

Selected Topics: Congressional Committees

PSc286 LH1

Masters of Arts in Legislative Affairs Program
Summer 2008, first session

Instructor:

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Meeting Time and Location:

Monday and Wednesday evenings 6:00pm to 8:00pm
May 19 through June 25, 2008
Classroom is on either the second or third floor, see listings at guard desk
400 North Capitol, a/k/a Hall of the States or C-SPAN building, some classes may be held in
House or Senate committee rooms

Contact Information:

Individual meetings by pre-arranged appointment
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Overview

This seminar is part of a legislative affairs curriculum examining the law-making processes of the United States Congress. The course focuses on the legislative workshops of both the House and the Senate: the committees and subcommittees. Jurisdictional or turf remains a key issue in examining committee behavior and performance. Oversight is another. This course will review the origins of committees from the First Congress and the evolution of the customs, norms and formal rules that govern their behavior. Both theory and current practice will be discussed and analyzed with a final project designed to reveal what theory and practice means for predicting legislative outcomes today. We will examine the key committees in the budget process starting with the Budget Committees and look at the delicate relationship between the authorizing (law-making) and appropriation (funding) committees.

As a graduate seminar, active class discussion is valued and encouraged throughout the semester. Congressional staff, security specialists and journalists and a surprise guest to two may join these discussions from time to time. The goal for the class is to provide students with a better understanding of the congressional responsibilities especially those of congressional committees

while providing a clearer appreciation how policy issues become law.

Expectations for students and grading

- participation in class discussions and case studies, 20%
- completing two small, analytical papers, 20%
- mid-term essay exam, 25%
- final project (see below), 35%

Texts

Committees of Congress, by Christopher J. Deering and Steven S. Smith
Competing Principals: Committees, Parties, and the Organization of Congress, by Forrest Maltzman

Other References Cited and Available

Legislating the Revolution: The Contract with America and It's First 100 Days, James G. Gimpel
The Postreform Congress, Roger H. Davidson
Congress and Its Members, 8th edition, Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek
Why Congressional Reforms Fail: Reelection and the House Committee System, E. Scott Adler
Organization of Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress
Turf Wars: How Congressional Committees Claim Jurisdiction, by David C. King
History of the United States House of Representatives, by George Gallaway

Absences and Tardiness

Some students may have responsibilities that intrude on class time. These students should inform the instructor in advance when such circumstances may arise. Absences from more than two classes during the term may result in a grade of incomplete.

Format

The beginning of each class period will be devoted to a review of current issues pertaining to domestic terrorism, homeland security and news from Capitol Hill. Students are invited to clip articles, download Web information and/or suggest sources relevant to class topics. Student discussion leaders may be assigned for some classes. A visit or two to a congressional hearing room is part of the class venue.

Final Project

The final project has two facets an oral report given like testimony before a congressional committee or subcommittee and research paper which elaborates what is in the oral report. Each student will choose a topic currently under consideration by either a House or Senate committee or subcommittee and offer support or perhaps, opposition to this pending legislation. As a final step the student will predict the result.

Statement on Scholarly Ethics

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, as in all courses, students are expected to be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, recycled assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

Report any such violations you witness to your instructor. You may also consult director of the program or the associate dean of the college.

Class Schedule and Assignments (version 07c)

1. May 19

Introductions

Course expectations, assignments and format

Congress and committee structure, preliminary view

Discussion assignment

2. May 21

A historical look at Congress and committees

Evolution and change in committees, Part I

Reading assignment:

Deering and Smith, Chapters 1 and 2

Essay #1 assigned

3. May 26

Committee histories Part I: House Agriculture Committee

Essay #1 due

Reading assignment:

Deering and Smith, Chapter 3

4. June 2

Committee histories Part II: House Armed Services Committee

Models of committee behavior

Reading assignment:

Deering and Smith, Chapter 4

Maltzman, Chapters 1 and 2

6. June 4

Committee assignments and jurisdiction, Part I

Reading assignment:

Deering and Smith, Chapter 5

Maltzman, Chapter 3

7. June 9

Committee assignments and jurisdiction, Part II

Leadership, subcommittees and staff

Midterm examination (part in class, part take-home)

Reading assignment:

Deering and Smith, Chapter 5

Maltzman, Chapter 4

8. June 11

Incentives, structure and reforms, Part I

Reading assignment:

Maltzman, Chapter 5 and 6

Small paper #2 assigned.

9. June 16

Incentives, structures and reforms, Part II

Small paper #2 due

Reading assignment:

Maltzman, Chapter 6 and 7

10. June 18

The gate keepers and referees: A look at the parliamentarians
Uniqueness in the Senate

Reading assignment:
Maltzman, Chapter 7
Handouts

11. June 23

Toward the future
Begin oral reports
Evaluations

12. June 25

Final oral reports
Final papers due

Please provide 2 copies of paper and a self-addressed, stamped, document size envelope if you wish a copy returned to you with comments