The United States Constitution is an enduring document which has borne up under the pressure of a modern government emerging from a tiny band of freedom seekers to one of the most stable and powerful governmental institutions of all time. The Legislative Branch remains as important as either of the other two branches yet by design of the Founding Fathers it has no more significance or power than either the Executive Branch or the Judicial Branch. The Congress’s work is different than the role played by the other two branches and it “works” very differently than a single executive or a small group of judicial decision-makers.

This course will examine the origin of the legislative branch of U.S. government and the unique role it plays in representing all of the people of our country. Its history reveals the development of our country and how the Congress has adjusted, modified and changed internally and independently---all within the constitutional constraints designed by the Constitution’s authors.

The Congress is comprised of two similar yet each uniquely different legislative bodies. We will examine the differences and the role each legislative body plays to develop and refine public policies resulting in statutory law. We will examine the budget process which influences and controls all emerging public policies. We will scrutinize the role of Congressional oversight of the executive branch and the role of the judiciary in our constitutional form of government.

In examining how Congress really works, we shall explore common public criticisms as well as discuss ways in which Congress’ effort could be improved. Lastly, we will look into the important role civic participation plays in demanding improved performance of this complex and diverse branch of government.

We shall apply our insights in a practical exercise that requires reading, thoughtful analysis, writing and representation of a particular vested interest. We shall read two (2) texts, review examples and analyses of specific legislative proposals, take two (2) examinations and write a Legislative Bill Analysis Memorandum in lieu of a Final Examination. Students shall be randomly assigned to teams to study and present to the class assigned chapters from either text. Students shall individually present a Power Point presentation, a written outline of notes and four (4) graded objective examination questions regarding their assignments. Student presenters shall distribute their outline notes and test questions electronically to the entire class in advance of their presentation.

Our goal is to learn about this important constitutional arm of government and to apply our knowledge in an academic exercise to read, write and intelligently analyze a legislative bill from a given perspective. The development of these analytical and communication skills will apply broadly to prospective employment pursuits.