

POSC 310: U.S. Congress
Spring, 2016

Professor: Justin Buchler

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Office Hours: MW 1-2 and any time my door is open

Description

This course is a broad survey of the legislative branch of the American government. Topics include representation and elections, party leadership, committee power, rules and procedures, and inter-branch relations. We will devote special attention to changes in Congress, as well as current political and scholarly controversies such as the rise of obstructionism in the Senate and the recent use of the “nuclear option” in response, the influence of parties, and campaign finance. The formal requirements of the course are: one short paper (15%), one term paper (35%), one take-home midterm (15%), a take-home final (20%), and course participation (15%).

Class structure

This course meets three times per week. Monday and Wednesday sessions will be interactive lectures. I will speak a lot, but you will be expected to participate.

Friday sessions will be based around student presentations. Beginning on Feb. 5, Friday sessions will proceed as follows. First, at least one student will make a roughly 10 minute presentation. Consider the following suggestions for the direction your presentations may take: 1) Provide additional comments supporting an important claim from the week’s course materials. 2) Provide a *counterargument* to an important claim from the week’s course materials. 3) Provide either modern or historical context to understand some aspect of the week’s materials. These are merely broad suggestions, though, and as long as a presentation is directly related to the topic of the week and makes a coherent point, that will be fine. Please look over the syllabus and decide which topics are of most interest to you. Each student will make 3 presentations throughout the semester, and students will sign up for dates in advance. Presentations will be factored into course participation grades.

Attendance

Attendance is required. You may miss three sessions. Each absence beyond that will result in a three percentage point deduction from your course grade. Exceptions will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances. To be clear, you do not have three excused absences plus however many doctors’ notes you can get. You have three excused absences total, so it would be best to save them for when you are ill. Please contact me as soon as possible if you have an extended bout of serious illness. Attendance and participation are critical.

You are also expected to show up on time. I find it distracting and disrespectful when students walk in after class has begun. You may show up late once during the semester. Each time you show up late beyond that, one percentage point will be deducted from your course grade. The objective is not to punish you for being late. The objective is to get you to show up on time. If

you have a class on the other side of campus just before our class, you need to speak with me about it at the beginning of the semester.

Classroom rules

1: Check your ideology at the door. The classroom is not the place to preach. It is a place to keep an open mind.

2: Be respectful. Show up on time, pay attention, participate, and **TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONES/IPHONES/BLACKBERRIES/OTHER GIZMOS**. Laptops, however, are welcome, with the caveat that an open laptop may be commandeered by me at any time since its presence indicates an open-ended offer to look up anything I need looked up at any time. If you fall asleep in class, five percentage points will be deducted from your course grade. You don't get any free passes on this. Drinking heavily caffeinated beverages during class is perfectly acceptable. (I can't teach an early class without coffee). If you don't think you can stay awake, it is also acceptable to say you aren't feeling well, and ask to be excused. Doing so will not count against your permitted absences.

Guidelines for all written assignments

Short papers due mid-semester:

Except in the case of hospitalization or similarly severe documentable crises, late papers will not be accepted. If you are dissatisfied with the level of work that you have ready by the deadline, you may hand in what you have, and conclude with the following line: "I can write a better paper than this." The paper you hand in must be at least recognizable as a draft that covers the basic requirements of the assignment. You then have 48 hours to submit an improved version. I will then assign a grade that includes half of the improvement. For example, suppose you have an exam in another class on the same day the paper is due. The exam in the other class is worth 30% of that course grade, and the paper is worth 20% of the grade in this class, so you decide to spend more time studying for the exam. As a result, you can only hand in a half-assed rough draft deserving of a C. You hand in that draft with the line, "I can write a better paper than this." Within 48 hours, you hand in an A-level paper once your exam is out of the way. I will record your grade as a B. Using this option requires handing in a recognizable rough draft on time, and obeying the 48 hour subsequent deadline. If you have nothing to hand in by the initial deadline, you may not submit a late paper, except as mentioned in extreme cases such as hospitalization.

Term papers, research papers or other projects due at the end of the semester:

Late work will not be accepted unless, as above, the reason is something on the order of hospitalization or other documentable crisis that suggests taking an "Incomplete" in the course.

Regarding computer problems, follow this simple trick: every time you take a break (I do so about once per hour when in heavy writing mode), email a current copy of your assignment to yourself. If you send an email from your Case account to your Case account, the email won't show up in your inbox, but will be saved as a sent message. Personally, I email documents from my Case account to an old Yahoo account, thus saving two extra copies of the document every time I take a break. I cannot lose more than an hour's worth of work, and no computer problem

short of an EMP will ever cause me to miss a deadline. You can do the same, and it is your responsibility to do so.

All assignments must be printed out and stapled. There must be a cover page, and while your name should appear on the cover page, it should not appear on any other page. This will facilitate blind grading. Any assignment that does not meet these guidelines will not be accepted. If you are worried about the consequences a last minute printer glitch at the computer lab, or an inability to find a stapler at the last minute etc., then my advice is simple. Don't wait until the last minute.

All academic honesty requirements apply. Any act of plagiarism or other form of academic dishonesty will be reported to the academic integrity board. You must provide proper attribution any time you draw on anyone else's work, and that includes both written work and presentations. Please mimic the citation style in the academic journal articles on the syllabus.

Unless otherwise stated, though, you may not cite any URL. The internet is a cesspool of nonsensical garbage written by cranks and charlatans still living in their parents' basements. You may reference articles by scholars in peer-reviewed journals, books published by peer-reviewed university presses and respected trade presses, and newspaper/magazine articles from outlets that include a print addition and follow standard fact-checking procedures. If you find a newspaper article, journal article, etc. on the internet, cite the publication itself, not a URL. As a simple rule, if the only thing you *could* cite is a URL, you may not use it as a source. See previous comment about cranks and charlatans in their parents' basements. I know which internet sources are useful, and which aren't. You don't, so don't just Google shit and hope to find something you can cite. Do proper research.

Every URL or internet-only citation in every paper will be subject to a grade penalty as follows: the use of an internet-only citation on the first assignment will result in a 1/3 of a letter grade penalty. The second assignment using prohibited sources will be subject to a 2/3 of a letter grade penalty, and so on.

Google is not a research tool, so stop treating it as such.

Texts include the following books

Davidson, Roger H., Walter J. Oleszek and Frances E. Lee. Congress and Its Members, 14th edition

Dodd, Lawrence C., and Bruce Oppenheimer. Congress Reconsidered, 10th edition.

Jacobson, Gary C. The Politics of Congressional Elections, 8th edition

Polsby, Nelson W. How Congress Evolves: Social Bases of Institutional Change.

Sinclair, Barbara. Unorthodox Lawmaking, 4th edition

Wright, John R. Interest Groups and Congress

Additional readings will be available on-line from the course Blackboard site. You may download them as pdf documents.

The readings for each week are listed below.

I: Congressional Elections and Representation

1/11-1/15 Redistricting

Readings: Butler and Cain, Congressional Redistricting chapters 1-4 (ON WEB SITE)

1/18 NO CLASS- MLK DAY

1/20-1/22 Campaign Finance Law

Readings: Majority opinion from Buckley v. Valeo (Blackboard)

 Majority opinion from Citizens United v. FEC (Blackboard)

1/25-1/29 Campaign Finance In Practice

Readings: Jacobson, chapter 4

 Jacobson, "The Effects of Campaign Spending in Congressional Elections" (Blackboard)

 Ansolabehere and Snyder. "Money and Office: The Sources of the Incumbency Advantage in Congressional Campaign Finance," in Brady et al., Continuity and Change in House Elections (Blackboard)

2/1-2/5 Campaigns, Competition, and Incumbency

Readings: Jacobson, chapters 1-3

 Fenno, "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration," *American Political Science Review*, 1977 (Blackboard)

 King, "The Vulnerable American Politician," *British Journal of Political Science*, 1997, (Blackboard)

2/8-2/12 Partisan Tides and Interpreting Congressional Elections
Readings: Jacobson, chapter 6

Erikson and Wright. "Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections."
In Dodd and Oppenheimer

Nyhan et al. "One Vote Out Of Step? The Effects of Salient Roll Call Votes in the
2010 Election" (Blackboard)

II. Congressional Organization: Individuals, Parties and Committees

2/15-2/19 Individual Members of Congress, Their Goals And Preferences

Readings: Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 5

Fenno, Congressmen in Committees chapter 1 (Blackboard)

Brady and Hahn, "Polarization in the U.S. House of
Representatives." (Blackboard)

2/22-2/26 Parties and Committees

Readings: Polsby. How Congress Evolves, pp. 3-155.

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 6, 7

Aldrich and Rohde, "The Consequences of Party Organization in the House: The
Role of Majority and Minority Parties in Conditional Party Government," from
Bond and fleisher, eds., Polarized Politics (Blackboard)

2/29-3/4 Congressional Procedure in the Modern Era

Readings: Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 8-9

3/7-3/11 SPRING BREAK

- 3/14-3/18 The Modern House
- Readings: Dodd and Oppenheimer, “The House in a Time of Crisis,” in Dodd & Oppenheimer
- Thurber, “The Dynamics and Dysfunction of the Congressional Budget Process,” in Dodd & Oppenheimer
- Rudder, “Tax Policymaking and Fiscal Responsibility” in Dodd & Oppenheimer
- 3/21-3/25 The Senate and Obstructionism
- Readings: Sinclair. “The New World of U.S. Senators.” In Dodd and Oppenheimer
- Binder and Smith, Politics or Principle? Chapters 1 and 4 (Blackboard)
- Koger, “Filibustering and Parties in the Modern Senate,” in Dodd & Oppenheimer
- 3/28-4/1 The Nuking of the Filibuster
- Binder & Maltzman, “Advice and Consent,” in Dodd & Oppenheimer
- ADDITIONAL READINGS TBA
- 4/4 Leadership crisis in the House
- Readings: TBA
- 4/6-4/8 NO CLASS- PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE

III: Congress and Policy-making

- 4/11-4/15 Congress and the President
- Readings: Sundquist, The Decline and Resurgence of Congress, Brookings, chapter 6 (Blackboard)
- Edwards and Barrett. “Presidential Agenda-Setting in Congress.” From Bond and Fleisher, eds., Polarized Politics (Blackboard)

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 10

4/18-4/22 Interest Group Involvement

Readings: Wright, Interest Groups and Congress

Smith, "Interest Group Influence in Congress," from *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 1995 (Blackboard)

Davidson and Oleszek Chapter 13

4/25 Last day, wrap-up