

Pol330: The U.S. Congress

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Course URL: <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol330-f03>

Course Description: The popular picture of large political institutions might be faceless, static organizations, inscrutable to outside observers. In fact, political 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 (contextual and electoral) and internal (institutional rules and procedures). 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.

A second theme of the semester is *politics vs. policy*. I would like to tell you that the most efficient and 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 democratic government.

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 1990'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 research papers (40%)
- A take home 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* (great book)
- Deering and Smith. *Committees in Congress 3rd Ed.* (recommended, good on facts but a dry book overall)
- Dodd and Oppenheimer. *Congress Reconsidered, 7th Edition* (recommended; we read nine chapters, but there are five copies at reserve)
- Jacobson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections 5th Edition* (Important for your first research paper)
- Hibbing and Theiss-Morse. *Congress as Public Enemy*.
- Sinclair. *Unorthodox Lawmaking* (Important for your second research paper)
- *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*. You need to buy a subscription to this publication. A copy will also be made available in the newspaper room at the library.

There are also reserve readings at the library (paper and e-reserve). There will be readings 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 political 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, showing you how scholarly approaches can help you understand the day to day workings of Congress. In the end, I hope this helps you become better citizens: better critics, better voters, and more nuanced observers of our political system.

We will regularly discuss a story from the *Washington Post Weekly* or another prominent political event that implicates Congress. Participation in these discussions is an important part of the course.

You may find these sources useful for learning about Congress:

- *National Journal Policy Central*: the library subscribes to this extensive database of information about national politics and policy. It is probably the most useful general guide available. Check out the email updates service if you like to receive daily politics news in your email box. Don't miss "Ad Spotlight," it is hilarious.
- Lexis-Nexis's *Congressional Universe* is the most useful electronic guide to Congress available at Reed. This is a must-learn; Dena Hutto will show you how to use this.
- *Congressional Quarterly's Weekly Digest* is **the** comprehensive guide to Congress. You will certainly use their printed materials in your research. They have a very good website (<http://oncongress.cq.com>) but Reed does not subscribe. However, a moderately useful substitute is available here: <http://libraryip.cq.com/cqweekly>.
- *The Almanac of American Politics* is a guide to members of Congress.
- *Roll Call* the "daily newspaper" of Congress. It's online site is pretty good: <http://www.rollcall.com>. Another similar source is *The Hill*, a biweekly; their website is <http://www.thehill.com>.
- *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. Their URL's are obvious: <http://www.house.gov> and <http://www.senate.gov>.

Course Plan

All readings are required. "Dodd" refers to the Dodd and Oppenheimer reader.

1. Sept 2–Sept 4 *The Founders Intentions*
 - Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* p. 102-131 "The principle of distinction"
 - *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>.
 - Charles Stewart III, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 2 "The Constitutional Origins of Congress"
2. Sept 9 *Introduction to Congressional Procedures*
 - Sinclair, Chs. 1-4
 - Recommended: Oleszek, *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*. Ch. 1
3. Sept. 11 *Congress Through History*
 - Stewart, Charles. *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 3
 - Caro, Robert. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* "The Seniority System and the South."

- *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. Turn in the clipping in class.
4. Sept. 16 *Class To Be Rescheduled*
- This class will be rescheduled later this month. We will meet Dena Hutto in the Library for a required library research session.
 - Gronke will be at the National Defense University (Washington DC) this day for a conference on the All-Volunteer army.
5. 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)
 - Fleisher and Bond, “Polarized Politics: Does it Matter?” In *Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era.*
6. Sept 23–Sept 25 *Congressional Elections I: Careers, Context, and Representation*
- Jacobson, Chs. 1-2.
 - Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 4: “The Choices Candidates Make: Running for Office” (outside my office or reserve)
 - Richard Fenno. “U.S. House Members in their Constituencies: An Exploration.” (JSTOR)
 - Recommended: Richard Fenno, *Home Style*
 - *Conference Assignment (Thursday)* Go to *The Almanac of American Politics* or *Politics in America* and photocopy the pages that describe a member of Congress whom you’d be interested in studying this semester. Be ready to discuss their role orientation in class. Turn in this photocopy.
7. Sept 30–Oct 2 *Congressional Elections II: Campaigning, Casework, Money*
- Jacobson Chs. 3-4
 - Herrnson, “The Money Maze: Financing Congressional Elections” (Dodd)
 - Kahn and Kenny. *The Spectacle of US Senate Elections*. Chs. 3–4.
 - Gronke handouts on campaign spending in 2002, new campaign finance laws
 - *Conference assignment*: Examine your House member’s 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.
8. 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)
 - Gronke, Paul. *The Electorate, the Campaign, and the Office*. Ch. 6
9. Oct 14–Oct 16 *Consequences of the Congressional Elections System*
- Jacobson, Chs. 7–8
 - Jacobson, “Party Polarization in National Politics: The Electoral Connection.” In Bond and Fleisher, *Polarized Politics*.
 - Fiorina, “Keystone Reconsidered” (Dodd)
 - **First Paper Due by Friday**

10. Oct 21–Oct 23..... *Fall Break*
11. Oct 28 *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*
- David Canon, *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*, Ch. 1 “Black Interests, Differences, Commonality, and Representation” (outside my office or reserve)
 - Lublin, David. *The Paradox of Representation*. Selections.
12. Oct 30..... *Forecasting 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.
13. Nov 4–6 *Committees in Congress I: Theories*
- Deering and Smith, Ch. 1–2
 - Krehbiel, Keith. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ch. 3 (61-101)
 - Aldrich and Rohde, “The Consequences of Party Organization in the House: The Role of the Majority and Minority Parties in Conditional Party Government.” In Bond and Fleisher, *Polarized Politics*.
 - Groseclose and King, “Committee Theories Reconsidered” (Dodd)
14. Nov 11–13 *Members and Committees*
- Deering and Smith, Chs. 3-5
 - King, David. *Turf Wars* (selections on reserve)
 - 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.
15. Nov 18–25..... *Congressional Legislation in Action*
- Sinclair, Chs. 7-12
 - 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 on Thursday.
 - Birnbaum and Birnbaum, entire book
16. December 2–4 *Who Likes Congress and Why?*
- Hibbing and Theiss Morse, entire book
17. December 9 *Congress and the Future*
- H.W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*, Chs. 1, 2, 7
 - Cooper, “The Twentieth Century Congress” (Dodd)
 - **Second Paper Assignment Due Tuesday: Congressional Legislative Report**