

# Congress

## STAGE 1 – DESIRED RESULTS

### Context: Congress

The framers of the Constitution conceived of Congress as the center of policy-making in America. Although the prominence of Congress has fluctuated over time, in recent years Congress has been the true center of power in Washington, DC. In addition to its central role in policy-making, Congress performs an important role representing the people. The legislative process becomes more complex each year, and congressional approval ratings are at historic lows. Why would individuals want to serve in Congress? What does effective representation look like? Does Congress deserve citizens' low regard?

### Purpose: Congress

The purpose of this cycle is to learn how the legislative process works. Students act as legislators in the U.S. Congress. While this cycle helps students understand how a bill becomes a law in greater detail, it also helps students better understand the intricacies of political compromise within a two-party legislative body. Students experience the consequences of the bicameral system framed by the Constitution, looping back to the Founders' Intent cycle. As students write, amend, and debate bills, they learn more about different areas of public policy. Students also experience firsthand the causes and consequences of political polarization as they advance party strategy at the committee level and during congressional floor debate. Throughout this cycle, you should help students make connections to concepts from prior cycles: party platforms created by the political party leaders and candidate teams from the Elections cycle and the application of ideas like separation of powers and checks and balances.

### Driving Questions

How do different branches of government work together to make laws?  
To what extent is Congress designed to make laws that reflect the will of the people?

## 2018–19 College Board Redesigned Curriculum Framework

### Units

Unit 2: Interactions Among Branches of Government  
Unit 4: American Political Ideologies and Beliefs

### Big Ideas

Primary: Competing Policy-Making Interests (PMI)  
Secondary: Constitutionalism (CON)

### Enduring Understandings and Learning Objectives

- ✓ CON-3: The republican ideal in the U.S. is manifested in the structure and operation of the legislative branch.
  - CON-3.A: Describe the different structures, powers, and functions of each house of Congress.
  - CON-3.B: Explain how the structure, powers, and functions of both houses of Congress affect the policy-making process.
  - CON-3.C: Explain how congressional behavior is influenced by election processes, partisanship, and divided government.
- ✓ PMI-4: Widely held political ideologies shape policy debates and choices in American policies.
  - PMI-4.A: Explain how the ideologies of the two major parties shape policy debates.
  - PMI-4.B: Explain how U.S. political culture (e.g. values, attitudes, beliefs) influences and formation, goals, and implementation of public policy over time.
  - PMI-4.C: Describe different political ideologies regarding the role of government in regulating the marketplace.
- ✓ PRD-2: The impact of federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continues to be contested by both sides of the spectrum.
  - PRD-2.C: Explain how the different processes work in U.S. congressional elections.



### AP Government: Overview

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Students will know/Learning Targets (Content):	Students will be able to/ Learning Targets (Skills):
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How Congress and the legislative process works.</li> <li>2. The path a bill must take to be enacted into law.</li> <li>3. The way in which the committee system in the House and Senate affects the passage of legislation and the role linkage institutions play in the process.</li> <li>4. The formal and informal leadership structures in both the Senate and House, and how the House and Senate interact with each other.</li> <li>5. The demographic characteristics of the House and Senate and what they say about representation in the American system.</li> <li>6. The extent to which Congress is designed to make laws that reflect the will of the people.</li> <li>7. The tension for legislators between personal decision-making, representation, and constituency.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Act as a policy-maker in Congress (work to pass legislation, participate in a committee meeting, negotiate with colleagues, draft and present bills, discuss the merits of bills in a floor debate, etc.).</li> <li>2. Read a complex text to determine the author’s point of view.</li> <li>3. Take a position and defend it using evidence during a structured academic controversy.</li> <li>4. Investigate different legislative districts to find similarities and differences in public policy issues.</li> </ol>

### College Board Disciplinary Practices

Practice 1: Apply political concepts and processes to scenarios in context.

- 1.a. Describe political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.
- 1.b. Explain political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.
- 1.c. Compare political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors.
- 1.d. Describe political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behavior illustrated in different scenarios in context.
- 1.e. Explain how political principles, institutions, processes, policies, and behaviors apply to different scenarios in context.

Practice 5: Develop an argument in essay format.

- 5.a. Articulate a defensible claim/thesis.
- 5.b. Support the argument using relevant evidence.
- 5.c. Use reasoning to organize and analyze evidence, explaining its significance to justify the claim or thesis.
- 5.d. Use refutation, concession, or rebuttal in responding to opposing or alternate perspectives.

## STAGE 2 – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

### *Culminating Challenge*

In this task, students act as representatives of the House or Senate in floor sessions hearing debates on possible bills for passage. In this process, students will practice once again literacy, argumentation, and deliberation skills (Task 4).

### *Formative Assessments*

- Reading and Vocabulary Quizzes
- Practice Free Response Questions
- Checks for Understanding (exit tickets, interactive notes, use of student response systems, etc.)
- Task 1: Research and summary of the student’s role
- Task 2: Writing legislation
- Task 3: Committee meetings and markups
- Task 5: Letter to Constituents

### *Summative Assessments*

- Authentic Assessment: Mock Congress—House or Senate floor debate
- Unit Exam consisting of 25 multiple-choice questions, one free response question (a College Board AP Exam question), and a simulation task.



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## STAGE 3 – LEARNING PLAN

### **Task 1: Taking on the Role of a Representative**

In Task 1, students are assigned political positions and then as legislators they research their assigned roles. In this legislative research period, students dig deeper into the various political ideologies they learned about in the Elections cycle. The political party platforms that were created for the election will also be brought forth as a reminder of the pressures of re-election on legislators, especially those in the House of Representatives. Students also determine major congressional roles in this task (House Speaker, Minority/Majority Whip, etc.).

### **Task 2: Drafting a Bill**

Task 2 asks students to create/write bills to submit to the hopper. This process requires students to think about political strategies they might employ to get their bills through the committee and to a floor hearing. Students may be influenced by interest group and media pressures associated with their assigned roles.

### **Task 3: Congressional Committees**

In Task 3, students are assigned to committees where they will learn about the importance of committee assignments, powers of congressional leaders, and nuances of political lobbying and compromise. In committees, students work to get their bills passed and onto the House floor for debate. Students experience committee markup as they evaluate the merits of their colleagues' bills and amend and vote on the bills. Once all the bills have gone through committee markup, the ones that survived will be carried into the final task.

### **Task 4: House Floor Debates**

In Task 4, students take part in a floor debate to try to pass bills that will be friendly to their parties. Students also develop a voting record with their constituents to get re-elected. By the end of the cycle, students will have a deeper understanding of how the legislative process works. Students will also have a more detailed grasp on the interconnectedness of linkage institutions and political institutions. At the end of this cycle, students discuss the role and limitations of the legislature in creating policy for the people, which sets them up for the last cycle in the course.

### **Task 5: Letter Home to Constituents**

Now that the 1st session of Congress has concluded—*sine die*—it is time to think about how each representative will tell constituents about the work done in Congress. Students write a formal “letter home” to explain their work and persuade their constituents to vote for them in the next election!

### 2018–19 College Board Redesigned Curriculum Framework

#### **Congress Foundational Texts**

- Constitution of the United States

Students will work closely with interpretation and application of Article I of the **Constitution** in order to understand policy-making in the legislative arena, Expressed and implied powers, as well as checks on the legislative branch, can be found by unpacking this founding document.

#### **Congress Supreme Court Cases**

- *Baker v. Carr* (1961)
- *Shaw v. Reno* (1993)

These cases deal with political reapportionment and gerrymandering. Excerpts from ***Baker vs. Carr*** and ***Shaw vs. Reno*** might be useful to share with students as they embark on Task 1: Taking on the Role of a Representative, in which they could try to determine how gerrymandered influences their assigned district.



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