

POSC 310: U.S. Congress  
Spring, 2007

Professor: Justin Buchler

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Office Hours: Wednesday 1-3 or 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, 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 two times per week. Tuesday sessions will be primarily lecture, although I will attempt to incorporate some discussion, and Thursday sessions will be entirely discussion. **DO NOT ATTEND** the Thursday session unless you are prepared to participate in a discussion. Your admission ticket to Thursday's class will be a set of questions about readings and lecture that you would like to address. I will briefly glance at these questions at the beginning of class, and will rely partly on these questions to guide discussion. In order to attend a Thursday session, you must hand in at least one discussion question. Discussion questions should not be questions for which there may be a straight-forward answer. They should be the type of questions that can be debated for a significant length of time.

However, also plan to bring clarification questions. If there was something in lectures or readings that you found unclear or just wondered about, write it down and hand it in with your discussion questions. If you are shy about asking questions, you can even hand it in anonymously on a separate piece of paper. However, always indicate clarification questions because on Thursday, I will answer all clarification questions before we begin discussion.

**DO NOT** take this to mean that you shouldn't ask questions at other times. I will try to stop during lectures to allow time for questions. If I don't, feel free to interrupt me. Whatever you do, just make sure you ask questions!

### LATE ATTENDANCE POLICY

My pet peeve is when students walk into the classroom after class has started. I find it distracting and disrespectful. I would rather you not attend class than walk in after class has started. The first time you walk in after class has begun, there will be no penalty. Each additional time you walk into class after class has begun, one percentage point will be deducted from the class participation component of your course grade (obviously, up to a maximum of 15). 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.

### FALLING ASLEEP IN CLASS POLICY

My other pet peeve... Since daily attendance is not required, if you cannot stay awake, don't

come to class. There is NOTHING worse than falling asleep in class, and I have no tolerance at all for it. If I catch you sleeping, your course participation grade will be reduced by five points (again, out of 15). You don't get any free passes on this. Drinking heavily caffeinated beverages during class is perfectly acceptable. 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.

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.

Texts include the following books

Bond and Fleischer. Polarized Politics

Dodd, Lawrence C., and Bruce Oppenheimer. Congress Reconsidered, 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

Jacobson, Gary C. The Politics of Congressional Elections, 6th edition

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

Price, David E. The Congressional Experience, 3rd 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**

1/16-1/18                      Redistricting

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

Canon, Race, Redistricting, and Representation, chapter 2 (ON WEB SITE)

1/23-1/25                      Campaign Finance

Jacobson, chapter 4

Herrnson. "The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act and Congressional Elections." In Dodd and Oppenheimer

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)

1/30-2/1 Campaigns, Competition, and Incumbency

Jacobson, chapters 1-3

Price, Congressional Experience, Chapters 1-3 and pages 159-64

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)

2/6-2/8 Partisan Tides and Interpreting Congressional Elections

Jacobson, chapter 6

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

Brady et al., “The Perils of Presidential Support: How Republicans Took the House in the 1994 Midterm Elections.” *Political Behavior*, (ON WEB SITE)

ADDITIONAL READINGS TO BE ANNOUNCED

## **II. Congressional Organization: Individuals, Parties and Committees**

2/13-2/15 Individual Members of Congress

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)

2/20-2/22 Parties and Committees

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

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 6

2/27-3/1 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

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

TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED 3/2, 24 hours to complete

3/6-3/8            The New Democratic Majority

READINGS TO BE ANNOUNCED

3/13-3/15            SPRING BREAK

3/20-3/22            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)

Dewar, "An All-Nighter in the Senate: GOP Aims to Call Attention to Blocked Judicial Nominees." *Washington Post*, (ON WEB SITE)

3/27-3/29            The New Committee System

Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking, chapters 1-3 (ON WEB SITE)

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 7-9

### **III: Congress and Policy-making**

4/3-4/5                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

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 10

4/10-4/12            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

4/17-4/19      Consequences

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

Davidson and Oleszek Chapter 16

4/24-4/26      Wrap-up and review