

Fordham University
Department of Political Science
Professor Richard Fleisher
PORU 2205
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Office: 674 Faber Hall
Office Hours: Monday 4-5
& Thursday 2-3
Office Phone: (718) 817-3952
e-mail: fleisher@fordham.edu

THE U.S. CONGRESS

Course Description

Our goal in this course is to develop an understanding of the U.S. Congress as a policy-making institution. We will explore the impact of internal structures (i.e. rules, committees, and parties) on congressional behavior as well as impact of the electoral process including such issues as the level of competition for congressional seats, the role of incumbency, how voters decide for whom to vote, the role of money, and the impact of the electoral process on congressional behavior. Finally, we will analyze the relationship between members of Congress, constituents and organized interests, the president and party leaders focusing on the impact of each on how representatives behave in committee and on the House and Senate floor. Since Congress and its members are always in the news, I recommend that you begin following developments that are relevant for understanding the Congress. On this score, you should read the online editions of the NY Times, Washington Post, CQ Weekly Report, or the National Journal.

Course Requirements

In this course there will be two exams, a midterm and a final, as well as a paper based on the course readings. Grades will be based on a total of 300 points. Each of the exams and the paper will be worth 100 points. The purpose of both the paper and the examinations is to evaluate how well you can use the required readings and class materials to answer specific questions about the US Congress. I expect that that you will be able to cite the readings on the syllabus as part of your answer to any exam question. Both exams are in-class essay exams. We will not have time to spend class time discussing every assigned reading. I encourage you to ask questions if there are aspects in the reading that are confusing. The final examination is cumulative. If your grade on the final exam is better than your grade on the midterm I will weigh the final exam grade twice and ignore the midterm grade.

For the paper, I will hand out a question or questions that will require you to use the course readings to develop and defend an answer. The paper will be graded based on the clarity and originality of the paper's answer, how well you use evidence to defend your points, how well you use the required readings to answer the question and the presentation of the argument in the paper (i.e. organization, grammar, spelling, etc.). I expect that your papers will be approximately 7-8 pages (this neither a minimum nor maximum but an average length of the paper). I will hand out the question for this paper on April 6th and the final paper is due on April 20th. In addition to handing in a hard copy of your paper, you must also email me a copy of your paper. I strongly urge you to turn the paper in on the assigned date. Papers turned in after the due date may or may not (the discretion is entirely mine) be penalized. The maximum penalty for late papers will be a reduction of 5 points per day for each day the paper is late. Papers not turned in at all will receive a grade of 0. If you cannot complete the paper by the assigned due date, you must speak to me prior to the day the paper is due. All papers are to be typed, double-space.

In addition, I will be giving out bonus points based on class participation. You will be earn from 0 to 5 bonus points based on what you contribute to class discussions over the course of the semester. The number of bonus points received for class participation is based on my

assessment of the quantity and quality of what you contribute. Bonus points will be assigned at the end of the semester. Semester grades will be assigned according to the schedule located on the last page of this syllabus.

Some general ground rules. I expect that you will come to class on a regular basis. You are responsible for organizing the other aspects of your life in such a way that they do not interfere with your commitment to this course. I fully understand that at times it may be necessary to miss class. That is why you are permitted four absences. Absences will not be excused except for acute medical situations and official university activities. Excessive absences (i.e. more than four) will result in your grade being lowered. The last page of this syllabus lists the penalty for missing more than four classes. If, for any reason, attending class becomes a problem, you must speak to me in a timely fashion to discuss the problem. In addition, I expect that you will keep up with the readings and be prepared to engage in class discussions. Class discussions may be based on the assigned readings but class time is not meant to summarize the readings. We will not have time to discuss each individual reading assignment during a class period. Whether or not we discuss an assigned reading, you are still responsible for its content. Feel free to raise questions about any of the readings at the beginning of class. I sincerely hope that we will be able to generate a good deal of class discussion. I normally prefer to call on volunteers to answer questions, but you should be prepared to answer questions about the readings if called upon. How well you answer questions when called upon will affect the evaluation of your class participation. My office hours, phone number and e-mail address are listed at the top of this syllabus. I encourage you to take advantage of my hours even if you just want to come by to discuss some aspect of politics or some other subject. Finally, I will be making use of Blackboard this semester. A copy of the course syllabus is posted under course Documents. In addition, a copy of the PowerPoint slides that I am using this semester also appears under Course Documents. Let me know if you are having any problems with PowerPoint. Here, you will also find copies of several readings noted below.

The following are the scheduled dates for exams in this course as well as the due date for the paper:

Midterm Examination – Thursday, February 19th

Paper question will handed out on Monday, April 6th and the paper is due Monday, April 20th

Final Examination - Check the final exam schedule for the date of the final. Except in the case of scheduling conflicts, the final exam will not be given at an alternate time.

Required Readings & Assignments

Readings for this course consists of books that can be purchased at the Fordham University Bookstore:

Dodd, Lawrence C. and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. 2009. **Congress Reconsidered**, 9th edition. CQ Press. **(D&O)**

Smith, Steven S., Jason Roberts, and Ryan Vander Wielen. 2008. **The American Congress**, 5th edition. Cambridge University Press. **(TAC)**

Smith, Steven S., Jason Roberts, and Ryan Vander Wielen. 2009. **The American Congress Reader**. Cambridge University Press. **(TAC-R)**

Reading

The due dates listed for each of the readings are presented below. The dates do not necessarily mean that is the day that we will discuss that material in class. Predicting in advance dates that we will discuss specific material is difficult because I do not know exactly when we will get to a specific topic. The topics are posted in the order we will cover them in class. Keep up and complete the readings by the dates posted. Feel free to ask questions about the readings even if we do not discuss a specific reading in class.

I. THE AMERICAN CONGRESS: HISTORICAL CONTEXT & MODERN TRENDS - Jan. 15

Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, chs. 1,2,7

Dodd and Oppenheimer, in D&O, #2

U.S. Constitution, Articles I, II, III, and Amendments & The Federalist, Nos. 10 and 51
43 in TAC-R # 4 & 5

Lee, "Senate Representation and Coalition Building in Distributive Politics," in TAC-R # 11

Sample of a Special Rule, in TAC #20

Sample of a Unanimous Consent Agreement, in TAC # 21

II. CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF THE US CONGRESS - Jan. 22

Mann and Ornstein, "Is Congress Still A Broken Branch?" in D&O #3.

Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, "What Is Wrong with the American Political System?"
in TAC-R # 1

Brady and Theriault, "A Reassessment of Who's to Blame: A Positive Case for the
Public Evaluation of Congress" in TAC-R # 2

Stimson, "Between the Campaigns: Public Approval and Disapproval of Government" in
TAC-R # 3

Hibbing and Larimer, 2008. "The American Public's View of Congress," **The Forum**
available on Blackboard

III. MEMBERS, GOALS, RESOURCES, AND STRATEGIES - Jan 29

Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 4

Mayhew, "Congress: The Electoral Connection." in TAC-R # 10

Sinclair, "The New World of U.S. Senators," in D&O # 1

Fenno, "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration," in TAC-R # 6

Lipinski, "Congressional Careers from the Inside: A Political Scientist as Congressman,"
in D&O # 15.

Rohde, "Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives," in TAC-R # 12
Sulkin, "Issue Politics in Congress," in TAC-R # 13
Sulkin, "Promises Made and Promises Kept," in D&O # 6

IV. THE POLITICS OF CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS - Feb 5

Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 3
Erikson and Wright, "Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections," in D&O # 4
Herrnson and Curry, "Issue Voting in the 2006 Elections for the U.S. House of Representatives," in D&O # 5
Dodd and Oppenheimer, "Congressional Politics in a Time of Crisis: The 2008 Elections and Their Implications," in D&O #18
Cox and Katz, "Elbridge Gerry's Salamander: The Electoral Consequences of the Reapportionment Revolution," in TAC-R # 8
Jacobson, "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946–1986," in TAC-R # 9

V. PARTIES AND LEADERS - Feb 23

Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 6
Cooper and Brady, "Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn," in TAC-R # 14
Smith, "Party Influence in Congress," in TAC-R # 16
Smith and Gamm, "The Dynamics of Party Government in Congress," in D&O # 7
Sinclair, 2008. "Orchestrators of Unorthodox Lawmaking: Pelosi and McConnell in the 110th Congress," **The Forum** available on Blackboard
Pearson and Schickler, "The Transition to Democratic Leadership in a Polarized House," in D&O # 8.
Evans and Grandy. "The Whip Systems of Congress," in D&O # 9
Cox and McCubbins, "Setting the Agenda," in TAC-R # 15
Cox, "On the Effects of Legislative Rules," in TAC-R # 22

VI. THE STANDING COMMITTEES - Mar 5

Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 6
Maltzman and Smith, "Principals, Goals, Dimensionality, and Congressional Committees," in TAC-R # 18
Aldrich and Rohde, "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era," in D&O # 10
Talbert, Jones, and Baumgartner, "Nonlegislative Hearings and Policy Change in Congress," in TAC-R # 19

VII. THE FLOOR AND VOTING - Mar 23

Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 8
Kingdon, "Models of Legislative Voting," in TAC-R # 26
Evans, "Greasing the Wheels: Using Pork Barrel Projects to Build Majority Coalitions in Congress," in TAC-R # 25

IX. CONGRESS, LOBBYISTS, AND INTEREST GROUPS - Mar 30

- Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 11
Hall and Wayman, "Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees" in TAC-R # 36
Wright, "Legislative Lobbying," in TAC-R # 37

X. CONGRESS, THE PRESIDENT AND THE COURTS - Apr 16

- Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, chs. 9, 10
Cameron, "Veto Bargaining: Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power," in TAC-R # 30
Krehbiel, "Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking," in TAC-R # 27
Howell and Kriner, "Congress, the President, and the Iraq War's Domestic Political Front," in D&O # 14.
Cooper, "From Congressional to Presidential Preeminence: Power and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century America and Today," in D&O # 16
Cameron, Cover, and Segal, "Senate Voting on Supreme Court Nominees: A Neoinstitutional Model," in TAC-R # 34
Krutz, Fleisher, and Bond, "From Abe Fortas to Zoe Baird: Why Some Presidential Nominations Fail in the Senate," in TAC-R # 35
Binder and Maltzman, "The Politics of Advice and Consent: Putting Judges on the Federal Bench," in D&O # 11
Binder, "The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947–1996," in TAC-R # 31
Dodd and Schraufnagel, "Reconsidering Party Polarization and Policy Productivity: A Curvilinear Perspective," in D&O # 17
Presidential Veto Messages in TAC-R # 28
Presidential Signing Statement in TAC-R # 29

XI. CONGRESS AND THE BUDGET- Apr 23

- Smith, Roberts and Vander Wielen, TAC, ch. 12
Evans, "Appropriations in the Republican Era," in TAC-R # 38
Rudder, "Transforming American Politics through Tax Policy, in D&O # 12

The following are the number of points lost for excessive absences as well as the grading scale that I will use this semester. Earning the number of points listed assures you of getting at least that grade.

Points lost for missed classes:

5 absences	6 points
6 absences	8 points
7 absences	10 points
8 absences	15 points
9 absences	20 points
10 absences	30 points
11 absences	40 points
12 absences	55 points
13 absences	70 points
14 absences	85 points
15 absences	100 points

Semester Grading Scale

A =	285	C+=	230
A- =	275	C =	210
B+ =	260	C- =	200
B =	250	D =	180
B- =	240	F =	< 180