

POSC 310: U.S. Congress
Spring, 2014

Professor: Justin Buchler

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Office Hours: T/TH 3:30-4:30 and any other 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 twice per week. Tuesday sessions will be primarily lecture, although I will attempt to incorporate some discussion. Thursday sessions will involve a combination of presentations and discussion. Beginning on 1/30, Thursday 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 lecture or readings. 2) Provide a *counterargument* to an important claim from lecture or readings. 3) Provide either modern or historical context to understand some aspect of lecture or readings. 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.

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 clarify, you do not have three excused absences plus doctors' notes. You have three excused absences in 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. This is a seminar, so 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.

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

1/14-1/16 Redistricting

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

1/21-1/23 Campaign Finance

Jacobson, chapter 4

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 (ON WEB SITE)

Majority opinion from *Citizens United* (ON WEB SITE)

1/28-1/30 Campaigns, Competition, and Incumbency

Jacobson, chapters 1-3

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

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

2/4-2/6 Partisan Tides and Interpreting Congressional Elections

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" (ON WEB SITE)

II. Congressional Organization: Individuals, Parties and Committees

2/11-2/13 Individual Members of Congress, Their Goals And Preferences

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 5

Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection pages 13-77 (ON WEB SITE)

Fenno, Congressmen in Committees chapter 1 (ON WEB SITE)

2/18-2/20 Parties and Committees

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

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 6, 7

2/25-2/27 Parties and Ideology

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 (ON WEB SITE)

Aldrich, Perry and Rohde, "Richard Fenno's Theory of Congressional Committees and the Partisan Polarization of the House," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

Smith and Gamm, "The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

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

3/4-3/6 The Modern House

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

3/11-3/13 NO CLASS- SPRING BREAK

3/18-3/20 The Senate and Obstructionism

Sinclair. "The New World of U.S. Senators." In Dodd and Oppenheimer

Binder and Smith, Politics or Principle? Chapters 1 and 4 (ON WEB SITE)

Koger, "Filibustering and Parties in the Modern Senate," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

3/25-3/27 The Nuking of the Filibuster

Binder & Maltzman, "Advice and Consent," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

ADDITIONAL READINGS TBA

4/1 Congressional Procedure in the Modern Era

Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 8-9

4/3 NO CLASS- PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE

III: Congress and Policy-making

4/8-4/10 Congress and the President

Sundquist, The Decline and Resurgence of Congress, Brookings, chapter 6 (ON WEB SITE)

Edwards and Barrett. "Presidential Agenda-Setting in Congress." From Bond and Fleisher, eds., Polarized Politics (ON WEB SITE)

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 10

4/15-4/17 Interest Group Involvement

Wright, Interest Groups and Congress

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

Davidson and Oleszek Chapter 13

4/22-4/24 Consequences

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, Congress As Public Enemy chapters 1-3, 8 (ON WEB SITE)

Davidson and Oleszek Chapter 16