Congress and the Legislative Process (GOVT 321)
Spring 2015

Professor Nick Goedert
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Meeting Times: 1:15-2:30 Tues/Thurs
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-4:00
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Description

This course analyzes the structure and function of the United States Congress. As a class, we will investigate the evolution of Congress, how it operates today, and how its members interact with the public, the President, and the judiciary. We will also cover a range of policy debate, assessing the success of certain bills and their implications.

Students will take an interacting approach through this course, answering questions such as “Why is Congress so unpopular?”, “Why does Congress have so many rules?”, and “Why should we care?”. We will pull from a variety of sources including recent political science literature, polling data, historical studies, congressional resources, newspapers, and television.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

• Explain congressional rules and procedures
• Assess current arguments in the congressional literature
• Formulate new arguments and theories to explain the institution of Congress and the behavior of its members
• Evaluate congressional districts and the relationship between legislators and their constituents
• Critically examine a recent policy debate and proposal in Congress

Readings

The course has two required books, both by the same authors:


The books should be available from the campus bookstore and online. Additional articles and book excerpts will be posted on Moodle as noted in the syllabus.
Requirements

The course grade consists of the following:

1. Midterm Exam (in class October 15): 17.5%
2. Final Exam: 25%
3. Congressional District Profile (due October 6): 12.5%
5. Class Participation: 20%

Exams: There will be two examinations in the course, an in-class midterm on October 15th, and a final on the designated final exam date. The final will be cumulative, but focus on material from the last half of the semester. Each exam will have a designated in-class review session, and the final will have at least one additional optional review session. Both exams will include multiple choice, short answer and one or more longer essay questions. All exams are open-notes, although you are not permitted to access electronic devices or the internet during the exam.

Research Papers: There are two required papers for this class. The first, a Congressional District Profile, is due Tuesday, October 6th, and is worth 10% of your grade. This is a 4-5 page paper describing the electoral history, demographics, and current representation of one of the nation’s 435 electoral districts.

The second paper, the Congressional Legislation Report, is due Tuesday, December 6th, and it worth 20% of your grade. This is an 8-10 page paper describing the substance and legislative history of a policy of interest to you that was debating in Congress within the past three years. The paper should track the legislative history of the policy, discuss the politics surrounding the accompanying debate, and the analyze the factors contributing the legislation’s ultimate success or failure within each house of Congress. Each student will also be asked to give a 10-15 minute presentation on the their legislation area in the week before the paper is due. Further details of both papers will be discussed in class.

Participation and Moodle Posts: Class participation will be composed of both your participation in class discussions and your responses to the readings posted on Moodle. Students are expected to attend all classes, having read the designated material from syllabus, and be well-prepared to answer questions about the of the readings. If you cannot attend a class, please let me know ahead of time.

You are required to post four reading responses on Moodle over the course of the semester. You should post at least once for every 3-4 weeks of class material (e.g. one by the end of week 4, two by the end of week 8). Additionally, at least one post during the semester should link to and discuss an article you read in the news media that relates the course materials (e.g. a current debate on Congress, or an event in a congressional election campaign). You should post under the correct week on the GOVT 321 Moodle site. Posts are due by 10pm on the night before the associated class meeting.

There is no required format or length to the Moodle posts, although I would expect many will be about one typed page or two paragraphs. You may respond to any aspect of any the day’s readings; you may tie together multiple readings, readings from previous weeks, current events or you own life experiences or simply argue why you think a particular argument is correct or incorrect, etc.
The Moodle posts will not be given individual letter grades; for the most part, they will be graded on a pass/fail basis. If I find your post particularly interesting or insightful, I may ask you to expand on it in class.

**Class Schedule**

Week 1: Introduction; Why We Hate Congress
- **September 1**
  - *Text*, Ch. 1: “The Troubled Congress”
  - *Reader*, Ch. 5 (Madison)
  - Case excerpt: *McCulloch v. Maryland*
- **September 3**
  - *Reader*, Ch. 1 (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse)
  - *Reader*, Ch. 2 (Brady & Theriault)
  - George Packer, “The Empty Chamber” (*New Yorker*, 2010)

Week 2: The Historical Context
- **September 8**
  - *Text*, Ch. 2: “Representation and Lawmaking in Congress: The Constitutional and Historical Contexts”
- **September 10**
  - *Reader*, Ch. 14 (Cooper & Brady)
  - Julian Zelizer, “Seizing Power: Conservatives and Congress since the 1970’s”

Week 3: Who Does Congress Represent and Who Should They?
- **September 15, 17**
- **September 15**
  - *Text*, Ch. 3: “Congressional Elections”
  - *Reader*, Ch. 6 (Fenno)
- **September 17**
  - *Reader*, Ch. 7 (Weissberg)

Week 4: Who Gets Elected to Congress?
- **September 22**
  - *Reader*, Ch. 8 (Cox & Katz)
  - Case excerpt: *U.S. Terms Limits v. Thornton*
- **September 24**
  - *Reader*, Ch. 9 (Jacobson)
  - Nicholas Carnes, “Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter”
Week 5: Why Does Anyone Run for Congress?

• September 29
  o Text, Ch. 4: “Members, Strategies, and Goals”
  o Reader, Ch. 10 (Mayhew)

• October 1
  o Richard Fenno, Congressmen in Committees, Ch. 1 & 3
  o Reader, Ch. 13 (Sulkin)

Week 6: Parties and Leaders

• October 6, 8
  o Text, Ch. 5: “Parties and Leaders”
  o Excerpt from Aldrich, Why Parties? (??)

• October 8
  o Reader, Ch. 15 (Cox & McCubbins)
  o Reader, Ch. 16 (Smith)

• Congressional District Profile due October 6

Week 7: Midterm

• NO CLASS October 13 (Fall Break)
• Midterm Exam in class Thursday October 15

Weeks 8: Committee Power

• October 20
  o Text, Ch. 6: “The Standing Committee”
  o Reader, Ch. 18 (Malzman & Smith)

• October 22
  o Richard Fenno, Congressmen in Committees, Ch. 4

Week 9: Rules

• October 27
  o Text, Ch. 7: “The Rules of the Legislative Game”
  o Reader, Ch. 20 & 21
  o Reader, Ch. 22 (Cox)

• October 29
  o Gregory Kroger, “Filibustering and Parties in the Modern Senate”
  o Case excerpt: Clinton v. NY

Week 10 & 11: Theories of Floor Voting & Polarization

• November 3
  o Text, Ch. 8: “The Floor and Voting”
  o Reader, Ch. 26 (Kingdon)

• November 4
  o Text, Appendix: “Introduction to the Spatial Theory of Legislating”
  o Reader, Ch. 27 (Krehbiel)

• November 10
  o Excerpt from Poole & Rosenthal, Ideology & Congress

• November 12
  o Excerpt from McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, Polarized Politics
Week 12 & 13: Congress’s Relations with other Branches

- November 17, 19, 24
- Readings:
  - *Text*, Ch. 9: “Congress and the President”
  - Case excerpt: *Youngstown v. Sawyer*
  - *Reader*, Ch. 29
- November 19
  - *Reader*, Ch. 28
  - *Reader*, Ch. 30 (Cameron)
- November 24
  - *Text*, Ch. 10: Congress and the Courts
  - *Reader*, Ch. 30 (Cameron, Cover, and Segal)
  - *Reader*, Ch. 31 (Krutz, Fleisher, and Bond)
- **NO CLASS November 26 (Thanksgiving)**

Week 14: Student Presentations of Policies and Legislation

- December 1 & 3: No new readings, students presentation & discussion

Week 15: Policy Making

- December 8
  - *Text*, Ch. 11: “Congress, Lobbyists, and Interest Groups”
  - *Text*, Ch. 12: “Congress and Budget Politics”
  - Additional reading TBD
- **Congressional Legislation Report due December 8**
- December 10: Exam review, no new readings

**Final Exam (DATE TBA)**

**Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of College policy and may result in a failing grade and/or other disciplinary measures. Please review the guidelines on “Principles of Intellectual Honesty” available in the Student Handbook (go to http://www.lafayette.edu/currentstudents and click on Student Handbook under Resources and Services), which elaborate College policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.