

POLS 107
Introduction to the US Congress
3 Credits

Community College of Baltimore County
Common Course Outline

Description

POLS 107 – Introduction to the US Congress: Offers students a comprehensive introduction to Congress through an investigation of the legislative branch of government as envisioned by the framers of the Constitution and analyzes its growth into the institution it has become. Students review the Articles of Confederation then examine Article One of the Constitution and the powers of Congress. Students will discuss political personalities, the legislative process, partisan battles, elections, congressional procedures, and pressures along with the demands from voters and lobbyists. Students will examine the increased partisanship and division in Congress along with what has caused it.

Pre-requisites: POLS 101 or permission of the instructor

Overall Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. examine the history of the US Congress;
2. outline how the power of Congress has grown and changed since the writing of the US Constitution in 1787;
3. discuss the role the Founding Fathers anticipated for Congress;
4. describe the powers of Congress in Article One and how they have interpreted and expanded over time;
5. compare and contrast the House of Representatives and the US Senate;
6. identify the steps and process of how a bill becomes a law;
7. explain the roles of interest groups, political action committees and lobbyists in the functioning of Congress;
8. assess the political and partisan impact of congressional oversight on the legislative and executive branches of government;
9. discuss how Congress has become more politically partisan and divided over the last 40 years;
10. examine the impact of congressional elections on the workings of Congress;
11. discuss how congressional scandals and actions impact public opinion;
12. outline how the events of January 6, 2021 impacted Congress and the nation;
13. evaluate the impact Maryland's congressional delegation has in Congress;
14. debate how Congress could better be reformed for citizens using a variety of technological resources; and
15. find, evaluate, use and cite academic sources on political issues and events based on criteria discussed in the course according to the timeliness, credibility and reliability.

The Common Course Outline (CCO) determines the essential nature of each course.
For more information, see your professor's syllabus.

Major Topics

- I. What did the Founding Fathers and Framers say
 - a. Articles of Confederation
 - b. 1787 Constitutional Convention
 - c. Legislative branch of government
- II. The Powers of Congress: Article One
 - a. Term of Office
 - b. Enumerated Powers
 - c. Elastic Clause
 - d. Exclusive Powers of the House of Representatives
 - e. Exclusive powers of the US Senate
- III. Membership in Congress and its privileges
 - a. House of Representatives
 - b. US Senate
 - c. Congressional Leadership
 - d. Congressional Immunity
 - e. District of Columbia and US possessions
 - f. Maryland delegation
- IV. How a bill becomes a law
 - a. Types of bills
 - b. Proposing a bill
 - c. The committee process
 - d. Partisanship
 - e. Voting on legislation
 - f. Conference committee
 - g. Presidential options
- V. Lobbying Congress
 - a. Origins and rationale
 - b. Role of interest groups
 - c. Types of lobbyist
 - d. Role of the media
 - e. Fundamentals of lobbying
 - f. Role of Political Action Committees, 527's and Super PACS
 - g. Federal Election Commission
- VI. Congressional oversight
 - a. What does oversight do
 - b. Constitutional basis
 - c. Independent agencies
 - d. Subpoena power of Congress
 - e. Congressional immunity
- VII. Abuse of power and partisanship
 - a. Red Scare: Senator Joe McCarthy, Hollywood Blacklist
 - b. Newt Gingrich, Nancy Pelosi
 - c. Recent abuse
- VIII. Assessment of Congress
 - a. Opinions and Suggestions
 - b. Future of Congress

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Course Requirements

Grading will be determined by the individual faculty member, but shall include the following, at minimum:

- Five collaborations, debates, oral presentations and/or online discussion forums about current political events and topics and their impact on Congress
- Two examinations
- A research assignment or project on a selected topic of interest that is approved by the instructor

Written assignments and research projects: Students are required to use appropriate academic resources in their research and cite sources according to the style selected by their professor.

Other Course Information

This course is a Political Science elective.

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