Syllabus

This course is a graduate level survey of literature on the US Congress. Congress has almost certainly received more attention from political scientists than any other single institution. In many ways, the contemporary study of Congress has become a laboratory (or perhaps a playground?) for the most advanced theoretical and methodological approaches in the discipline. This is a literature that is inherently quantitative and has become bound up in rational choice theory and formal models in political science. Familiarity with advanced concepts and tools is more or less a prerequisite to engage this rich literature.

There will only be occasional lecturing. The best way to understand the difficult concepts in the congressional literature is by careful reading, writing summaries, and replication of findings. Seminars will be led and conducted by student discussants. All students will be responsible for the weekly readings, but discussants will be required to circulate summaries of the material including a critique of the the topic area. Discussants will lead class by presenting the articles and the key findings and then start the discussion with an assessment of strengths and weaknesses.

At the end of the semester each student should feel well-prepared for questions about the US Congress that might appear on a prelim exam.

Course Website

http://www.uwm.edu/~tofias/teach/gradcongresss

Texts Reccomended for Purchase


Additional Suggestions

Grading & Expectations

Seminar Papers – 25% Each student will serve as a discussant five times. The schedule will be coordinated by a lottery and draft at the first meeting.

The seminar papers should assess the state of the literature. Discussants will likely need to seek out additional references, at least glancing at the “also recommended” readings as a jumping off point to present a well-rounded evaluation. Discussants will then lead the presentation of material in-class. It is important for all of the discussants scheduled for a weekly session to coordinate and compose a somewhat coherent order to the seminar. An overhead and/or laptop with projector can be made available.

Seminar papers from each discussant are due Mondays at 10:45am emailed as PDF files. Papers will be distributed by discussants to the class as hard copies at the beginning of the seminar. Do not distribute PDF files to the rest of the class until after the weekly seminar meeting.

Discussants are especially encouraged to drop by the Monday office hours after submitting their papers in order to discuss the upcoming seminar.

Seminar Participation – 15% The best grades will be given to students who are the most active participants and come to class every week fully prepared to take part in the discussion.

Research Paper – 30% An original research paper related to an element of the course. You must use data. Sophistication and expectations will be based on each individual student’s standing in the graduate program. Research findings will also be featured during a short conference style presentation in class. Short proposals will be required. Additional details will be discussed during the semester.

Exam – 30% The final exam will be comprehensive and resemble a prelim exam question – or three. Following the UWM Final Exam Schedule, the final exam will be December 22nd.

Schedule & Readings

1 An Introduction

First Meeting, no readings.

Recommended


2 Theoretical Foundations


Also Recommended


3 Legislative Organization and Majorities


Paper prepared for presentation at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science
Association, Washington, DC, September 2-5.

Also Recommended

of the Confederation Congress and the Survival of the Federal Congress Tell Us About the New
Institutionalism” in Brady, David W. and Mathew D. McCubbins. Party, Process, and Political


mittees: An Informational Rationale for Restrictive Amendment Procedures.” Journal of Law,

61(3):832-840.


Lee, Frances E. 1998. “Representation and Public Policy: The Consequences of Senate Apportion-

Lee, Frances E. 2000. “Senate Representation and Coalition Building in Distributive Politics.”
American Political Science Review 94:59-72.

4 Legislative Organization and Party

House: The Role of the Majority and Minority Parties in Conditional Party Government.” In
Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era, eds. Jon Bond and Richard

University Press.


Also Recommended

Aldrich, John H. 1995. Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in

Implications for Theories of Congressional Politics.” Political Science Quarterly 112(4):541-567.

Congress Reconsidered, 7th edition, eds. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer. Washing-
ton, DC: CQ Press.


## 5 The Committee System


**Also Recommended**


6 Casting Roll Call Votes


Also Recommended


7 Measuring Roll Call Votes


Also Recommended


Poole, Keith and Howard Rosenthal. 1985. “A Spatial Model for Legislative Roll Call Analysis.”


8 Elections with Candidates and Voters


Also Recommended


9 Districting & Money


Also Recommended


Green, Donald P. and Jonathan S. Krasno. 1988. “Salvation for the Spendthrift Incumbent:


10 Careers & Leaders


Also Recommended


**11 Representation & Responsiveness**


**Also Recommended**


12 Lawmaking, the Senate, and Bicameralism


Also Recommended


13 Research Presentations


University Policies & Resources

More information about university policies relating to academic issues can be found online: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf).

UWM has a writing center. Take advantage of it: [http://www.writingcenter.uwm.edu](http://www.writingcenter.uwm.edu).