

# POS3424: Congress and Legislative Procedure

Professor Sean Freeder ([sean.freeder@unf.edu](mailto:sean.freeder@unf.edu))  
University of North Florida, Fall 2021

**Class Meetings:** T/Th, 3:05–4:20: Fine Arts Center (#45), Room #2412

**Office Hours:** T/Th, 1:45–2:45, 4:30–5:30, Social Science Building (#51), Room #2418

- **Sign up for 15 minute slots using Canvas > Calendar > Find Appointments**
- I may be available for in-person and Zoom meetings on Friday afternoons by request.

## Course Description

This course is designed to examine thoroughly the constitutional role of the legislative branch of the United States government. It will provide information on the procedures and personalities of the Senate and House, and demonstrate the centrality of Congress in shaping domestic and foreign policy within our federal democratic system. Students will learn about how Congress functions, how its members work within the system to achieve their individual goals, and how these members find ways to work together to achieve collective goals. In doing so, students will also learn to form arguments about institutional rules and policy making, and how to effectively relate their evaluations to their peers.

## Learning Outcomes

### Content

- Understanding the function of various government institutions, particularly Congress, and relating these structures to political and policy outcomes.
- Understanding how the policy-making process impacts the substance of policy, and how historical and political context can inform the policy-making process.
- Understanding the interests and tools of individual members of Congress.

### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing legislation (likelihood of passage; means by which passage might occur; etc.)
- Analyzing the needs of a member given their personal and district-specific context, and how their actions have contributed to their likelihood of reelection.

### Communicating

- Developing writing skills for communicating clearly and effectively.
- Developing skills for public debate and persuasion.

# Course Content

## Class Time

Most of class time will be spent on lectures with Q&A and whole class discussion. Throughout the semester, some days will be spent on student-run debates over key controversies regarding Congress (see below). **Class attendance is mandatory and will be enforced (see below).**

## Readings

There are two required books for this class: *Congressional Procedure: A Practical Guide to the Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress* (Arenberg, 2018) and *Freshman Orientation: House Style and Home Style* (Sidlow, 2007). These readings will be used along with a number of films, documentaries, and short articles to accompany lecture content. The total cost for all these materials is not expected to exceed \$50 (*Congressional Procedure* can usually be found for \$15-25, *Freshman Orientation* about \$8-10, and the total cost of all movies should be \$5-20 depending on whether you already subscribe to a variety of several popular streaming services, like Netflix and especially HBO Max).

In addition, as we will be discussing events in Congress as they happen, you should generally keep up with the news (also, you should do this because you are a breathing human being). In particular, you will want to focus somewhat more on news related to Congress (bills being considered/passed; hearings; other major actions). You should know that UNF makes several of the most popular American "newspapers of record" available for free or heavily discounted based on your status as a UNF student:

- **New York Times:** UNF offers a **free** subscription to the Times and its associated apps! You can gain access to this resource for free for your entire time as a student. [Click here to sign-up.](#)
- **Wall Street Journal:** Students can get an [academic rate of \\$2-4/mo](#) for as long as they are enrolled.
- **Washington Post:** Students get a [full subscription for \\$1/mo](#), 90% off the retail subscription plan.

## Assignments

In this course, your grade will be assessed across a total of 800 possible points that you can earn over the next several months. These points are earned across five Modules, each corresponding to a general theme in the course materials. Use the Modules Page to guide yourself through the course. Some assignments recur weekly (supplemental reflections, discussion posts).

- **Attendance (56 points, 2 points per class meeting, 7% of total grade):**
  - Attendance "Quizzes" will activate on Canvas starting at 3:00pm on each lecture day. If the quiz is completed successfully by 3:30pm, you will earn 2 points. You are allowed to turn in the quiz late until 4:20pm, when class ends, for 1 point.
  - Points are earned by simply entering the correct number, 0-9, into the multiple choice quiz. This number will be featured prominently at the front of the classroom on the whiteboard and/or lecture slides. If you enter the correct number, you will receive full credit. If you enter the wrong number, you will receive zero credit.
  - If you know you will be unable to attend, please let me know in advance and I may be willing to waive your attendance on a given day depending on the reason. If something significant arises just prior to lecture (illness, emergency, etc.), please email me and I may be willing to work with you regarding that day's attendance.
  - If you do not have access to Canvas during the period in which the quiz opens, there will be a physical sign-in sheet provided at the front of class that you can use to give your first and last name.
  - *It is strictly against the rules to share the "password" with someone who is not in attendance, or sign in someone who is not there.* If someone is caught using a password remotely, any parties involved will lose their entire attendance grade for the semester.
  
- **Debate (100 points, ~13% of total grade):**
  - During the first week of the semester, you will indicate your preferences from a list of seven potential debate topics, and you will then be assigned to a team of 1-2 other students to argue for a particular perspective on that topic. Students will be expected to work together to research their debate topic in advance of their presentation, and to develop an effective strategy for persuading the audience.
  - On the day of your presentation, you and your team will be expected to present a coherent argument for your side, provide rebuttals to points made by the other side, and address questions from myself and other students. Click here for exhaustive details on how to complete this assignment.
  - Your grade on this project will entirely reflect your individual performance. This group will not receive a grade as a whole, and no one will "win" these debates. All individuals on both teams can (and should) earn A's.
  
- **Supplemental Reflections (90 points, 6 points per reflection, ~10% of total grade):**
  - You will read/watch outside materials that are related to the topics covered in that module's lectures. Once you have engaged with these materials, you will then write a short (about 2 paragraphs) reflection on what you learned.
  - A new set of materials will open each Tuesday at noon. Your reflection will be due one week later, Tuesday by 11:59pm.
  - See online syllabus for full details.

- **Discussion Posts (90 points, 6 points per assignment, ~10% of total grade):**
  - Each week, you will be asked to make a public post on Canvas addressing a topic related to the lecture material for a given week. Sometimes, these posts will ask you to argue briefly for a position on a political topic. Other times, you will be asked to write an expressive post in which you describe your experiences and/or background. The length of each post is roughly a long paragraph.
  - You will not be required to respond to other posts, but you will be allowed to do so if you choose, and everyone will generally be able to see what everyone else has written. These forums are a platform for safe expression of thoughts about difficult subjects, and hostility and/or harassment will not be tolerated.
  
- **Essays (200 points, 100 points each, 25% of total grade):**
  - For Essay 1, you will track a member of Congress for several weeks, observe the decisions they have made while in office, and write a report on their performance. Due October 19. See online syllabus for full details.
  - For Essay 2, you will research a major policy passed by Congress in the last several decades, and explain how it was developed and came into law. Due December 12. See online syllabus for full details.
  - To help you improve your writing at the college level (and especially in the social sciences), I have developed a short Writing Guide with tips that will help you.
  - Plagiarism will be taken extremely seriously. Consult the Plagiarism Guide if you have any concerns about what will be considered plagiarism.
  
- **Midterm Exam (100 points, ~13% of total grade):**
  - This exam will cover Lectures 1-8, and take place in our lecture hall on Thursday, September 30. You will have the length of class time (75 minutes) to complete it.
  - The exam will exclusively cover material found on the Midterm Study Guide. It will consist of a variety of short answer questions, multiple-choice questions, and fill-in-the-blank questions.
  - See online syllabus for study guides, slides, and more.
  
- **Final Exam (150 points, ~20% of total grade):**
  - This exam will cover Lectures 9-21, and take place in our regular lecture hall on Tuesday, December 14 at 3pm. You will have 110 minutes to complete it.
  - The exam will exclusively cover material found on the Final Study Guide. It will consist of a variety of short answer questions and fill-in-the-blank questions.
  - See online syllabus for study guides, slides, and more.
  
- **Participation (8 points, 1% of total grade):** Assessed at the end of semester –
  - How often you participated in class discussions
  - Any efforts you may have made to contact me for help (email, office hours)
  - Any type of extra effort that you showed throughout the course of the class.

## Grading

Based on the above assignments, your overall grade in the class will be determined as follows:

- 744-800 points = A
- 720-743 points = A-
- 696-719 points = B+
- 664-695 points = B
- 640-663 points = B-
- 616-639 points = C+
- 560-615 points = C
- 480-559 points = D
- Below 480 points = F

Some other important policies regarding grading:

- I plan to maintain a goal of a median grade of 86-87 in this course. To do so, I plan to curve the exams to meet that median target if necessary. If student scores, for whatever reason, are still below the target goal, I may curve everyone's final grade upward to meet the desired median. I will *not*, however, curve class grades *downward* to achieve that median.
- If you are very close to one of the above cutoff points (say, 5 points off), I will consider the possibility of moving you up to the next highest grade level. In doing so, I will take into other aspects of your performance in the class, such as whether your performance has improved over the course of the semester, the degree to which you have participated in class and communicated with me, whether you sought help when you needed it, etc.
- In the interest of fairness to all students, and to prevent undue burden on my graders, I almost never offer any extra credit. I do, however, offer my time to students who want to learn how to do better in the future!
- Turning in an assignment late will generally result in a 10-20% penalty for every 24 hours it is not turned in, resulting in a zero after the fifth day. If you know in advance you are unlikely to meet a deadline, let me know, and I may be willing to work with you.
- If you believe you have received a grade in error, or wish to dispute a grade you received, I am happy to have those conversations, but require that you wait at least 24 hours after receiving the grade to talk with me. I will then review the grade in question. Please note that your grade could go higher *or* lower.

## COVID-19 Policy

As we are still mid-pandemic, we will be relying on the following related guidelines throughout this semester:

- **If I am exposed to COVID-19:** Exposed faculty members must self-quarantine for two weeks. Upon learning this, I will send out a formal announcement outlining the temporary shift in the schedule. Most likely, this will mean relying on a combination of pre-recorded lectures (while I am still ill) and remote instruction via Zoom (the remaining quarantine period). All other deadlines will proceed as normal.
- **If you are exposed to COVID-19:**
  - Do not come to campus! Showing up will risk exposing others. Begin self-quarantine.
  - Fill out the [self-reporting form](#) so that UNF can engage in contact tracing.
  - Email me and let me know about your situation. I will try to work with you so that the impact on your grade is minimal.
- **You are encouraged to wear masks during class, and distance as much as possible.** While perhaps inconvenient, this will help us to limit potential transmission. I don't want face-to-face classes to be canceled by rising caseloads, and neither do you.
- **You are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated.** The consensus of the medical community around this recommendation is overwhelming, but you can see reality in the emerging data itself:
  - [Vaccination leads to a significant reduction in your odds of contracting COVID...](#)
  - [...and dramatically reduces your odds of serious illness and/or death.](#)
- **Long-term disruptions:** In any period during which we may not be able to meet face-to-face, lectures will shift synchronously to Zoom at their scheduled day and time, and various class policies may be revised thereafter.

# Module Schedule

## Module 1: Origins of Congress

- **Week 1**
  - **August 24: Lecture 1 – Introduction** (problems with and opinions about Congress; introductions; classroom procedures and syllabus)
  - **August 26: Lecture 2 – Congress in the Constitution I** (early attempts at legislating; Congressional convention debates; the bicameral system; Article I; enumerated powers; checks and balances)
- **Week 2**
  - **August 31: Lecture 3 – Congress in the Constitution II** (expansion of powers; commerce clause politics; expansion of size and workload)

## Module 2: Rules and Procedures

- **Week 2 (cont.)**
  - **September 2: Lecture 4 – Rules and Procedures I** (introducing legislation; committees; the floor)
- **Week 3**
  - **September 7: Debate 1 – Apportionment by State or Population?**
  - **September 9: Lecture 5 – Rules and Procedures II** (conference committees; vetoes; likelihood of passage; Parliamentary tools; quorums)
- **Week 4**
  - **September 14: Lecture 6 – Rules and Procedures III** (strategies; legislative productivity; the filibuster; comparisons to other major deliberative bodies; divided government)
  - **September 16: Debate 2 – What to do with the filibuster?**

## Module 3: Members of Congress

- **Week 5**
  - **September 21: Lecture 7 – Basics of Members of Congress** (descriptive representation by race/gender/class; politics as a vocation)
  - **September 23: Lecture 8 – Districts, Recruiting and Primaries** (apportionment; gerrymandering; recruiting candidates; challenging incumbents)
- **Week 6**
  - **September 28: Debate 3 – Should Congress have term limits?**
  - **September 30: MIDTERM EXAM**
- **Week 7**
  - **October 5: Lecture 9 – Congressional Campaigns** (endorsements; campaign advertising; mobilization; persuasion and turnout)
  - **October 7: Lecture 10 – Hill and Home Styles** (staffing organization; constituent services; scheduling)

- **Week 8**
  - **October 12: Lecture 11 – Member Decision-Making** (types of decisions; impact of decisions; determinants of votes; individual bargaining)
  - **October 14: Debate 4 – Should representatives be Delegates or Trustees?**
- **Week 9**
  - **October 19: Lecture 12 – The Role of Money I** (history of campaign finance law; modern campaign finance law; does money determine votes?)
  - **October 21: Lecture 13 – The Role of Money II** (advantages and disadvantages; impact on decision-making; lobbying reform)
- **Week 10**
  - **October 26: Debate 5 – What should we do about money in Congress?**

#### **Module 4 – Collective Action in Congress**

- **Week 10 (cont.)**
  - **October 28: Lecture 14 – Collective Action Problems** (examples of collective action problems; early long coalitions; how Congress solves CAPs)
- **Week 11**
  - **November 2: Lecture 15 – Committees** (types of committees; committee membership; role of committees throughout history; modern committees)
  - **November 4: Lecture 16 – Congressional and Partisan Leadership** (conditional party government theory; historical developments; types of officers)
- **Week 12**
  - **November 9: Lecture 17 – Partisan Polarization** (DW-NOMINATE; Asymmetric polarization; relationship to masses; consequences; constitutional hardball)
  - **November 11: No Classes (Veterans Day)**

#### **Module 5: Policymaking**

- **Week 13**
  - **November 16: Lecture 18 – General Policymaking** (stages of development; Congressional budgets; budgetary considerations; key domestic policies)
  - **November 18: Lecture 19 – Policymaking Case Studies** (Obamacare; COVID)
- **NO CLASSES THANKSGIVING WEEK**
- **Week 14**
  - **November 30: Lecture 20 – Congress and POTUS** (oversight; the veto power; foreign policy)
  - **December 2: DEBATE 6 – Should Congress have more say in Foreign Policy?**
- **Week 15**
  - **December 7: Lecture 21 – Congress, Bureaucracy and Courts** (delegation; oversight; nominations; dealing with conflicts; jurisdiction; case studies)
  - **December 9: DEBATE 6 – Should we make Major Reforms to Congress?**

**December 14th, 3:00 – 4:50p, same room: FINAL EXAM**

## **Other Course Policies**

- I will generally be available throughout the semester via email (sean.freeder@unf.edu). You can also contact me via the Canvas messaging system for our class, which will go directly to my main email. I typically should respond within 24 hours, and will usually be able to give you a response far more quickly. If you are facing a particularly difficult problem and wish to speak with me directly about it, we can talk about it in my office hours, or set up a remote Zoom meeting if that is not possible.
- If you qualify as a student for accommodations, you will receive them. However, I need to receive a letter from [Student Accessibility Services](#) outlining the accommodations you receive. You may wish to contact me to confirm that I have received this letter. Also, if you have not received accommodations, and regularly struggle with timed assignments, please know that you may qualify for extended time, reduced distraction environments, and other services. Speak with SAS to determine if you may qualify.
- Plagiarism, defined as passing off someone else's ideas or words as your own, is a very serious offense. If a student is caught plagiarizing in this class, they will be subject to academic disciplinary measures. At minimum, they will fail the assignment. More egregious cases may result in failing the class, and/or expulsion from UNF entirely. If you have any concerns as to what constitutes plagiarism, see the Plagiarism Guide or please simply ask me!

## **About Your Professor**

My name is Sean Freeder, and I'm an Assistant Professor of Political Science here at University of North Florida, specializing in American Politics and Political Psychology. I just arrived here as a new faculty member last summer (yes, during the pandemic).

I teach a variety of courses on politics within the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, including Introduction to American Politics; Congress; Parties, Campaigns, and Elections; The American Presidency; and Controversial Political Issues.

My research focuses on the contemporary aspects of American politics, particularly voting decisions (both turnout and choice), how people use political information, the effects of partisanship and polarization, political correctness, and how citizens think about and interact with one another politically.

I spent my childhood in Phoenix, AZ and Seattle, WA. Upon graduating high school, I enrolled in audio engineering school, and spent the next couple years working in recording studios and playing in a band in Seattle. To this day, I have deep interests in music, and continue to play guitar/bass and record music.

I received my Bachelor's in Political Science from University of Washington in 2011, while also managing a Congressional campaign for the 7th Congressional District of Washington. I then

attended the University of California, Berkeley from 2012-2019, where I received my Master's and PhD in Political Science. This is the first time I have called the East Coast home!

In addition to my interests in politics and music, I enjoy exploring a variety of other interests including science fiction, video games, comedy, history, sports (go Seahawks, Suns and Warriors!), and art. I live with my eclectic parrot Joey (who will likely make a number of appearances in my videos), and my two cats Pepper and KitKat.

I welcome you all to introduce yourselves to me at any point during the semester, and am happy to chat with you about the class, politics, or any aforementioned topics of interest. Hope you enjoy the class!

## **Student Resources**

- **General Academic Support**
  - [Student Academic Support Services](#)
    - [Supplemental Instruction](#): Get help with specific classes in a collaborative peer setting with a leader who has previously excelled in the class!
    - [Academic Coaching](#): Learn key skills in organization, note-taking, public speaking, and test preparation!
    - [Persistence Advocacy](#): If you are struggling, these folks can help you create a plan to keep you on track, or get you back on it!
  - [UNF Writing Center](#): Consultation and workshops meant to help improve your writing skills as a student across a variety of disciplines.
  - [Student Accessibility Services](#): Talk to these folks if you feel you may qualify for accommodations, or need assistance with a disability.
  - [English Language Program](#): Resources for students who may be using English as a secondary language, and wish to improve their skills.
  - [Library](#): Explore online student resources, online learning services, schedule a research consultation, reserve a study room, and more.
  - [Ombudsman](#): Provides clarification on UNF policies and procedures.
  - [Resources on Plagiarism](#): Learn more about UNF's plagiarism policies.
  - [First Year Advising](#): A neutral place to get advice and support on planning out your educational career at UNF.
- **Student Life Support Resources:**
  - [Career Services](#): Learn about how different majors on campus can help you get the job you want, or talk with people who can help you figure out what you want!
  - [Counseling Services](#): Struggling? The Counseling Center provides both group and individual counseling sessions to help you manage your life.
  - [Wellness Services](#): This provides a wealth of links to resources for health management, assessment and training.
  - [Health Services](#): Provides check-ups, testing, immunizations, and other services.

- [Dottie Dorion Fitness Center](#): Explore ways to improve your physical health through group fitness classes, challenges, and other resources.
- [Lend a Wing](#): Anonymous and free food pantry and resource for active students.
- [Interfaith Center](#): Build relationships and explore religious and worldview diversity.
- [Military and Veterans Resource Center](#): Support for military-affiliated students and their family.
- [LGBTQ Resource Center](#): Advocacy, support, community for LGBTQ students.
- [Women's Center](#): Connect with others to eliminate gender inequities and foster a supportive environment conducive for academic and personal success.
- **Getting Active:**
  - **At UNF**
    - [Osprey Life](#): Check this page for a constantly updating list of UNF community activities. Get engaged, meet new friends!
    - [Student Government](#): This is an opportunity to work on issues that affect you and your fellow students. Vote and run for office!
    - [Spinnaker Media](#): Learn about local issues via text and radio sources, and develop skills in journalism, writing and media content creation!
    - [Student Clubs](#): Check out the various student organizations on campus!
  - **Outside UNF**
    - [Community Engagement](#): Learn about the ways you can connect with the local Jacksonville community!
    - [Global Engagement and Study Abroad](#): Learn about study abroad opportunities and other global initiatives!
    - [Voter Registration](#): Use this website to see whether you are registered to vote in the state of Florida. If you are not...get registered now!
  - **In Academics**
    - [Hicks Honors College](#): Many opportunities for high achieving students including Honors in the Major, scholarships and opportunities, and more.
    - [UNF Public Opinion Research Lab](#) Want to help political scientists conduct surveys and learn more about political opinions in the US in Florida? Come work for our lab as a researcher!
    - [Office of Undergraduate Research](#): The OUR provides services and support to UNF undergraduates who are interested in conducting research or creative research projects in any discipline and across all colleges, departments, and majors.
    - [Taylor Leadership Institute](#): Attend leadership events, participate in mentoring, explore the Leadership Minor, and all things leadership!
    - [Institute of Environmental Research and Education](#): Join the KAO Environmental Honor Society, apply for the year-long, merit-based Environmental Leadership Program and scholarships, participate in day-long or week Conservation Field School, explore the Environmental Studies minor, attend environmental events, and all things environment!