COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar is designed to introduce you to the major topics of research on and the major theoretical approaches to studying the United States Congress. The central questions are: what motivates the behavior of members of Congress, how do they structure institutions to meet their goals, how do structures affect outcomes, how do members of Congress interact with the President, the courts, and the public . . . ultimately, how important is Congress for the making of public policy and why? We will only be able to cover a small fraction of the work on Congress, but I will attempt to introduce you to some of the classics in the area as well as give you a taste of the best work that is currently being done. We will begin the semester with several weeks on the major approaches to studying Congress: new institutionalism, rational choice (distributive, informational, and partisan), behavioral, and historical. Next we will examine Congress on several different levels: individual level (representation and elections), the institutional level (committees, parties, rules, and the floor), and extra-institutional (Congress and the executive and judiciary). The semester ends with a focus on normative work on Congress. How should the institution be structured and how can its performance be improved?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) The quality of this seminar will largely depend on the level of participation from all students. Everyone is expected to read the required readings by the day of the seminar and be willing and able to participate meaningfully in discussions. It is essential to have a good understanding of each article, not only individually but also how they fit together.

2) You will write a 15 page (or so) paper that addresses one of the research questions raised in the seminar. This is not to be a synthetic work, but rather a paper that defines a problem, briefly reviews the state of knowledge on the issue, and then presents a proposal for future research.

3) You also will write six short papers (2-3 pages) that summarize and critique the readings for a given week. No outside reading is required for these papers.

4) There will be a final examination. The exam will probably have three questions. We will discuss the format of the exam (how long you will have to work on it, take-home or in-class) later in the semester.

COURSE EVALUATION

The seminar paper and the final exam will each comprise 25% of your grade, the six short papers are 5% each, and seminar participation is the remaining 20%.

COURSE READINGS  The following books are required reading for the course:

The rest of the course readings will be available on-line through Moodle on your “student center” on MyUW.
COURSE OUTLINE

Suggested Readings are indicated with a * (these are not included in the online readings).

Part One--Theories and Methods

January 23rd – Approaches to Studying Congress and American Politics


General reviews of the Congress literature:
*Also see the appendix to Richard F. Fenno, Home Style: House Members in their Districts, “Notes on Method: Participant Observation,” (1978), 249-95, for an excellent discussion of how to do field work in congressional districts.

January 30th – The Rational Choice Approach

Cameron, Charles, Chapter 3 in Veto Bargaining, 69-82.
Shepsle and Weingast, “Positive Theories of Congressional Institutions,” Chap. 1 in edited book by the same name, pp. 5-35.
Arnold, Douglas R. The Logic of Congressional Action, Chapters 1, 4 and 6, pp. 3-16, 60-87, 119-146.
Krehbiel, Keith, Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking Chapters 1+2, pp. 3-48.
Green, David and Ian Shapiro, “Legislative Behavior and the Paradox of Voting” and selection from their conclusion, pp. 98-120,142-46,196-204, from Pathologies of Rational Choice.

February 6th – Historical Research

Gamm, Gerald. “Buried Treasure: Theory and Historical Data.” The Political Methodologist, Newsletter of the Political Methodology Section, American Political Science Association, 8:1 (Fall, 1997).
Katzenelson, Ira. “Reflections on History, Method, and Political Science.” The Political Methodologist, Newsletter of the Political Methodology Section, American Political Science Association, 8:1 (Fall, 1997).
Aldrich, John. “Does Historical Political Research Pose Any Special Methodological Concerns?” The Political Methodologist, Newsletter of the Political Methodology Section, American Political Science Association, 8:1 (Fall, 1997).


(Note we also will have one week on normative approaches to studying Congress. Logically that week should come here on the syllabus, but in practical terms, we will have a better discussion of what Congress should be doing after you have a better understanding of how it works and what it is doing.)

**Part Two--Congressional Elections and Representation**

February 20th – Representation: The Senate, Districting, and Race


Griffin, John D. “Senate Apportionment as a Source of Political Inequality.” *Legislative Studies*
Quarterly 31:3 (August, 2006): 405-32.
Canon, David, Race, Redistricting, and Representation. Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1, xi-59.


February 27th - Race and Representation in Congress

Kenneth Shotts, “Does Racial Redistricting Cause Conservative Policy Outcomes?” JOP 65:1 (February,

Canon, David. Race, Redistricting, and Representation, Chapters 3, 4, and 6, 93-200, 243-64.


March 6th – Congressional Elections and Links to Constituents


Canon, David, Race, Redistricting, and Representation, Chapter 5, 201-42.


*Theriault, Sean M., The Power of the People: Congressional Competition, Public Attention, and Voter


Part Three--Testing Distributive, Informational, and Partisan Theories: Institutional Structures and Congressional Behavior

March 13th – Parties in Congress

Krehbiel, Keith. Pivotal Politics. Chapters 8-10, 165-236.

Cox and McCubbins, Setting the Agenda, Chapters 9-10, pp. 171-229.


*Smith, Steve, Party Influence in Congress, chapter 6-8, pp. 148-216.


*Bianco, William T. And Itai Sened, “Uncovering Evidence of Conditional Party Government:


*** March 20th – Spring Break ***

March 27th – Parties, Rules, and Parliamentary Rights


Krehbiel, Keith. Pivotal Politics, Chapters 4-5, 51-117.

Cox and McCubbins, Setting the Agenda, Chapter 4, 50-86.


April 3rd – Floor Behavior

Cox and McCubbins, Setting the Agenda, Chapters 5-6, 87-123.

April 10th– Floor Behavior 2: Random topics


April 17th – Congressional Committees

Cox and McCubbins, Setting the Agenda, Chapter7-8, 124-70.


*Londregan, John and James M. Snyder, “Comparing Committee and Floor Preferences,” In PTCI, 139-72.


*Krehbiel, Keith. Information and Legislative Organization, Chapter 4.

Part Three- Interbranch Relations

April 24th – Congress and the Courts

Canon, David T. Race, Redistricting, and Representation, Chapter 2.


*Murphy, Walter. Congress and the Court: A Case study in the American Political Process.

May 1st – Congress, the Presidency, and Divided Government


Krehbiel, Keith. Pivotal Politics, Chapters 3, 6-7, 51-75,118-64.

Cameron, Charles, Veto Bargaining, Chapters 5-6, 123-177.


Part Four—Reforming Congress and Various Normative Issues – May 8th

William Galston, Donald Wolfensberger, and Rep. Tom Davis, Testimony at the hearing on “Raising the Bar for Congress: Reform Proposals for the 21st Century,” U. S. Senate Committee on Homeland

*Mann, Thomas, and Norman Ornstein. The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to get it Back on Track (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Other Topics that we didn’t get to:

1. Women in Congress


2. The Bureaucracy


3. The Congressional Career


4. Realignments:


5. Interest Groups


6. Campaign finance


