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 interbranch 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. 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 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 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!

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 however many doctors’ notes you can get. You have three excused absences, 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. 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


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


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

1/13-1/15 Redistricting
Butler and Cain, Congressional Redistricting chapters 1-4 (ON WEB SITE)

1/20-1/22 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)

1/27-1/29 Campaigns, Competition, and Incumbency
Jacobson, chapters 1-3
Price. *Congressional Experience*, Chapters 1-3 and pages 159-64


2/3-2/5 Partisan Tides and Interpreting Congressional Elections

Jacobson, chapter 6

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


ADDITIONAL READINGS TO BE ANNOUNCED

II. Congressional Organization: Individuals, Parties and Committees

2/10-2/12 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)

2/17-2/19 Parties and Committees

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


Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 6

2/24-2/26 Parties and Ideology


Brady and Hahn, “Polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives.” (ON WEB SITE)
TAKE-HOME MIDTERM WEEKEND OF 2/28: 24 hours to complete

3/3-3/5 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

3/10-3/12 SPRING BREAK

3/17-3/19 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)


3/24-3/26 The New Committee System

Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking, chapters 1-3 (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

3/31 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
NO CLASS 4/2

4/7-4/9  
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

4/14-4/16  
Consequences

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

Davidson and Oleszek Chapter 16

4/21-4/23  
Wrap-up and review