

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: U.S. CONGRESS
Political Science 1211 (35785)
University of Pittsburgh
Monday/Wednesday 4:30 – 5:45pm
David Lawrence Hall 105
Fall 2009

Professor: Jennifer Nicoll Victor, Ph.D.
Email: jnvictor@pitt.edu
Office: 4613 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, Department of Political Science
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:30-2:30pm
Course Website: <http://courseweb.pitt.edu> (on Blackboard, use your Pitt e-mail login)

Teaching Asst.: Brandon Myers (bmm59@pitt.edu)
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00am-12:00pm, Department of Political Science (4600 Posvar Hall)

I. Course Description

This course uses the United States Congress as a model to describe basic legislative processes. Students will gain a firm understanding of the spatial model of legislative decision-making and apply the model to a variety of topics. We will explore congressional elections, voter participation in elections, lawmaking, congressional committees, the congressional budget process, and congressional parties. In addition to these institutional lessons, we will learn about types of voting, the theoretical problems associated with aggregating votes (such as voting cycles) and how Congress overcomes such problems to create policy.

II. Course Goals

I have three broad objectives for this course. First, I hope to stimulate your **curiosity** about legislative government and politics and provide you with a life-long desire to be an informed, critical and active citizen. Second, I hope students will develop a base level of **knowledge** and understanding about the processes and politics in the U.S. Congress. Third, I hope students will advance their critical thinking, analytic, and writing **skills** and be able to apply theoretical concepts to new problems.

III. Teaching Philosophy and Teaching Style

My teaching philosophy is based on three primary principles.

- First, I believe the gap between undergraduate and graduate coursework in political science is too broad. I therefore introduce advanced theoretical concepts in undergraduate classes so that students understand the true value of studying politics as a science; moreover, should any student choose to pursue advanced or graduate work in political science, they will be well prepared.
- Second, I believe in incorporating current events into classroom lessons. Nothing in science seems concrete until one can “see it with their own eyes.” Reading a daily

newspaper and following current events, then applying theoretical concepts to political happenings helps to clarify theoretical concepts and demonstrate their utility.

- Finally, as an instructor and a leader of class discussions on everything from lawmaking to elections, I aim to remain politically neutral and non-partisan. Students should learn to collect and evaluate information on their own. I would not want students who disagree with my political views to hear all course information with a skeptical ear; nor would I want students who tend to agree with my views to accept everything I say at face value. I encourage students to express their views, be critical, and challenge information when it is appropriate.

Accordingly, my teaching style supports my philosophy. I therefore use a Socratic-style, frequently ask questions, and encourage an interactive learning experience. I do my best to learn students' names, encourage participation, and create, what I hope is, an open learning environment where students feel free to question, comment, and explain how they view course content. Such an environment helps to foster student interaction, thinking, and analytical and creative skills. Moreover, while lectures are important because they help to distribute necessary information and facts, they are not usually the most effective way to learn information. For this reason, we will do a variety of activities in the classroom. Successful performance in this course will include classroom participation and working in and out of class with your peers.

IV. Student Responsibilities

A. *Class Attendance and Participation.* Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. Accordingly, every student is expected to attend class as well as be prepared to ask questions about and comment on the readings. You need to complete the daily reading assignment *prior* to the class meeting. You will be much more successful in this class if you attend regularly, take notes, pay attention, and participate.

B. *Readings.* As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is *your* responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. I will do everything I can to make this task easier for you. You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and **take notes on them.**

C. *Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity (available at: <http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>). Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment.* Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the appropriate Dean's office. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else's work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. *If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.*

D. *Students with Disabilities.* If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please let me (the instructor) know and contact the Office of

Disability Resources and Service, 216 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890/(412) 383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. All discussions with me regarding disabilities are confidential.

V. Following Political Developments in the Media

Students are required to follow current political events. A familiarity with current happenings in politics, and Congress especially, will facilitate your ability to understand the material. Along with any local papers you may read, I recommend that you read *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Washington Post* with frequency. You can sign up to receive daily e-mail news updates from the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* for free on their websites. Additionally, you may want to examine news-magazines for more in-depth coverage of particular issues and events. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, *Roll Call*, *National Journal*, and *The Hill* are particularly informative periodicals. Other options include *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *The Economist*. Useful URLs are provided below.

Recommended News Sources

<i>New York Times</i>	http://www.nytimes.com
<i>Washington Post</i>	http://www.washingtonpost.com
<i>CQ Politics</i>	http://www.cqpolitics.com
<i>Congressional Quarterly Weekly</i> *	http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/
<i>National Journal</i> *	http://www.nationaljournal.com
<i>The Hill</i>	http://www.thehill.com
CNN	http://www.cnn.com/POLITICS/

Research Resources

House of Representatives	http://www.house.gov	
Senate	http://www.senate.gov	
Library of Congress	http://thomas.loc.gov	Look up <u>legislation</u> and <u>Congressional Record</u> in current and previous Congresses (1989-present)
Government Printing Office	http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html	Find out about anything the government prints, from laws, to Presidential orders, to speeches on the Senate floor.
Congressional Research Service Reports (environment)	http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRS/	Reports on specific policies prepared by professional researchers for Members of Congress.
Congressional Research Service Reports (various topics)	http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/	Reports on specific policies prepared by professional researchers for Members of Congress.

* Requires a subscription, which the University has. Just access this website from any campus computer or via the Pitt VPN (https://sslvpn.pitt.edu/dana-na/auth/url_default/welcome.cgi)

LexisNexis (Congressional Universe)
*CQ Researcher**

<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp>
<http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/>
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/bioserch/biosearch.asp>

Hearings, bills, policies, committees, etc
In-depth reports about policies on the congressional agenda
Look up a bio of any member of Congress (throughout history)

VI. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

There are five graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	77-79	C+	67-69	D+	< 60	F
93-96	A	83-86	B	73-76	C	63-66	D		
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	70-72	C-	60-62	D-		

Problem Set Assignments (40%) There are five assignments, or problem sets, scattered throughout the course. Problem sets are posted on the course web site. Students are encouraged to do work in groups while thinking about the problem sets, but each student must hand in their own original work. Assignments that are obviously copied will receive a failing grade. (Students will benefit from the use of a drawing compass.) Due dates of homework assignments are:

Assignment #1 is due Wednesday, September 16

Assignment #2 is due Wednesday, September 30

Assignment #3 is due Tuesday, October 13

Assignment #4 is due Monday November 2

Assignment #5 is due Wednesday December 2

Three Team Projects, "Modeling Days" (30%) Students will be organized in teams of 5-6 students. Teams will be selected by the instructor. On three specified "modeling days" (dates are below) teams will have one full class period to construct a model. About a week prior to each modeling day, the instructor will post an on-line article, or series of articles, about a political event. These articles will provide the prompt for modeling day. Teams are encouraged to begin working together and brainstorming modeling ideas prior to modeling day. On "modeling day" teams will devise a model, draw it, and write up a team justification for their modeling choices. *Every student must participate in their team's efforts.* I will devise methods of discovering students who are not participating in their team's efforts, and such students will receive reduced grades; otherwise, grades will be distributed per model/per team. Students may bring extra materials, computers, or any other outside sources they desire to class on a modeling day. Models are due at the end of the class period. Models can be drawn by hand or using software, but it must be clear, legible, and easy to read. If students are absent on a modeling day, they will be required to write a written paper to substitute. Modeling day dates are: **Wednesday, October 21, Wednesday, November 11, Monday, December 7.**

* Requires a subscription, which the University has. Just access this website from any campus computer or via the Pitt VPN (https://sslvpn.pitt.edu/dana-na/auth/url_default/welcome.cgi)

Final Exam (30%). This will be an in-class exam covering material from the entire course (comprehensive), though concentrating on material from the last half of the course. The exam will include identifications, short answers, and essay questions (closed book, closed-note) based on material presented in class and in the readings. The exam will be administered during the regular final exam scheduled time for our class on **Thursday, December 17, 4:00pm – 5:50pm.** This is the **ONLY** day to take the exam. If you do not come to class on this day or you arrive late, you will not be allowed to take the exam.

VII. Texts

The reading assignments are chosen to buttress and expand on the analytic foundation laid in class. **Please notify the instructor about problems obtaining the readings as soon as possible.** The following materials are required and can be found at the bookstore. All of the following required titles are on reserve at Hillman Library.

Davidson, Roger H. and Walter J. Oleszek. 2009. *Congress and Its Members*, 12th ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Mayhew, David R. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Stewart, Charles III. 2001. *Analyzing Congress*. London: W.W. Norton & Company.

For reference, I also recommend:

Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek. 1997. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

VIII. Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Mon., Aug. 31 INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND THE STUDY OF CONGRESS (1)

PART I: FOUNDATIONS

Wed., Sept. 2 HOW WE THINK ABOUT CONGRESS (2)
Stewart, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-14)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 1

Mon., Sept. 7 **No Class**—Labor Day Holiday

Wed., Sept. 9,
Mon., Sept. 14,
Wed., Sept. 16 INTRODUCTION TO SPATIAL MODELS: THE MEDIAN VOTER AND ONE DIMENSIONAL MODELS (3, 4 & 5)
Stewart, Chapter 1 (pp. 15-22)

Mon., Sept. 21 INTRODUCTION TO SPATIAL MODELS: VOTING CYCLES (6)
Stewart, Chapter 1 (pp. 22-24)
Assignment #1 Due Wed., Sept. 16

Wed., Sept. 23 INTRODUCTION TO SPATIAL MODELS: TWO DIMENSIONS (7)
Stewart, Chapter 1 (pp. 24-35)

Mon., Sept. 28 - INTRODUCTION TO SPATIAL MODELS: VARIATIONS (8)
Stewart, Chapter 1 (pp. 35-49)

Wed., Sept. 30 - CONGRESS AND THE CONSTITUTION (9 & 10)
Mon., Oct. 5 Stewart, Chapter 2 (pp. 55-86)
Assignment #2 Due Wed. Sept. 30

Wed., Oct. 7 – HISTORY OF CONGRESS (11)
Tues., Oct. 13 Stewart, Chapter 3 (pp. 87-128)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 2
Assignment #3 Due Tues., Oct. 13
(Note: Mon., Oct. 12 is
Fall Break. Our class will
meet on Tuesday this week
only).

PART II: ELECTIONS AND CANDIDATES

Wed., Oct. 14 RUNNING FOR CONGRESS I (12)
Stewart, Ch. 4 (pp. 129- 164)

Mon., Oct. 19 RUNNING FOR CONGRESS II (13)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 3
Stewart, Chapter 6 (pp. 194-234)

Wed., Oct. 21 *MODELING DAY I*

Mon., Oct. 26 THE ELECTORAL CONNECTION (14)
Mayhew, *entire*

Wed., Oct. 28/ CAMPAIGNING (15& 16)
Mon., Nov. 2 Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 4
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 5
Assignment #4 Due Mon., Nov. 2

Wed., Nov. 4 VOTING (17)
Stewart, Chapter 5 (pp. 165-193)

PART III: CONGRESSIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Mon., Nov. 9** CONGRESS AND INTEREST GROUPS (18)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 13
- Wed., Nov. 11** **MODELING DAY II**
- Mon., Nov. 16-
Wed., Nov. 18** POLITICAL PARTIES IN CONGRESS (19 & 20)
Stewart, Chapter 7 (pp. 235-273)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 6
- Mon., Nov. 23** COMMITTEES IN CONGRESS (21)
Stewart, Chapter 8 (pp. 274-329)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 7
- Wed., Nov. 25** **NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**
- Mon., Nov. 30 -
Wed., Dec. 2** LAWMAKING (22 & 23)
Stewart, Chapter 9 (pp. 336-387)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapter 8
Assignment #5 Due Wed., Dec. 2
- Mon., Dec. 7** **MODELING DAY III**
- Wed., Dec. 9** CONGRESS, THE BUDGET PROCESS, AND THE BUREAUCRACY (24)
Davidson and Oleszek, Chapters 11 & 14
- Thurs. Dec. 17** **FINAL EXAM: 4:00pm – 5:50pm.**