Meets: Mondays 5:45-9:25  
Room: HS 219  
A-E graded

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Legislative Process

Its fall 2017!

Regardless of your point of view, you have to agree that it’s an interesting time to study politics and Congress. A newly elected president with majorities of his party in both chambers of the legislature—unified government—set the stage for considerable policy productivity. Yet thus far into President Trump’s term, we have seen, even in a notably partisan era, a failure to pass a health care bill and other signs that there is little unity inside either the House or Senate. What incentives do individual members have to tow the party line or when do they seek to go it alone? What factors impact the relationship between Congress and the president, what are the appropriate standards to use in order to evaluate Congress (or any other legislature), and what of tried and true factors like representational connections between legislators and their constituents??

In addition to the inherently intriguing nature of the questions considered in the study of Congress, one attraction of the academic literature is the multiple perspectives and methods which have been used to study the institution. Thus, throughout the class, students will be asked to consider not only important substantive debates but also to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the alternative approaches and methodologies which have been used by political scientists to study questions about legislative processes.

As we study Congress, several broad themes will emerge, including discussions about the multiple meanings of political representation; the motivations of legislators/politicians particularly in a partisan era; the role/importance of institutions and institutional design along with appropriate standards for evaluating them; the connections between local and national politics; and, assuming they want to, the ways citizens can make a difference with respect to the politicians who represent them.

After an examination of important introductory perspectives, the course is organized into three sections: 1.) Members of Congress as they are elected and operate in their districts and among their constituents; 2). The historical background and internal workings of both houses of the legislature; and 3.) The role of Congress as an actor in the broader U.S. political system.

Note that while most of our focus will be on the U.S. Congress, at strategic points, we will broaden our scope to include state legislatures and the workings of legislatures in other nations.
Required Readings
David Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection. (Yale University Press, 1974)
James Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka, American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization. (Cambridge University Press, 2015)
Richard Fenno, Home Style (Longman, 1978)
Justin Grimmer, Representational Style in Congress (Cambridge University Press, 2013)
A couple of additional books may be assigned later in the class, and additional readings can be found either on Blackboard or from easily available journals cataloged on JSTOR.

For those of you who feel you need a refresher on the basics of Congress or just a handy reference text, see Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek, Congress and Its Members (Washington: CQ Press, 16th edition). Additionally, if you would like an overview of the classic articles marking the field of legislative politics, see Herbert F. Weisberg, Eric S. Heberlig and Lisa M. Campoli, Classics in Congressional Politics (New York: Longman, 1999). If you are particularly interested in an overview of State Legislatures, you might want to take a look at Peverill Squire and Gary Moncrief, State Legislatures Today: Politics Under the Domes, (Rowman and Littlefield, Maryland, 2015), and for a look at how the academic study of congress has developed, see The Oxford Handbook of The American Congress (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Additional Online Resources
Congressional Quarterly Weekly Reports
http://library.cqpress.com.ezpprod1.hul.harvard.edu/cqweekly
Inside Newspapers
http://thehill.com
http://www.rollcall.com
State Legislatures Magazine
Congressional Record is here:
http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php
Staff and Salary reports are maintained at:
http://www.legistorm.com/
Open Records Information
Sunlight Foundation, https://sunlightfoundation.com/ and Open Secrets,
https://www.opensecrets.org
Requirements
*Final Exam, 30%.
*Either 1 longer research paper or 2 literature reviews, roughly 15-20 pages in total, 25%.
  - Literature reviews should give you a fuller understanding of particular aspects of how congress works. Details to come.
  - Research paper; Based on course readings, you will be able to identify a topic of interest to you and a gap in the existing literature. Your project, consisting of a small-scale literature review and your own original research, will expand your knowledge of Congress and give you practice at doing independent research on your own.
*Weekly papers or discussion questions, 20%.
  - You get two buys! Note the weekly papers, due via e-mail before class, will alternate between a standard reaction paper and two or three paragraphs describing a couple of questions you feel highlight central points in the reading. The reaction papers (approximately 1.5-2 pages each) should summarize and analyze one or more of the major issues or readings for the week. Summarize the argument of one or more of the readings, and then, based on other readings or your own analysis, provide a critique. The “question” papers should include a paragraph or two of set-up followed by a question or two highlighting main themes of the reading. Note that the purposes of these short papers are to help you focus your ideas, to highlight what you think are the most important questions addressed by the readings, to compare and contrast alternative approaches, and to give you a chance for feedback on your work.
  --* At the end of Part I, you can expect a longer (approximately 5-page) essay, covering all the reading.
*Participation/attendance/Current Events, 25%.
  --Attendance is required. Should unusual circumstances arise, please if at all possible let the professor know prior to class.
  --participation. We’re a small seminar; participation is expected, and you want your voice to be heard!
  --Current events. Each week, you will be expected to spend some time outside of class attending to what congress is currently doing, watching relevant videos or finding academic articles that broaden our perspective on the particular topics we are studying.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty
The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me before submitting assignments for grading. Violations will result in disciplinary action. Additionally, it goes without saying that students are expected to meet the broader standards of academic honesty expected of students at a major university.
See link on University policy: http://www.albany.edu/eas/104/penalty.htm
See also the UAlbany Library “Plagiarism 101” Tutorial
http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1

Students with Disabilities
If you need any class accommodations due to a disability, please utilize University resources as needed, and please let the professor know well in advance of any assignments requiring accommodation(s). It is a function of the University to provide such accommodations as needed.

**Reading Schedule**

*subject to some changes given our interests, needs and preferences.

*obviously additional readings will be provided for the second part of the class

**Part I. Introduction and Alternative Perspectives**

8/28 - Introduction

- David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*.
- Michael J. Malbin, “Congress during the Convention and Ratification,” in *The Framing and Ratification of the Constitution*.
- Andrew Taylor. 19--. *Congress: An Appraisal*. Ch. 1, 2


**Part II. In the Districts**

9/25. Elections
- Additional article of your choice covering some aspect of congressional elections.

10/2. Candidate Recruitment and the Congressional career
- Scott A. Frisch and Sean Q. Kelly, “Don't Have the Data? Make them up! Congressional Archives as Untapped Data Sources” (PS: Political Science and Politics Vol. 36, No. 2 (Apr., 2003)

10/9. In Office and In the Districts I
• Daniel Butler and David Brookman, “Do Politicians Really Discriminate Against their Constituents” American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 55, No. 3 (July • 2011)

10/16. In Office and In the Districts II

10/23. Looking Back and Looking Ahead to Part III.
• First literature review due, 10/27.

**More To Come!**

**Important to Note**
12/18. Final exam Due.
Final paper/Lit review due on agreed upon date.