

The American Legislature

PLS 307 001

Fall 2008

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COURSE MEETINGS

M & W: 2:00-3:15 p.m. (Leutze Hall 110)

OFFICE HOURS

M & W, 3:30-5:00 p.m. or By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The United States Congress is the oldest popularly elected legislature in the world history and it is the most powerful one that has veto override and impeachment authority. This course is a survey of how Congress works within the American political system. We take an in-depth look at representation and lawmaking in Congress over the American political development. The main goals of this course are to acquaint you with the basic operation of Congress and to introduce you to theoretical explanations about policymaking processes in Congress.

Among the specific topics the course will examine are the constitutional and historical context of the modern Congress, congressional elections, motivations of members of Congress, legislative rules and procedures, party leaders and committee politics, floor voting, Congress and the President, budget politics, Congress and American foreign policy, party polarization in Congress, and congressional reform.

In addition, one of the reasons for and benefits from study of Congress is that we can interpret and explain contemporary politics. As we all agree, this coming fall of 2008 is an exciting election season not only for presidential but also for congressional contests. So, throughout the course, we will keep a collective eye on events in states and districts that bear on the American Presidency and the US Congress. I highly recommend that you read a daily newspaper (e.g. *The Washington Post* or *the New York Times*) and interesting web sources (e.g. www.realclearpolitics.com or www.politico.com/congress), or that you watch or listen to a news and debate program such as *Meet the Press*, *This Week*, *Fox News Sunday*, or NPR's *Morning Edition* or *All Things Considered*.

COURSE READING

Course Textbook

Steven S. Smith, Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2007. *The American Congress*. 5th edition. (Cambridge University Press)

Suggested Readings

- Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. 2005. *Congress Reconsidered*, 8th ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press)
- Gary C. Jacobson. 2009. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*. 7th ed. (New York: Pearson and Longman)
- Christopher J. Deering and Steven S. Smith. 1997. *Committees in Congress*. 3rd ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press)
- Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher. 2000. *Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era*. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press)
- Lewis L. Gould. 2005. *The Most Exclusive Club: A History of the Modern United States Senate*. (New York: Basic Books)
- Barbara Sinclair. 2007. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*, 3rd ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press)
- Charles Stewart III. 2001. *Analyzing Congress*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company)
- Eric Schickler. 2001. *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and Development of the U.S. Congress*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press)
- Sean M. Theriault. 2005. *The Power of the People: Congressional Competition, Public Attention, and Voter Retribution*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press)
- Sarah A. Binder and Steven S. Smith. 1997. *Politics or Principle?: Filibustering in the United States Senate*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press)
- Steven S. Smith. 2007. *Party Influence in Congress*. (Cambridge University Press)

Basically, the required reading for this course is one textbook, but, on occasion, I will post additional readings on SeaPort or I will circulate them by email. You are responsible for making sure that I have a working email address for you by the first week of the semester.

REQUIREMENTS

- Midterm Exam (Sep 29) (20%)
- Final Exam (Dec 10) (25%)
- Campaign Report and Presentation (15%)
- Research Proposal (Due Oct 15) (5%)
- Research Paper (Due Dec 3) (25%)
- Attendance/Participation (10%)

1) IN-CLASS EXAMS

There will be a midterm that counts for 20% of your grade and a final exam will be 25%. The format of the exams will be a combination of multiple choice, identification, and short essay. All reading material and lectures will be fair game on the exams. Since the lecture material will not necessarily appear in the readings, missing class will put you at a disadvantage. And since I do not discuss all of the readings in class, skipping

reading assignments will also put you at a disadvantage. Students who require special provisions for exams or class because of a disability should notify the instructor well in advance of scheduled exams. I will distribute a study guide before each of the exams.

2) CAMPAIGN REPORT AND PRESENTATION

The purpose of campaign report and presentation is to allow you to demonstrate your newly acquired knowledge about the U.S. Congress and congressional elections. You are to play the role of a campaign strategist for a member of the United States Senate or for a challenger running in an open seat race in the Senate election. You will pick ONE STATE and ONE CAMPAIGN CATEGORY and give your classmates some keen insight and knowledge about the campaign you are analyzing. More details will be discussed in class and assignment information will be distributed as well.

3) RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND PAPER

You will be responsible for taking a broad topic that is pertinent to the study of Congress and writing a 12-15 page paper about it. Topics you might write about include new patterns of campaign finance, membership turnover, important legislation debates (energy, economy, the Iraq War, immigration, China policy, etc), congressional redistricting, party influence in Congress, Senate rules change, and the performance of statistical models predicting the 2008 outcome. And, of course, you can choose your own topic. 1-2 page and single spaced RESEARCH PROPOSAL is due Oct 15 and I will give you feedback and some suggestions. Final RESEARCH PAPER is due Dec 3 and it should be 12-15 page and double-spaced.

LATE PAPERS will be penalized and your course total points will drop 3 points.

4) ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

This course will be primarily a lecture class given its size. Yet, I encourage class participation. I often will begin class with a discussion of current events, especially as they relate to what is going on in Congress. I encourage you to bring questions to class and to respond to issues I may raise. Be advised that attendance is a form of participation and will count toward your final grade. Also, if you find any relevant and interesting source for our study of Congress this semester, do not be hesitant with sharing it with the class. You can email me or post it on the SeaPort. It could be also considered as a form of participation. .

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following point totals:

A=92.5 or more	A-=89.5-92.49		
B+=87.5-89.49	B=82.5-87.49	B-=79.5-82.49	
C+=77.5-79.49	C=69.5-77.49	D = 59.5-69.49	F= less than 59.5

READINGS BY CLASS SESSION

- Aug 20 **Course Introduction: *Why Congress this Fall 2008?***
(*American Congress*, Ch 1)
- Aug 25, 27 **Overview of Congress:**
Modern Trends and the Power of Congress in Comparative Perspective
(*American Congress*, Ch 1)
Representation and Lawmaking in Congress: *Two Congresses*
Constitutional Foundations: *Separate Institutions Sharing Power*
(*American Congress*, Ch 2)
- Sep 1 **Labor Day Holiday**
- Sep 3 **Evolution of Congress: *Institutionalization of the Modern Congress***
(*American Congress*, Ch 2)
- Sep 8, 10 **Congressional Elections: *Running Scared?***
(*American Congress*, Ch 3)
- Sep 15, 17 **Members of Congress: *Home Styles vs. Hill Styles***
(*American Congress*, Ch 4)
- Sep 22, 24 **Legislative Rules and Procedures I:**
From “Text-book Congress” to “Unorthodox Lawmaking”
(*American Congress*, Ch 7)
- *** Sep 29 (M) Midterm Exam (Ch 1 through 4 and Ch 7) ***
- Oct 1 **Legislative Rules and Procedures II: “*Preferences, Rules, and Choice*”**
Rational-choice Theory and Study of Congress
(*American Congress*, Appendix, the Spatial Theory of Legislating)

- Oct 6 (M) **Fall Break**
- Oct 8 (W) **Poli-sci Day** (No Class, but Attend a Poli-sci Day event!)
- Oct 13, 15 **Parties and Leaders in Congress:**
 “Transformational Leader or Faithful Agent?”
 (American Congress, Ch 5)
- Oct 20, 22 **Committees in Congress:** *Distributive vs. Informational vs. Partisan*
 (American Congress, Ch 6)
- Oct 27, 29 **The Floor and Voting:** *“Why Don’t We Do It on the Floor?”*
 (American Congress, Ch 8)
- Nov 3, 5 **Congress and the President:** *From Agenda-setting to Veto Power*
 (American Congress, Ch 9)
- Nov 10, 12 **Congress-in-the-Systems:** *Congress, the Courts, and Interest Groups*
 (American Congress, Ch 10 & 11)
- Nov 17, 19 **Congress and Budget Politics:** *The Power of the Purse*
 (American Congress, Ch 12)
- Nov 24 **Congress and American Foreign Policy:** *“Congress Resurgent?”*
- Nov 26 (W) **Thanksgiving Holidays**
- Dec 1 **Party Polarization Congress:** *Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences*
- Dec 3 (W) **Last Class Day & Research Paper Due in Class!**
 Politics of Congressional Reform: *Congress and the American Democracy*

***** Dec 10 (W) Final Exam (3:00 – 6:00 p.m.) (Ch 5, 6, and Ch 8 through 12) *****

INCOMPLETE

A grade of incomplete (“I”) will be given if unforeseeable circumstances keep you from completing the course requirements within the normal semester. Under these circumstances you submit the missing assignments during the subsequent semester (not revisions of previously graded work).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in the *University of North Carolina Bulletin* and the *Student Handbook*. Violations of these rules in any assignment may be subject to a minimum penalty of failing grade for the assignment and could result in a grade of “F” for the course.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Disability Services; and, (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. The contact number is 910-962-7555.