

Special Topics: Congressional Process and Procedure

Political Science 4790H

Spring 2018

Baldwin 102

MW 3:35-4:25pm

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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 congressional politics as well as complete several additional assignments pertaining to the data collection. Students will also be required to complete a detailed analysis of the passage of a landmark piece of legislation.

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 congressional politics. To date, students of congressional politics have written extensively about roll call voting and the legislative process in Congress. Using roll call votes, political scientists have demonstrated fairly convincingly that the two political parties are more polarized than they have been since the years leading up to the Civil War. This polarization is commonly treated by the media as being solely driven by ideology. Similarly, campaigns and interest groups routinely use roll call votes as latent or true measures of politicians attitudes on issues. This suggests that the solution to solving the problem of gridlock is to “vote the bums out” and replace them with less-ideological members.

However, we know comparatively little about how the roll call record has changed over time. Roll call votes need to be formally requested by a member and supported by a sufficient second of one-fifth of a quorum, as specified by the Constitution. The framers debated the roll call voting clause and viewed the sufficient second as a compromise that balanced the need for transparency in government with a fear, as Nathaniel Gorham of Massachusetts put it, of stuffing the record with “frivolous” votes to “mislead the people, who never know the reasons determining the votes.”

A systematic examination of the roll call generating process in both the House and Senate will help us address this issue. Utilizing the *Congressional Record* available on Hein Online and congress.gov, students will code the vote type and disposition of

key parts of the legislative process during the passage of landmark enactments. This includes final passage in the House and the Senate, votes on the special rule and motion to recommit in the House, votes on the motion to proceed in the Senate and votes resolving differences between the chambers. Students will meet in class to discuss interesting cases and gauge their progress. Students are expected to have completed their data collection by Monday, ***April 30th***.

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 entries to the same bill and write a short paper comparing their data and discussing discrepancies. The comparison assessment is due on Thursday, ***January 24th***. 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 Wednesday, ***March 7th*** and Wednesday, ***April 11th***. 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 Monday, ***April 30th***.
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 eight to twelve double spaced pages and is due before Monday, ***April 30th***.

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. 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:

January 8th and 10th: Course Overview/Syllabus; Introductions; Lawmaking in Congress.

Readings: The Georgia Congress Project

January 17th: Data Management and Coding Procedures; Discussion of Resources; Coding Walkthrough.

Readings:

January 22nd and 24th: Congress and Lawmaking

Readings: Oleszek et al. Chapters 1-3 **Note: COMPARISON ASSESSMENT DUE!**

January 29th and 31st: House Process

Readings: Oleszek et al. Chapters 4-5

February 5th and 7th: Senate Process

Readings: Oleszek et al. Chapters 6-7

February 12th and 14th: Polarization; Ideological Scaling

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

February 19th and 21st: 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

February 26th and 28th: Assorted Procedures; Hastert Rule; Paygo; Motions to Waive; Motion to Recommit

Readings: CRS Report 98-995, "The Amending Process in the House"; Could the Modern Senate Manage an Open-Amendment Process?; The Motion to Recommit, Hijacked by Politics; To self-execute or not to self-execute, that is the

March 5th and 7th: Writing an Assessment; Working in Congress

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

Note: **MIDTERM ASSESSMENT 1 DUE!**

March 12th and 14th: Spring Break

Readings:

March 19th and 21st: Measuring Congressional Performance

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

March 26th and 28th: "Fixing" Congress

Readings: Confessions of a Congressman; Help, We're in a Living Hell and Don't Know How to Get Out *Note:* **BILL HISTORY TIME LINE DUE!**

April 2nd and 4th: “Fixing” Congress, Part 2

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

April 9th and 11th: Writing a Bill History

Readings:

Note: **MIDTERM ASSESSMENT 2 DUE!**

April 16th and 18th: 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.

April 23rd and 25th: Senate Rules

Readings: Wawro and Schickler (2004); Madonna (2011); Binder, Madonna and Smith (2007) **BILL HISTORY ROUGH DRAFT DUE!**

April 30th: Project Discussion

Readings: Note: **BILL HISTORY, FINAL ASSESSMENT AND DATA DUE!**