp papers on assigned topics focusing on knowledge of class materials and critical thinking. **All papers should be submitted to john.lawrence@ucdc.edu as WORD attachments.**

- Please note that **this is a seminar and as such, regular student participation is expected**. This participation may include commentary on topics under discussion and summary of reading or video materials. Students who enroll should be prepared to engage in classroom dialogue, which affects grading. NOTE: Student discussions should reflect knowledge of the readings and other scholarly materials rather than simply statements of one's personal opinions. All points of view are invited and welcome.

Classroom Conduct

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation.

- **PLEASE NOTE: This class will involve discussion of contemporary and historic public policies that some students may find sensitive. All class members are reminded that discussions must respect the opinions of other students regardless of disagreement on political matters to ensure that all students feel free to express their views.**

Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates this policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence.

Students who wish to speak confidentially about an incident of misconduct should contact UCDC's Counseling Services at UCDCCounseling@gmail.com. To report misconduct to ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding misconduct, please contact the UCDC Title IX administrator, Debbie Deas is now Director of Student Services. (202-974-6214 or Debbie.deas@ucdc.edu). Because the University of California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed.

Covid compliance: All students must comply fully with masking, social distancing and other policies implemented by UCDC to ensure the safety of all members of the community.

ADA Accommodations for Students

Any student requiring accommodations for class should inform the instructor at the first class meeting (if not earlier). In compliance with the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Public Law 93- 112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336), University of California policy prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, services, and activities.

Grading

Research Paper): 50%

DUE: TBA

Shorter papers (30%)

DUE: Several Dates

Class Participation (20%)

NOTE: Papers are due at 11:59PM on the due date. Late submissions will be subject to grade reductions unless previously authorized in writing by the instructor. All times are Eastern Standard Time.

Policy on Original Work and Use of Sources

UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonest scholarship. All materials submitted for this class must be original work prepared for this class. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. **Unfamiliarity with these behaviors is not an adequate defense.**

Readings are available online and/or on Desktop.

Class Meetings

1. Class Introduction

During this introductory class during, we will introduce ourselves and our expectations for the class, review the syllabus, and identify key topics to be covered.

Reading

- Maggie Astor, “On Politics: How partisanship affects pandemic thinking”
NYT (8/19/21)

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGkZsvxfDhksNsnDTwswfWKDQzg>

2. The Lay of the Land: U.S. Politics in 2021

Reading

- Thomas Edsall, “Lean Into It. Lean Into the Culture War” *NYT* (July 14, 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/14/opinion/culture-war-democrats-republicans.html>
- Kevin Drum “If you hate the culture wars, blame liberals” Jaberwocking (7/3/21) https://jabberwocking.com/if-you-hate-the-culture-wars-blame-liberals/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top
- “‘An Indelible Stain’: How the G.O.P. Tried to Topple a Pillar of Democracy” *NYT* (December 12, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/12/us/politics/trump-lawsuits-electoral-college.html>
- “We’re in the Foxhole Together: House Democrats Reckon with a Diminished Majority” *WP* (November 23, 2020) https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/house-democrats-biden-election/2020/11/23/c280ad2c-2b4d-11eb-8fa2-06e7cbb145c0_story.html
- Thomas Edsall, “I Fear That We Are Witnessing the End of American Democracy” *NYT* (August 27, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/opinion/trump-republican-convention-racism.html>

3. What Were the Founding Fathers Thinking?

Reading

- Jack N. Rakove, “From the Old Congress to the New,” in Julian Zelizer, *The American Congress*, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin. 2-22.

Video

Professor Richard D. Brown, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, History, University of Connecticut

4. The Modern Congress

Reading

- Eric Rauchway, “The Transformation of the Congressional Experience,” in Zelizer, 319-334.
- Ron Elving, *Czars And Firebrands: A Brief History Of Power In The House*” NPR (October 15, 2015)

<https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/10/16/449136598/czars-and-firebrands-a-brief-history-of-power-in-the-house>

5. Congressional Organization: Leadership, Caucuses, Committees

Reading

- Roger Davidson, Walter Oleszek, Frances Lee. *Congress and Its Members*. Chapter 8, Congressional Rules and Procedures,” 215-251
- Bryan Marshall and Bruce Wolpe, *The Committee*. Chapter 1, “Hop and Change Meets the Hill,” 1-17.
- Politico Guide to the Legislative Process (July 30, 2019)
https://www.politicopro.com/blog/guide-to-legislation?cid=promkt_19q3_corenews_legg

6. Congressional Staff: Who Are They, What’s Their Background, What Do They Do?

Reading

- Alliance for Congress, “Serving the People: Congressional Staff Perspectives” (July, 2021) <https://allianceforcongress.org/publications/serving-the-people/>

7. Bean Counting 101: Budgets, Appropriations, Entitlements, CRs, Omnibuses, Minibuses, Sequestration, Fiscal Cliffs, Earmarks and Reconciliation

Reading

- Thomas Kahn, “A Democrat Against Deficits” *Wall Street Journal* (July 28, 2021)
- Eric Patashnik, “Congress and the Budget Since 1974,” in Zelizer, *American Congress*, 668-686
- “Democrats planning budget blitz to pass Biden agenda” *Roll Call* (January 20, 2021) https://www.rollcall.com/2021/01/20/democrats-planning-budget-blitzkrieg-to-pass-biden-agenda/?utm_source=morningheadlines&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletters&utm_content=01/21/2021 “The Dead Earmarks Society” *The Hill*, Feb. 15, 2019 <https://www.rollcall.com/news/congress/pork-earmarks-making-comeback>
- Paul Kane, “Earmark spending went away after corruption scandals. Now, it’s back on the table,” *Washington Post* (March 13, 2021)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/earmark-congress-spending-cunningham/2021/03/12/cd135fb0-82c2-11eb-ac37-4383f7709abe_story.html
- Ezra Klein, “The Senate Has Become a Dadaist Nightmare” (*NYT*, 2/5/2021)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/opinion/democrats-senate-reconciliation.html/>

Additional Reading

- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, “Reconciliation 101” (January 22, 2021) <http://www.crfb.org/papers/reconciliation-101?emci=135b67dc-285c-eb11-a607-00155d43c992&emdi=646334c0-de5c-eb11-a607-00155d43c992&ceid=142324>

8. The Filibuster: Minority Protection or Majority Obstruction?

Reading

- Sarah Binder, Molly Reynolds, “Filibuster 101: An explainer of the Senate rule and reform” https://www.brookings.edu/events/filibuster-101-an-explainer-of-the-senate-rule-and-reform/?utm_campaign=Governance%20Studies&utm_medium=email&utm_content=120092042&utm_source=hs_email
- Richard Arenberg, “Unintended consequences of killing the filibuster” *The Hill* (August 18, 2020) <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/512512-unintended-consequences-of-killing-the-filibuster>
- Burt Neuborne and Erwin Chemerinsky “Make the Filibuster Difficult Again” NYT (January 27, 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/27/opinion/filibuster-senate-biden.html>
- John Lawrence, “The House's stake in filibuster reform” *The Hill* (September 28, 2020) <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/518534-the-houses-stake-in-filibuster-reform>
- Ezra Klein, “The definitive case for ending the filibuster” Vox (October 1, 2020) <https://www.vox.com/21424582/filibuster-joe-biden-2020-senate-democrats-abolish-trump>

9. Diversity on the Hill

Reading

- Michele Swers, *Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate*, pp 1-23 <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=NnQ-es6oHWAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Michele+Swers+gender&ots=IHiz-y9nh5&sig=fOjYla9fsn51drY3UwdrBghrY78#v=onepage&q=Michele%20Swers%20gender&f=false>
- Kathryn Lyons, “Demeaned, overlooked, fighting back: What it’s like to be a woman in Congress” *Roll Call* (August 5, 2020) <https://www.rollcall.com/2020/08/05/demeaned-overlooked-fighting-women-congress-aoc/>

- Jim Saksa, “‘Where am I?’: Black staffers describe hurdles of working on Capitol Hill” *Roll Call* (February 25, 2021) https://www.rollcall.com/2021/02/25/where-am-i-black-staffers-describe-capitol-hill/?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletters&utm_content=02/28/2021
- Bridget Bowman, “House members are more diverse, but does the same go for staff?” *Roll Call* (January 25, 2019) <https://www.rollcall.com/news/congress/house-members-diverse-go-staff>
- Readings from Black Americans in Congress and Hispanics in Congress
- DeSipio, Louis, “Demanding Equal Political Voice...And Accepting Nothing Less: The Quest for Latino Political Inclusion,” in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study*, pp. 273-287.
- Claudine Gay, *The Effect of Minority Districts and Minority Representation on Political Participation in California*, (2001), Public Policy Institute of California http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_601CGR.pdf

10. Origins of Polarization

Reading

- Sam Tanenhaus, “The Promise of Polarization” *The New Republic* (October 29, 2018) <https://newrepublic.com/article/151612/promise-polarization-book-review-sam-rosenfeld-the-polarizers>
- David Frum, “How the American Two-Party System Became So Divided” *The Atlantic* (April 8, 2018) <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/the-polarizers-interview/557288/>
- Michael Grunwald, “How Everything Became the Culture War” *Politico Magazine* (Nov-Dec, 2018) <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/11/02/culture-war-liberals-conservatives-trump-2018-222095>
- Finkel, et al., “Political Sectarianism in America,” *Science* (October 30, 2020) <https://pcl.stanford.edu/research/2020/finkel-science-political.pdf>; for articles cited, see: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/370/6516/533#BIBL>
- John Lawrence, “You Don’t Actually Need to Reach Across the Aisle, Mr. Biden,” *New York Times* (April 27, 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/28/opinion/joe-biden-bipartisanship.html?referringSource=articleShare>
- Ezra Klein, “Democrats and Republicans Can’t Agree on Anything. They Shouldn’t Have To” *NYT* (April 29, 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/29/opinion/biden-schumer-manchin-bipartisanship.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>
- “The Man Who Was Trump Before Trump,” An Interview with Prof. Julian Zelizer, *Salon* (July 14, 2020) <https://www.salon.com/writer/dean-obeidallah>

- Drew DeSilver, “The Polarized Congress Of Today Has Its Roots In The 1970s,” Pew (June 12, 2014) <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/12/polarized-politics-in-congress-began-in-the-1970s-and-has-been-getting-worse-ever-since/>