

Special Topics: Congressional Process and Procedure

Political Science 4790H

Fall 2016

Fine Arts 201

T TR 12:30-1:45pm

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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 instructor in collecting data on the congressional amending process as well as complete several additional assignments. Additionally, students taking the course for honors credit will be expected to make progress on their own honors theses.

Books and Readings:

The following book is required and can be purchased from amazon.com:

Oleszek, Walter J., Mark J. Oleszek, Elizabeth Rybicki, Bill Heniff, Jr. 2016. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*, 10th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

The following books are recommended and can be purchased from amazon.com. These all provide discussion of the legislative process through detailed case studies:

Draper, Robert. 2012. *Do Not Ask What Good We Do: Inside the U.S. House of Representatives*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Kaiser, Robert. 2013. *Act of Congress: How America's Essential Institution Works, and How It Doesn't*. New York, NY: Alfred Knopf.

Mann, Robert. 1996. *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.

Sinclair, Barbara. 2011. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the United States Congress*, 4th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Students will not only be expected to have done the reading assignments, but should also be aware of relevant news stories. As such, I 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.

Additional readings will be available via the course dropbox folder. Many 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.

Course Grading:

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

1. *Course Attendance and Discussion (10% 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 (40% 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 gage their progress. Students are expected to have completed their data collection by Friday, **December 16th**.

3. **Comparison Assessment (5% of final grade):** Students will be required to turn in a short comparison assignment. 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 comparison assessment is due on Thursday, **September 1st**. 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 Thursday, **October 16th** and Thursday, **November 10th**. 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 Friday, **December 16th**.
6. **Landmark Bill History (25% of final grade):** In order to demonstrate an understanding of the historical policy-making process, students are required to complete a paper analyzing the passage of a landmark piece of American legislation. A more detailed discussion of the assignment will be provided in class, however, the analysis should include the following labelled sections: (1) An "Overview" section, which provides identifying information and a brief summary of the act; (2) A "Background" section, which includes information on the broader political context; (3) "Initial House Consideration", which discusses the bills chronological consideration in the House of Representative as observed in the *Congressional Record*; (4) "Initial Senate Consideration", which discusses the bills chronological consideration in the Senate as observed in the *Congressional Record*; (5) A "Subsequent Action" section, which provides an overview of the bills consideration after initial consideration in both chambers; (6) An "Aftermath" section, which includes any relevant information on the bill after enactment and; (7) An "Additional Notes" section, which includes any additional discussion and information you may find relevant. The landmark bill history should be approximately five to eight double spaced pages and is due before Thursday, **December 1st**.

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 instructor are encouraged to do so by scheduling an appointment via e-mail. Additional assistance can be provided by Professor Michael Lynch or either of the course TA's, Jordan McKissick and Ryan Williamson. Finally, students are encouraged to e-mail questions about coding and/or procedures to UGA Congress Project.

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 Lecture Outline/Readings Schedule:

August 11th: Course Overview/Syllabus; Introductions; Lawmaking in Congress; The Georgia Congress Project.

Readings:

August 16th and 18th: Data Management and Coding Procedures; Discussion of Resources; Coding Walkthrough.

Readings:

August 23rd and 25th: Congress and Lawmaking

Readings: Oleszek et al. Chapters 1-3

August 30th and September 1st: House Process

Readings: Oleszek et al. Chapters 4-5

Note: **COMPARISON ASSESSMENT DUE!**

September 6th and 8th: Senate Process

Readings: Oleszek et al. Chapters 6-7

September 13th and 15th: Polarization; Ideological Scaling

Readings: Polarization is Real (and Asymmetric); Mapping Congress' Growing Polarization

September 20th and 22nd: Roll Call Votes and the Amending Process

Readings: CRS Report 98-853, "The Amending Process in the Senate"; Wallner, James, "Unprecedented: Informal Rules and Leader Power in the United States Senate"; Vulnerable Senate Democrats Almost Always Voted With Obama

September 27th and 29th: Roll Call Votes and the Amending Process, Part 2

Readings: CRS Report 98-995, "The Amending Process in the House"; Could the Modern Senate Manage an Open-Amendment Process?

October 4th and 6th: Assorted Procedures; Hastert Rule; Paygo; Motions to Waive; Motion to Recommit

Readings: The Motion to Recommit, Hijacked by Politics; To self-execute or not to self-execute, that is the

October 11th and 13th: Writing an Assessment; Working in Congress

Readings: Best Intern Ever: Roll Call's Guide to Acing Your Internship

Note: **MIDTERM ASSESSMENT 1 DUE!**

October 18th and 20th: Measuring Congressional Performance

Readings: Measuring Legislative Accomplishment, 1877-1994; Five reasons why you can't judge a Congress by counting laws

October 25th and 27th: "Fixing" Congress

Readings: Confessions of a Congressman; Help, We're in a Living Hell and Don't Know How to Get Out

November 1st and 3rd: "Fixing" Congress, Part 2

Readings: New Directions in Legislative Research: Lessons from Inside Congress

November 8th and 10th: Writing a Bill History

Readings:

Note: **MIDTERM ASSESSMENT 2 DUE!**

November 15th and 17th: Ideology and Party Leadership

Readings: Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn; What happened to John Boehner hasn't happened in a century. No one knows what comes next.

November 22nd and 24th: Thanksgiving Break

Readings:

November 29th and December 1st: Project Discussion

Readings: Note: **BILL HISTORY DUE!**