

## Pol330: The U.S. Congress

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Course URL: <http://www.reed.edu/~gronkep/pol330-s07>

**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

- Current events blurbs (25%)
- Papers (2) (50%)
- Short assignments and memoranda (25%)

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

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

- Dodd and Oppenheimer. *Congress Reconsidered, 8th Edition*. We read a number of chapters of this book but it should be possible to survive on the library copies. (make sure you get the newest edition)
- Jacobson, Gary. *The Politics of Congressional Elections 5th Edition* (Important for your first research paper) I have multiple copies of this book at the library, but it is sort of the bible of congressional elections research.
- Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein. *The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America*. A new book on Congress by two of the best known “inside the Beltway” observers of the institution.

- Mayhew, David. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. A classic statement of the basic motives of members of congress and congressional action. A really easy read.
- Sinclair, Barbara. *Unorthodox Lawmaking* (Important for your second research paper). A good summary book detailing congressional procedures, along with a series of interesting case studies.
- Stewart, Charles. *Analyzing Congress*. Never very successful as a textbook, this is a historical-institutional and formal theoretic book on Congress. We read almost all of it.

There are also reserve readings available from the professor and the reserve room. The method of distribution will be determined in class; most likely, we will rely on a combination of the the honor system and the library. Some readings from the JSTOR system (<http://www.jstor.org>).

**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 such as *The National Journal*. What I require is for everyone in the class to subscribe to the "politics" and "In Congress" feeds from the *Washington Post*. Just go to their website, register, and click on "E-mail newsletter selections." This will arrive as HTML-formatted email in your inbox. It is possible that we will discuss stories from these feeds daily, and every other *Wednesday* you will be required to email me a short (2-3 paragraph) "blurb" relating a story to a reading or readings from the course. It is important that I have these on Wednesday so I can prepare for class. **Please email these to [gronke.classes@gmail.com](mailto:gronke.classes@gmail.com).**

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 and “Stewart” to the Stewart book.

1. Jan 23–Jan 25 ..... *Introduction to the Analysis of Congress*
  - Charles Stewart III, *Analyzing Congress* Ch. 1, pg. 3-22, 43-48 (advanced students may read the section on multidimensional spatial analysis).
  - Problem set handed out and discussed on Thursday.
  - **Wednesday blurb:** Email me a 2-3 paragraph blurb discussing a story in the news, and attach the story link to the end of the blurb. Due by noon on Wednesday.
2. Jan 30–Feb 1 ..... *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”
  - **Problem Set 1 Due**
3. Feb 6–Feb 8 ..... *Historical Change in Congress*
  - Stewart, Charles. Chapter 3.
  - Poole and Rosenthal. *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting*. Chs. 2, 4.
  - Jenkins, Jeffrey. “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.
  - Caro, Robert. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* “The Seniority System and the South.”
  - Thursday presentation: the Voteview roll call analysis system. <http://voteview.com>.
  - **Wednesday blurb:** Email me a 2-3 paragraph blurb discussing a story in the news, and attach the story link to the end of the blurb. Due by noon on Wednesday.
4. Feb 13 ..... *Congress Today*
  - Sinclair, Barbara. Chs. 1–4.
  - Dodd and Oppenheimer, Chs. 1–3.
5. Feb 15 ..... *Introduction to Elections: the 2006 Midterm Shocker*
  - All articles listed below are from the December 2006 Issue of *The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics*. Available at <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol4/iss3>.
  - Steven Shier. “Frustrated Ambitions: The Bush Presidency and the 2006 Election.”
  - John J. Pitney. “The Midterm: What Political Science Should Ask Now.”
  - David Menefee-Libey. “Big Deal: The 2006 Midterm Election, the Progressive Project, and the Reagan-Bush Revolution.”
  - Klinkner and Schaller. “A Regional Analysis of the 2006 Midterms.”
  - Evans and Turner. “The New Democratic Majority in Congress: Preferences, Structure, and Bargaining.”

6. Feb 20–Feb 22 ..... *Congressional Elections I: Careers, Context, and Representation*
  - Jacobson, Chs. 1-2.
  - 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)
  - **Group Assignment(Thursday) and memorandum** Come to class prepared to give a 3 to 5 minute political introduction to one congressional district and its current member of Congress. Include a 3 page memorandum detailing what you found and turn in.
7. Feb 27 ..... *Congressional Elections II: Campaigning for Congress*
  - Jacobson Chs. 3-4
  - Handouts on 2006 election outcomes.
8. Mar 1 ..... *Congressional Elections III: Voter Choice*
  - Jacobson, Chs. 5-6
  - Stewart, Ch. 5
  - **Wednesday blurb** Due by noon on Wednesday.
9. Mar 6 ..... *Congressional Elections IV: Summing it all up*
  - Jacobson, Chs. 7
  - Stewart, Ch. 6
  - Erikson and Wright, “Voters, Candidates, and Issues in Congressional Elections.” Ch. 4 in Dodd and Oppenheimer.
  - Fiorina. “Keystone Reconsidered.” Ch. 7 in Dodd and Oppenheimer.
10. Mar 8 ..... *Reforming Congressional Elections*
  - Donovan, Todd and Shaun Bowler. *Reforming the Republic: Democratic Institutions for the New America*. Chs. 3–4.
  - **First paper due**
11. Mar 13-15 ..... *Spring Break*
12. Mar 20–Mar 22 ..... *From Elections to Congressional Action*
  - David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (whole book)
  - **Wednesday blurb:** Due by noon on Wednesday.
13. Mar 27–Mar 29 ..... *Parties, Procedures, and Congressional Action I: Theories*
  - Stewart, Chs. 7–8.
  - 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*.
  - **Group assignment and memorandum** Due Thursday. Analyze the past ten years data from <http://voteview.edu> for a particular state in the country. Write up a 3 page memorandum summarizing what you found, and be prepared to present in class.
14. Apr 3 ..... *Parties, Procedures, and Congressional Action II: Empirical Evidence*
  - Stewart, Ch. 9.

- Dodd and Oppenheimer 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.
15. Apr 4 **Note Wednesday Date**..... *Legislative Research Session*
- Meet with Dena Hutto to learn congressional research tools
  - **Group 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 a copy to class on Tuesday; turn in a copy to Gronke’s mailbox by mailbox by Monday at noon.
16. Apr 10-Apr 12..... *Congressional Legislation in Action*
- Sinclair, Chs. 7-12
  - **Thursday group presentation:** Be prepared to provide a 5-10 minute summary of the status of your legislation.
17. Apr 17..... *No Class*
- Makeup class this week or end of semester
18. Apr 19..... *Congressional Polarization*
- McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Chs. 1-2, 6.
  - **Wednesday blurb** Due by noon on Wednesday.
19. April 26–April 28..... *Congress and the Future*
- Cooper, “The Twentieth Century Congress” (Dodd)
  - Mann and Ornstein. *The Broken Branch*. (whole book)
  - **Thursday blurb:** provide a 3 page review and commentary on the Mann and Ornstein book in light of the outcome of the 2006 election and the new Congress.
20. End of semester ..... *Makeup class*
- Oral presentations of congressional legislative research reports
  - **Second Paper Due: Congressional Legislative Research Report**