

POSC 310: U.S. Congress
Fall, 2010
Professor: Justin Buchler
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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday 3-4 and whenever else 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 three times per week. Monday and Wednesday sessions will be primarily lecture, although I will attempt to incorporate some discussion, and Friday sessions will be entirely discussion. Your admission ticket to Friday's class will be a set of questions about readings and lecture that you would like to address. I will read these questions quickly at the beginning of class, and I will rely partly on these questions to guide discussion. In order to attend a Friday 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!

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/blackberries/iphones/otherwise-unmentioned-little-gizmos. 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, 12th edition

Dodd, Lawrence C., and Bruce Oppenheimer. Congress Reconsidered, 9th edition.

Jacobson, Gary C. The Politics of Congressional Elections, 7th 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

8/25-8/30 Redistricting

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

NOTE: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WILL BE DUE ON MONDAY, 8/30

9/1-9/3 NO CLASS: PROFESSOR OUT OF TOWN FOR CONFERENCE

9/6 NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

9/8-9/10 Campaign Finance

Jacobson, chapter 4

Ansolahehere 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)

9/13-9/17 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)

9/20-9/24 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

9/27-10/1 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)

10/4-10/8 Parties and Committees

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

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

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 6

10/11-10/15 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)

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

10/18 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

10/20-10/22 Recent Trends in Congress

Dodd and Oppenheimer, "The Politics of the Contemporary House: From Gingrich to Pelosi," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

Mann and Ornstein, "Is Congress Still the Broken Branch?" in Dodd & Oppenheimer

Pearson and Schickler, "The Transition to Democratic Leadership in a Polarized House," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

10/25-10/29 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)

11/1-11/5 The New Committee System

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

Cohn, "How They Did It," (ON WEB SITE)

Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 7-9

Aldrich & Rohde, "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era," in Dodd & Oppenheimer

III: Congress and Policy-making

11/8-11/12 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

11/15-11/19 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

11/22-11/24 Consequences

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

Davidson and Oleszek Chapter 16

11/26 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

11/29-12/3 Wrap-up and review