

Pol330: The U.S. Congress

Paul Gronke

Phone: 517-7393

Office Hours: Thursday 9-11 am and by appt

205A Eliot Hall

email: gronke@reed.edu

Course URL: <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol330-s05>

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 three parts. 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, focusing on the current debate over partisanship in Congress. Why is Congress organized along partisan grounds? Do the activities of committees, the leadership, and other institutions help us identify the importance of parties? Ultimately, we want to ask: who decides, and how are decisions made? Third, we trace changes in Congress in the 1990's, especially the seismic shifts after the 1994 Republican revolution. These changes, many of which actually started in the late 1970s, played themselves out through the Reagan and Clinton administrations, and explain a lot about the Congress today. This closes the course with a question: can Congress govern and how does Congress govern?

The requirements for this class are

- Short assignments, class participation, oral presentation (25%)
- Two research papers (40%)
- A take home essay final (open book)(35%)

The dates for the assignments are noted on the syllabus. Class assignments are given far ahead of time; therefore, 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:

- Baker, Ross. *House and Senate*. A nice, readable book comparing the two chambers.
- Birnbaum and Murray. *Showdown at Gucci Gulch* (old but great book)
- Dodd and Oppenheimer. *Congress Reconsidered, 8th Edition* (make sure you get the newest edition; there is only one copy of this on reserve)
- Jacobson. *The Politics of Congressional Elections 5th Edition* (Important for your first research paper)
- Sinclair. *Unorthodox Lawmaking* (Important for your second research paper)

There are also reserve readings available from the professor. The method of distribution will be determined in class; most likely, we will rely on the honor system. Some 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: its membership, procedures, and policies are constantly in flux. What I hope to do is help you move beyond the typical journalistic approach, showing 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 stories relevant to Congress. The best way to keep this going is for all of you to read a quality daily newspaper such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, watch CSPAN, or follow events via web sources. The best web source is the *National Journal's* website. Participation in these discussions is an important part of the course. If it seems like you are not keeping connected to current events, you will not do as well in the course.

You may find these sources useful for learning about Congress:

- A research guide for this course is maintained at the course website. A library research guide for this course exists here: <http://www.library.reed.edu/instruction/politicalscience/03fpol330/>
- *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 printed guide to members of Congress.
- *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. Jan 25–Jan 27 *The Founders Intentions*
 - *The Federalist Papers* 10, 51–53, 57, 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"
 - Charles Stewart III, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 2 "The Constitutional Origins of Congress"
 - Baker, Ross. *House and Senate*, Ch. 1
2. Feb 1 *Introduction to Congressional Procedures*
 - Sinclair, Chs. 1-4
 - Gronke handouts on congressional procedures
3. Feb 3–Feb 8 *Introduction to Spatial Modeling and Voting Theory*
 - Dixit and Skeath, *Games of Strategy*, Ch. 15
 - Poole and Rosenthal. *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting*. Chs. 2–4.

- Jenkins, Jeffrey. Jeffrey Jenkins. “Examining the Bonding Effects of Party: A Comparative Analysis of Roll-Call Voting in the U.S. and Confederate Houses”. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 4. (Oct., 1999), pp. 1144-1165. Available at JSTOR.
4. Feb 10 *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.”
 5. Feb 15 *Congressional Research Session*
 - We will meet Dena Hutto in the Library for a required library research session. This session is vital for your final research paper.
 6. Feb 17 *Congress Today*
 - Dodd Part 1 (all chapters)
 - Conference Assignment: Each student must bring in an article (photocopy, clipping, or on-line printout) describing legislation currently under consideration in Congress. Be ready to discuss the content of the bill, the issues at stake, and where it stands in the legislative process. Turn in the clipping in class.
 7. Feb 22–Feb 24 *Congressional Elections I: Careers, Context, and Representation*
 - Jacobson, Chs. 1-2.
 - Baker Chs. 4.
 - Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 4: “The Choices Candidates Make: Running for Office”
 - Richard Fenno. “U.S. House Members in their Constituencies: An Exploration.” (JSTOR)
 - 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 them in class. Turn in this photocopy.
 8. Mar 1–Mar 3 *Congressional Elections II: Campaigning, Casework, Money*
 - Jacobson Chs. 3-4
 - Herrnson, “The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act and Congressional Elections” (Dodd)
 - Kahn and Kenny. *The Spectacle of US Senate Elections*. Chs. 3–4.
 - Conference assignment: Examine your House or Senate member’s two most recent campaigns. Make sure your report includes how much money they raised and how much from individual contributions, PACs, and who their three largest donors were. What percentage of the vote did they receive this time? How much last time? Is the member safe or at risk? 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-two page) and turn it in.
 9. Mar 8–Mar 10 *Congressional Elections III: Voter Choice, Incumbency Advantage*
 - Jacobson, Chs. 5-6
 - Erikson and Wright, “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections” (Dodd)
 - Oppenheimer, Bruce. “Deep Red and Blue Congressional Districts: The Causes and Consequences of Declining Party Competitiveness.” (Dodd)
 - Gronke, Paul. *The Electorate, the Campaign, and the Office*. Ch. 6 Available at <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol330-f03/11131-06.pdf>
 10. Mar 12-21 *Spring Break*
 11. Mar 22–Mar 24 *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**
12. Mar 29–Mar 31 *Parties, Procedures, and Congressional Action I: Theories*
- Deering and Smith, *Committees in Congress*, Ch. 1–2
 - Krehbiel, Keith. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ch. 3 (61-101)
 - Baker, *House and Senate* Ch. 3
 - 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*.
13. Apr 5–Apr 7 *Parties, Procedures, and Congressional Action II: Empirical Evidence*
- Deering and Smith, Chs. 3
 - King, David. *Turf Wars* (selections)
 - Dodd and Oppenheimer Part III (chapters 8–11)
 - Covington, Cary R. and Andrew Bargan. 2004. “Comparing Floor Dominated and Party Dominated Explanations of Policy Change in the House of Representatives.” *Journal of Politics* 66:4 (November 2004). PDF available from Gronke.
 - Conference Assignment: Identify a recently (last ten years) piece of passed legislation that you will write your second paper on. Produce a nicely formatted legislative timeline and bring this to class to turn in. Be ready to discuss the content of your legislation.
14. Apr 12 *Congressional Legislation in Action*
- Sinclair, Chs. 7-12
 - Birnbaum and Birnbaum, begin to read
15. Apr 14 *No Class: Midwest Political Science Association meeting*
- Makeup class at end of semester
16. Apr 19–21 *Congress and Public Policy*
- Dodd and Oppenheimer, Part IV (all chapters)
 - Birnbaum and Murray, be prepared to discuss this book on Thursday
17. April 26–April 28 *Congress and the Future*
- Cooper, “The Twentieth Century Congress” (Dodd)
 - Dodd, “Re-envisioning Congress” (skim only)
 - Baker, Chs. 5–7
 - **Final exam distributed in class**
18. *Special Meeting*
- Oral presentations of congressional legislative reports
 - **Second Paper Assignment Due Thursday: Congressional Legislative Report**