

**PSC 218 LH – Legislative Politics  
Fall Semester 2006**

Tuesdays, 6-8PM  
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Course Overview

This course will examine the theory, structure, and processes of the U.S. Congress, with emphasis on congressional development, elections and incumbency, the nature of representation, legislative process and procedure, leadership, and executive-legislative relations. We will consider why Congress is important within our broader political and social system, how it changes across time, and how it manages its constitutional powers. While you will be introduced to a range of scholarly perspectives on Congress, our discussions and your assignments will focus on the practical application of these perspectives.

Course Format

This course is a graduate-level seminar and will be run as such. The emphasis will be on discussion; lectures will be kept to a minimum. You are expected to prepare for each class and to participate in class discussions.

Required Texts

**Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process. 2004. Walter J. Oleszek. CQ Press:** Washington DC, 6<sup>th</sup> edition

**Congress Reconsidered. 2005. Dodd, Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, eds. CQ Press:** Washington, DC, 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

**Congress: The Electoral Connection. 2004. David R. Mayhew. Yale University Press:** New Haven, CT, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Blackboard

This course has its own website ([www.blackboard.gwu.edu](http://www.blackboard.gwu.edu)). I will post assignments, hyperlink readings, and communicate with you through the website. Readings marked “bb” on the syllabus can be found on the blackboard website.

### Method of Evaluation

**Papers.** You will write two papers. The first paper will be 8-10 pages and will focus on material from the first half of the course. The second paper will be 10-12 pages and will focus on material from the second half of the course (and the first half, if you choose.) The first paper is worth 25% of your final grade and the second paper is worth 35% of your final grade. In addition, you will write a proposal (approximately 2-3, double-spaced pages) for your second paper and discuss your proposal with the class. The proposal and proposal presentation are worth 10% of your overall grade.

Paper 1 should focus on one, or some combination of the following topics:

- Congress: The Electoral Connection (Mayhew). Critique Mayhew's argument. What do you find most compelling, useful, or interesting about his argument and what do you find most questionable?
- Congressional elections and incumbency advantage.
- Congressional elections and campaign finance.
- Role of interests groups and lobbyists in Congress.

In short, I am looking for a thoughtful assessment of the ideas presented in the readings and in class discussion. You are expected to use at least five outside sources in addition to those assigned for the course.

Paper 1 is due October 17.

Proposal for paper 2 is due November 14.

Paper 2 is due December 12.

**Weekly reading reactions and questions.** Each week, you will email me a reaction to the readings for that week, along with one or two, thoughtful discussion questions for the class. Your reaction may be a couple of sentences or a couple of paragraphs, depending on how much you have to say. What is the author's thesis or main argument? Is the argument persuasive? Why or why not? What is your own critical viewpoint? What questions remain for you? What – if anything – did the readings make you think about? These reactions are fairly casual – no need to stress about whether you are saying something deeply profound. They should, however, demonstrate that you have critically assessed the material. You may choose to focus on one of the readings or several of them. **Reactions are due at 6PM, on the Monday prior to class.** Your weekly reactions and questions are worth 15% of your final grade.

**Class participation and attendance.** Your overall class participation is worth 15% of your final grade. You are expected to prepare for and participate in each class. Attendance is mandatory; failure to attend class without prior approval from the instructor is prohibited and will result in a lower final grade.

### Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential in the pursuit of knowledge. The University, your professor, and your classmates will not tolerate cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting your own work, taking credit for the work of others without appropriate citation, and the fabrication of information. Plagiarism will result in an automatic “F” for this course. Please refer to the GWU Student Guide to Rights and Responsibilities for more information on academic dishonesty and student conduct.

### Course Schedule

#### **September 5: Course introduction**

#### **September 12: Introduction to the study of Congress**

- David Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection – all.
- Skim the discussion of Mayhew’s book in PS: Political Science and Politics, Volume XXXIV, #2, June 2001, pgs. 251-266 (you can locate this edition of PS through JSTOR, using the “browse” function)
- Eric Schickler, “An Informal History Posts Landmarks in the Study of Congress,”  
<http://www.igs.berkeley.edu/publications/par/fall2001/history.htm>

#### *Questions to consider ....*

Are members single-minded seekers of reelection?  
Why did the House adopt centralizing reforms?  
How has fundraising affected member behavior?  
Are party leaders more influential today?

#### **September 19: Patterns of congressional development**

- Dodd, chapter 18 in CR
- Nelson W. Polsby. 1968. “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives.” American Political Science Review 62: 144-168. (bb)
- Sinclair, chapter 1 in CR
- Dodd and Oppenheimer, chapter 2 in CR
- Hibbing and Larimer, chapter 3 in CR

#### *Questions to consider ...*

How have the Congress and the job of being a legislator changed over time?  
What factors have contributed to these changes?

#### **September 26: Congressional elections**

- Erikson and Wright, chapter 4 in CR
- “How do Candidacies Affect Elections?” (bb)

#### *Questions to consider ...*

What are the most important factors/issues in the upcoming elections?  
Predictions???

### **October 3: Incumbency and the marginality puzzle**

- Oppenheimer, chapter 6 in CR
- Fiorina, chapter 7 in CR
- James Campbell, "The Stagnation of Congressional Elections." (bb)

#### *Questions to consider ...*

Why are incumbents so successful? Is this fair?

What makes for a successful challenger?

How does incumbency advantage affect representation and lawmaking?

### **October 10: Campaign finance and outside interests**

- Herrnson, chapter 5 in CR
- Currinder, "Money in the 2004 elections." (bb)
- Currinder, Green, and Conway, "Interest Group Money." (bb)
- Ackerman and Ayres, "Voting with Dollars." (bb)

#### *Questions to consider ...*

How successful/unsuccessful is BCRA?

Should 527's be better regulated? How?

What reforms would you suggest?

### **October 17: The nature of representation**

- Warren Miller and Donald Stokes. 1963. "Constituency Influence in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 57:45-56 (bb)
- Richard Fenno. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies." (bb)
- John Kingdon. 1977. "Models of Legislative Voting," *Journal of Politics* 39:563-595. (bb)
- Haynie, chapter 17 in CR

#### *Questions to consider ...*

How do you think members decide how to vote?

Which constituencies do you think have the strongest voice?

Should members of Congress be more representative of the people as a whole? Why?

### **October 24: Introduction to the legislative and budgetary processes**

- Oleszek, chapters 1 and 2

#### *Questions to consider ...*

What is the role of the budget in the legislative process?

What is the difference between appropriations and authorizations?

### **October 31: House and Senate procedure**

- Oleszek, chapters 4-8

#### *Questions to consider ...*

What are the major differences between the two chambers and how do these differences affect the legislative process?

### **November 7: Committees**

- Oleszek, chapter 3
- Aldrich and Rohde, chapter 11 in CR
- Gordon, chapter 12 in CR

#### *Questions to consider ...*

How much power should committee chairs exercise? How should they be selected?  
What is the special role of the House Rules Committee?

### **November 14: Discussion of elections and of paper proposals**

### **November 21: Thanksgiving – no class**

### **November 28: Congressional leadership**

- Smith and Gamm, chapter 8 in CR
- Schickler and Pearson, chapter 9 in CR
- Evans and Lipinski, chapter 10 in CR
- Oleszek and Davidson, “Theories of Congressional Leadership.” (bb)
- “Is Party Leadership Personal or Contextual?” (bb)

#### *Questions to consider ...*

What role does the party play in both the House and Senate?  
What role do House and Senate leaders play?  
How much power/influence should congressional party leaders exercise?  
How would you describe the current congressional leadership?

### **December 5: Executive-legislative relations**

- Cooper, chapter 16 in CR
- Binder and Maltzman, chapter 13 in CR
- Wolfensberger, chapter 15 in CR
- Oleszek, chapter 9

#### *Questions to consider ...*

When should Congress defer to the President and vice versa?  
What role should Congress play in the judicial appointment process?

### **December 12: Course wrap-up and discussion of final papers**

- Oleszek, chapter 10