

Special Topics: Congressional Amending Process

Political Science 4790H

Fall 2015

Leconte Hall 322

TTR 11:00am-12:15pm

Instructors

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Course Description:

This course is intended to provide students with a background in congressional process and procedure, social science research methods and data collection and management. A thorough understanding of the United States Congress requires not only a familiarity of its evolution and institutions, but a deep comprehension of the trade-offs inherent in policy-making. Throughout this course, we will evaluate existing theories of legislative evolution and policy-making. This will require students to learn data collection and analysis techniques utilized by social scientists. As such, students will work with the instructors in collecting data on the congressional amending process as well as complete several additional assignments.

Book and Readings:

The following book is required and can be purchased from the campus bookstore:

Oleszek, Walter J. 2013. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*. 9th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Additional readings will be available via the course dropbox folder. Some of these readings will be highly technical in nature. As such, students are not expected to understand all aspects of each paper. However, they will be held accountable for a basic understanding of the paper's theory and applications.

In addition to assigned readings, students should also be aware of relevant news stories. As such, we recommend reading a daily newspaper – such as the New York Times and/or the Washington Post – or at least checking cnn.com. Other political blogs that students may find useful include FiveThirtyEight, Political Wire, The Monkey Cage, The Upshot, Vox and the Drudge Report.

Course Grading:

Your grade in this class will be assigned according to the following:

1. *Course Attendance and Discussion (15% of final grade)*: Students will be required to attend class to discuss their progress and the broader data collection progress. Additionally, we will be reading literature on congressional politics and applying it to the data on amendments. Students will be expected to have completed the assigned readings and participate in these discussions.
2. *Data Collection (45% of final grade)*: In accordance with the policies established by the University of Georgia's Center for Undergraduate Research, students will be required to spend five hours a week collecting data on the congressional amending process. To date, students of congressional politics have written extensively about roll call voting and the legislative process in Congress. Throughout much of this research, however, a majority of attention has been given to final passage or procedural votes in Congress. Despite the important role of the amending process as illustrated by the above discussion, we know far less about the policy implications of amendments relative to special rules and final passage votes. This is unfortunate given that amendments provide the crucial linkage between these two important sequences in the legislative process and have the ability to fundamentally shift the substantive content of bill proposals in Congress. When we further consider the major institutional differences across the two chambers, it remains unclear how this may directly impact the amending process in Congress.

A systematic examination of the amending process in both the House and Senate will help us address a number of previously unanswered questions in the context of the legislative process. For instance, who sponsors amendments in Congress? Are they motivated electorally to introduce amendments as part of a position taking strategy? How has the use and introduction of amendments changed over time? How often do majority party members win or lose on amendments relative to the minority? Does this differ by chamber? What are the policy implications of amendments in Congress? Utilizing the *Congressional Record* available on Hein Online and congress.gov, we can answer these questions. Students will meet in class to discuss interesting cases and gauge their progress. Students are expected to have completed their data collection by Wednesday, **May 16th**.

3. *Comparison Assignment (5% of final grade)*: Students will be required to turn in a short comparison assignments (worth 5% each). Pairs of students will code the first 10 amendments to the same bill and write a short paper comparing their data and discussing discrepancies. The data assessments are due on Tuesday, **September 8th**. A more detailed discussion of the comparison assignments will be provided in class.
4. *Mid-semester Data Assessments (10% of final grade)*: Students will be required to turn in two separate mid-semester data assessment assignments (worth 5% each). These assessments should include a listing and description of bills that the student has analyzed. This listing and description should contain a count of the number of

amendments considered in the House and the Senate. Each assessment should also include a discussion of specific cases they found particularly interesting, confusing or problematic. The data assessments are due on Tuesday, **September 29th** and Tuesday, **November 3th**. A more detailed discussion of the assessments will be provided in class.

5. **Final Data Assessment (10% of final grade):** Students will also be required to complete one final data assessment. This assessment should be cumulative and contain a discussion of all bills completed during the semester. The final data assessment is due with the student's completed data on Wednesday, **December 16th**.
6. **Final Paper (15% of final grade):** Students will be expected to a final course paper. The paper should be between 6-8 pages in length (typed, double-spaced, one inch margins, Times New Roman, 12 point font, Chicago style citations). It should include a discussion of a bill or set of bills coded by the student and a discussion of the enactment of those bills relates to literature on legislative politics discussed in class. The paper is due Wednesday, **December 16th** at 5:00pm. Papers will be docked a full letter grade for each day they are late.

Final course grades will be assigned as follows: 100-93 = A, 90-92 = A-, 87-89 = B+, 83-86 = B, 80-82 = B-, 77-79 = C+, 73-76 = C, 70-72 = C-, 60-69 = D, and 60-0.

Extra credit will not be given in this course.

Disabilities:

Students with disabilities of any kind are strongly encouraged to notify the instructor and the Office for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester, so appropriate accommodations can be made.

Instructor Availability:

Students seeking to contact the instructors are encouraged to do so by scheduling an appointment via e-mail.

Classroom Behavior:

Students should behave professionally throughout the course. Due to the small size of the course, disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. This includes cell phone usage, excessive talking and derogatory or offensive comments made during discussion. Students will be held responsible for all material discussed or assigned.

Cheating and Plagiarism:

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will have their names forwarded to the University. It is each student's

responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism. Further information regarding academic honesty can be found at <http://www.uga.edu/honesty/>.

Tentative Weekly Readings Schedule:

Aug 18 and 20: Course Overview/Syllabus; Bill to Law Intro.

Georgia Amending Project Background
Oleszek Chapter 1

Aug 25 and 27: Data Management and Coding Procedures; Guest Lecture on CURO

Nature Editorial on Data

Sept 1 and 3: House Procedure

Oleszek Ch. 2-Ch. 5
CRS materials

Sept 8 and 10: Senate Procedure

Oleszek Ch. 6-Ch. 8
CRS materials

Comparison DUE (9/8/15)!

Sept 15 and 17: Special Topics in Procedure

Binder MC 2010
Roberts (2010)

Sept 22 and 24: The House Part 2

Why Did Democrats Support the Stupak Amendment?

Sept 29 and Oct 1 : The Senate Part 2

Reforming the Senate
Turning Down the Chair

Assessment 1 DUE (9/29/15)!

Oct 6 and 8: Intro to Quantitative Research

Lynch, Madonna, and Roberts (2015)

Oct 13 and 15: Research Design: Polarization and Amendments

Polarization is Real
Changing Minds? Not in Congress!

Oct 20 and 22: Parties and Amendments

The House GOP and the Fiscal Cliff: Position-taking vs. Policy-making

Oct 27 and 29: Amendments and Ideology

For Congressional Candidates, Party Trumps Constituency

Nov 3 and 5 : Stories/Problems with the Data

Assessment 2 DUE (11/3/15)!

Nov 10 and 12: Assessing Legislative Success

Nov 17 and 19: Stories/Problems with the Data

Nov 24 and 26: Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Dec 1 and 3: Conclusion

Dec 16: Course Paper, Assessments, and Data DUE!