

Introduction to Congressional Policy Making
Summer 2012 (Monday & Wednesday 6:30-9:30)
James Saturno
301-641-2436/202-707-2381
Office hours: Monday & Wednesday 5:00-6:00 or by appointment

“Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made.”

-- John Godfrey Saxe (1869; often attributed to Otto Von Bismarck)

“Politics is the art of the possible.”

-- Otto Von Bismarck (1867)

Course Description and Objectives

This course provides an introduction to the legislative process and the U.S. Congress. The impact of the institutional context shaped by congressional structure, rules, and practices on policy making will be discussed and analyzed, as well as the influence of other factors, such as constituents, elections, interest groups, and the bureaucracy. Students will develop a practical understanding of Congress through readings and written assignments which are designed to give an appreciation of the complexity of congressional decision-making. The course will be in lecture-discussion format.

Course objectives include developing:

- an understanding of congressional decision-making by examining the purpose and role of Congress in the American constitutional system, and how it is able (or not, as the case may be) to translate public preferences into public policy;
- an appreciation for the rules and practices of Congress for considering legislation, including such topics as: the role of committees; rules governing legislative action on the House and Senate floor (including special consideration concerning the impact of the budget process);
- knowledge of appropriate sources for further researching issues related to the legislative process as well as skills in writing and understanding legislative histories; and
- skills in oral discussion and presentation in areas where reasonable people can disagree based on differing views.

Course Format and Policies

Class will be conducted lecture/discussion format, meaning that students are expected to attend all classes, and that it is incumbent on each student to prepare and participate in discussions each week. Class discussions will raise questions and encourage thoughtful perspectives on that week's topic and readings. Throughout the course you will be expected to follow congressional actions while they are in session so that the class may

reflect on how these actions are influenced by the opportunities and obstacles presented by the rules of procedure. Excessive unexcused absences will be considered as a factor in the participation grade, along with the quality of participation.

All assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Where relevant, sources should use APSA format (in-text, parenthetical citations).

All assignments will be due on the dates indicated on the syllabus.

There will be two papers due during the course as indicated on the syllabus, approximately 5 pages each.

Papers that are turned in late will be marked down one letter grade for each class they are late.

There will be a take home mid-term exam; no make-up will be given.

The final will be comprehensive and given in the final class.

Required Readings

Oleszek, Walter. Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process. 8th Edition. Congressional Quarterly Press. 2010.

Sinclair, Barbara. Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress. 4th Edition. Congressional Quarterly Press. 2011.

Additional materials may be assigned to the class as the semester progresses.

Evaluation

Class participation 20%

Two papers 30% (15% each)

Take home mid-term exam 20% (covers Intro through Resolving Differences; 10 short answer questions plus 2 of 3 essays)

Final exam 30% (covers entire term, but with an emphasis on the second half of the course; 10 short answer questions plus 2 of 3 essays)

Class Schedule

6/3 Overview of the syllabus and course expectations

6/5 The Constitution and the Role of Congress

Readings: Oleszek, Chapter 1; Sinclair, Chapter 1

6/10 The Role of Committees in the Legislative Process

Readings: Oleszek, Chapter 3

6/12 The House and the Legislative Process
Readings: Oleszek, Chapters 4-5; Sinclair, Chapter 2

first short paper due (pick one):

a) View or attend a congressional hearing on any subject and write a summary of what happens. Include *your impressions* of how Members interact with witnesses and with each other, the utility of having hearings, and their role in the legislative process.

b) Explain how the House and Senate refer legislation to committees; compare and contrast how the two chambers work, identifying strengths and weakness of each approach.

6/17 The Senate and the Legislative Process
Readings: Oleszek, Chapters 6-7; Sinclair, Chapter 3

6/19 Resolving Differences Between the House and Senate
Readings: Oleszek, Chapter 8; Sinclair Chapter 4

6/24 The House and Senate Compared

6/26 The Budget Process (Part 1)
Readings: Oleszek, Chapter 2; Sinclair, Chapter 5
Mid-term exam handed out

7/1 The Budget Process (Part 2)
Mid-term exam due

7/3 no class

7/8 Review of the Mid-term exam

7/10 Congressional Leadership & Managing the House and Senate

7/15 Congress and Change
Readings: Sinclair, Chapter 6

7/17 Congress and the Executive Branch

7/22 Congress and the Influence of Elections and Interest Groups

7/24 Putting it all together / Case studies I
Readings: Sinclair, Chapters 7, 8, 9

Second paper due (pick one):

- a) Is congressional leadership a more or less difficult task than it was in the 70s?
- b) Is the budget process broken?

7/29 Putting it all together / Case studies II

7/31 Course Review

8/5 Final Exam