

## Pol330: The U.S. Congress

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Course URL: <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol330-f02>

**Course Description:** The popular picture of large social institutions might be faceless, static organizations, inscrutable to outside observers. In fact, social institutions are, in some degree or another, constantly changing in response to their environment. This course will examine the *development and current state of America's preeminent political institution: the U.S. Congress*. I will talk about the “environment” of Congress in two main ways: external (mainly electoral) and internal (institutional procedures and inertia). The carriers of Congressional change turn out to be, not surprisingly, the members. Since Congress makes its own rules, we will talk about the *institution* of Congress as a product of the *goals and motivations* of the members. These two views of Congress—a 200 year old institution and a noisy aggregate of members—are the centerpiece of this course.

Our second theme this semester is *politics vs. policy*. I would like to tell you that the most efficient and most effective solutions to our social ills are embodied in the legislation that passes Congress, but that is often not the case. In fact, one can argue that political feasibility is just as important as the inherent worth of a particular policy proposal. Nothing can be “good” policy which has no chance of passing. This tension, between politics and policy, is one of the enduring features (and frustrations!) of Congress.

We examine Congress in four steps. First, we look at how members get to Congress and what our expectations are once they get there. What is the “job” of a member of Congress? We then turn to Congressional decision-making, first in committees, then on the floor. Who matters and how are decisions *really* made? Third, we trace changes in Congress in the 1980's, especially the seismic shifts after the 1994 Republican revolution. These changes, many actually beginning to be seen in the late 1970s, played themselves out through the Reagan and Clinton administrations, and explain a lot about the discontent that the public feels with Congress today. Thus our final question: can Congress govern, and if not, what are the alternatives?

The requirements for this class are

- Short assignments and class participation (25%)
- Two short research papers (7 page strict limit) (40%)
- A take home guided essay final (open book)(35%)

The dates for the assignments are noted on the syllabus. The deadlines on the papers and examinations are strict.

The following books are on available for purchase at the Reed College bookstore. There are multiple copies of each in library reserve:

- Birnbaum and Murray. *Showdown at Gucci Gulch*
- Deering and Smith. *Committees in Congress 3rd Ed.*
- Dodd and Oppenheimer. *Congress Reconsidered, 7th Edition*
- Jacobson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections 5th Edition*
- Hibbing and Theiss-Morse. *Congress as Public Enemy.*
- Sinclair. *Unorthodox Lawmaking*

Oleszek *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process* is recommended if you believe that you do not have sufficient background in Congressional procedures. There are multiple copies of this book at library reserve.

There are also reserve readings at the library (paper and e-reserve). There is one reading from the JSTOR system (<http://www.jstor.org>)—you should familiarize yourself with this invaluable resource.

**Current Events Requirement:** There is an important *current events* focus to this course. This will be reflected in the readings, in class discussion, and in your written assignments. I don't expect you all to become current events junkies. However, one of the most interesting aspects of Congress is its dynamic nature—membership, procedures, and policies are constantly in flux. What I hope to do is help you move beyond the typical journalistic approach to current events, showing you how scholarly approaches can help you understand the day to day workings of the institution. At the end, I hope this helps you become better citizens: better critics, better voters, and more nuanced observers of our political system.

Consequently, each of you will be required, on average once a week, to provide the rest of a class members an online link (via email) to a story drawn from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Roll Call*, *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Digest*, or other Washington oriented journal, magazine, or website. The library may also be continuing to receive the *Washington Post Weekly* and does receive *CQ Weekly*. More information on this assignment will be given in class.

You may find these sources useful for learning about Congress:

- *Congressional Quarterly's Weekly Digest* is **the** comprehensive guide to Congress. They have a very good website (<http://oncongress.cq.com>) but Reed does not subscribe. However, a moderately useful substitute is available by going here: <http://libraryip.cq.com/cqweekly>.
- Lexis-Nexus *Congressional Universe* is the most useful electronic guide to Congress available at Reed. *You will need to learn how to use this database.*
- *The Almanac of American Politics* is a reference guide of sorts to members of Congress. This is at the reserve desk.
- *Roll Call* the “daily newspaper” of Congress. It's online site is pretty good: <http://www.rollcall.com>
- *National Journal* a very influential Washington weekly, widely read on the Hill, in the executive branch, and among interest groups and lobbyists.
- *Project Vote Smart* (<http://www.vote-smart.org>) provides a wealth of information on congressional candidates. Also see <http://www.opensecrets.org>.
- *U.S. House and Senate* have their own websites that are very informative. They URL's are obvious: <http://www.house.gov> and <http://www.senate.gov>.

#### *Course Plan*

All readings are required, *except* readings from Oleszek. Dodd means from the Dodd and Oppenheimer reading.

1. Sept 6–Sept 9 ..... *The Founders Intentions*
  - *The Federalist Papers* (Interests) 47, 51, (House) 52-53, 55-57, (Senate) 62-63. Available online at the Library of Congress: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html>.
  - Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* p. 102-131 “The principle of distinction” (outside my office)
  - Conference Assignment (Monday) Go to *The Almanac of American Politics* and photocopy the page that describes your member of Congress. Be ready to discuss his performance as a representative of your district's interests in class. Turn in this photocopy.
2. Sept 11 ..... *No Class: Gronke Flies Today??*
3. Sept 13 ..... *A Spatial Analysis of the Founders' Design*
  - Charles Stewart III, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 2 “The Constitutional Origins of Congress” (outside my office)
4. Sept 16-Sept 18 ..... *Congress Today*
  - Barbara Sinclair “The New World of U.S. Senators” (Dodd)
  - Dodd and Oppenheimer, “A House Divided: The Struggle for Partisan Control” (Dodd)

- Hibbing and Smith, “What the American Public Wants Congress to Be” (Dodd)
  - Oleszek, Chs. 1-2 (book on reserve) (optional)
5. Sept 20–23..... *Introduction to Congressional Procedures*
- Sinclair, Chs. 1-4
  - Conference Assignment: Each student must bring in an article (photocopy, clipping, or on-line printout) describing a bill currently under consideration in Congress. Be ready to discuss the content of the bill and where it stands in the legislative process on Friday. Turn in the clipping in class.
6. Sept 25–Sept 27..... *Congressional Elections I: Careers, Context, and Redistricting*
- Jacobson, Chs. 1-2.
  - Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 4: “The Choices Candidates Make: Running for Office” (outside my office or reserve)
  - David Canon, *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*, Ch. 1 “Black Interests, Differences, Commonality, and Representation” (outside my office or reserve)
  - Conference assignment: select one state and collect information on the state of redistricting in that state. Provide a brief typed one-page summary to be turned in after class.
7. Sept 30–Oct 2..... *Congressional Elections II: Campaigning, Casework, Money*
- Jacobson Chs. 3-4
  - Herrnson, “The Money Maze: Financing Congressional Elections” (Dodd)
  - Richard Fenno, “U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration” (JSTOR)
8. Oct 4..... *Conference Discussion: The Midterm Election*
- Conference assignment: Make a prediction of the outcome of the midterm elections. Provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to support your position. Use the formula that Gronke will provide in class, as well as the online resources listed at the top. Turn in a one page writeup. You may work in groups of up to two on this assignment.
9. Oct 7–Oct 9..... *Congressional Elections III: Voter Choice, Incumbency Advantage*
- Jacobson, Chs. 5-6
  - Erikson and Wright, “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections” (Dodd)
  - Cooperman and Oppenheimer, “The Gender Gap in the House of Representatives” (Dodd)
  - Fiorina, “Keystone Reconsidered” (Dodd)
10. Oct 11..... *Conference Discussion: Your Member’s Electoral History*
- Conference assignment: Examine a sitting Senator or a House member from your chosen state and examine their two most recent campaigns. How much money did they raise and from where? What percentage of the vote did they receive? You may find <http://www.opensecrets.org>, <http://www.fec.gov>, Project Vote Smart, and the *Almanac of American Politics* useful sources. Type up a brief report (one page) and turn it in.
11. Oct 14–Oct 16..... *Consequences of the Congressional Elections System*
- Jacobson, Chs. 7–8
  - Sinclair, Ch. 6
  - Fiorina, “Keystone Reconsidered” (Dodd)
  - Dodd and Oppenheimer, “Congress and the Emerging Order: Assessing the 2000 Elections.” (Dodd)

12. Oct 18..... *No Class Session*
- **First Paper Assignment Due: Member Evaluation**
13. Oct 28-30..... *Committees in Congress I: Theories*
- Deering and Smith, Ch. 1
  - Groseclose and King, “Committee Theories Reconsidered” (Dodd)
14. Nov 1..... *Introduction to Congressional Research: Tracking Legislation in Congress*
- Special meeting in library. Instructor provided handouts.
15. Nov 4..... *History of the Committee System*
- Canon and Stewart, “The Evolution of the Committee System in Congress” (Dodd)
  - Deering and Smith, Ch. 2
16. Nov 6–8..... *Members and Committees*
- November 5th is election day! Get out and vote!
  - Deering and Smith, Chs. 3-5
  - Evans, “Committees, Leaders, and Message Politics” (Dodd)
  - Be ready to discuss the outcomes of the midterm elections
17. Nov 11..... *Conference Discussion: Policy in Congress*
- Conference Assignment: Choose a policy area that you are interested in. Do a brief review on Congressional Universe about recent congressional activities in this area. Identify a recent piece of legislation that you would like to report on. Bring a brief one page printout or write up to class to turn in.
18. Nov 13–Nov 15..... *Congressional Legislation in Action I*
- Sinclair, Chs. 7-12
  - Oleszek, Chs. 5-8
19. Nov 18..... *Congressional Legislation in Action II: Budget Policy*
- Sinclair, Chs. 5, 11
  - Oleszek, Ch. 3
20. Nov 20–Nov 22..... *Congressional Legislation in Action III: The 1986 Tax Reform Act*
- Birnbaum and Birnbaum, complete book
21. Nov 25..... *Public Attitudes Towards Congress*
- Hibbing and Theiss Morse, Chs. 1-4
22. Nov 26 (special evening meeting)..... *Conference Discussion: Legislative Timelines*
- Conference Assignment: Make a one page timeline for your chosen piece of legislation (from introduction, committee consideration, floor consideration, to passage). Bring this to class.
23. December 2–4..... *Who Likes Congress and Why?*
- Hibbing and Theiss Morse, Chs. 4-8 (read over break)
24. December 6–9..... *Understanding a Changing Institution*
- Cooper, “The Twentieth Century Congress” (Dodd)

- Dodd, “Re-Envisioning Congress: Theoretical Perspectives on Congressional Change.”
- Sinclair, Ch. 12
- Review Jacobson, Ch. 8
- **Second Paper Assignment Due Monday: Congressional Legislative Report**

25. December 11 ..... *Conclusions*

- Distribution of Final Essay Assignment
- Final discussion