Legislative Institutions
(PS 9170)
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Objectives
The primary purposes of this course are two: (1) to prepare graduate students for their comprehensive examinations by exposing them to the wide range of literature on the U. S. Congress and (2) to encourage students to begin developing their own research agendas by familiarizing them with the numerous methodological approaches to be found in legislative studies. Using a seminar format, we will read from and critique both seminal and — especially — recent works in the field. Substantive topics will include elections, internal institutional dynamics (e.g., elections, voting behavior, committee and subcommittee systems, parties and leadership), and interbranch interactions (e.g., oversight, presidential leadership, Congress and interest groups). The methodological approaches we will examine over the course of the semester are eclectic and include participant observation, rational choice modeling, the "new institutionalism", historical (and some comparative) analysis, and empirical behavioralism.

Required Readings
You are not required to purchase any textbooks for this course. The readings — which are numerous — are either journal articles (that we will all read) or books (that you will read and report on individually ... see below). Many of the journal articles are available via on-line databases (such as www.jstor.org or Ellis Library’s electronic journal site) that you may access through any on-campus computer. (Links to a number of electronic journals may be found at: http://mulibraries.1cate.com/). More recent articles (as well as some older pieces) may be available only in hard copy format at Ellis Library. Most of the books assigned for individual reports are available through Ellis Library. If you are unable to secure a book through the library, I may be able to lend you my personal copy.

Since it is impossible to conduct a graduate seminar with students who are unprepared, I expect everyone to have completed all the assigned readings prior to the beginning of class each week. Should it be necessary, I am prepared to enforce this expectation with ruthless grading and unannounced quizzes. Needless to say, both attendance and prompt arrival for the beginning of class are assumed.

Requirements
You will be evaluated based on your performance in three areas, which will each count for roughly one-third of the final course grade: seminar participation, a series of book critiques, and a final research project.

Since this class is a seminar, participation in classroom discussion is essential. As noted above, I expect students to have completed all of the assigned readings before the start of each class, and to be prepared to summarize, discuss, and critique them. At the end of the semester I will evaluate the quantity and quality of each student's contributions to seminar discussions.

Over the course of the semester, each student will prepare a series of book critiques (precise numbers and assignments to be determined in class). These critiques will consist of two parts — oral and written. We will begin each class meeting with the responsible students summarizing the books assigned for that
week (approximately five to ten minutes each). Within a week of each presentation, students will submit copies of their written critiques to me and to their colleagues. These critiques should be three to five pages in length, typed, and double-spaced. (I will provide you with an example – one such critique that I did as a graduate student – that you may use as a guide.)

The final project for this class is to be a major research paper. Topics should be of interest to the individual students and developed in consultation with me ... so start early. These papers should represent an effort at original research, involving either the gathering of new data or the reinterpretation of previous findings, and striving to make an original contribution to the literature on the subject. Papers should be approximately 20 to 30 pages in length (typed and double-spaced), and use standard APSA reference, footnote, and bibliographic styles. Paper will be graded on both style and substance. The standard for an A paper is that — with modest revisions — it is suitable for presentation at a professional conference and submission to a professional journal. The last class meeting will be devoted to student presentations of their research projects. Final drafts are due to me by Tuesday, May 8th. Late papers will be accepted and "incomplete" grades given only under unusual circumstances.

Nota Bene
Let me remind you that this is a graduate-level class. As such, we will not devote much time to reviewing the basic organization or operations of the Congress, since I assume that each student already has a reasonably good working knowledge of such fundamental facts. Those who need to reacquaint themselves with the Congress should read (or reread) an elementary undergraduate text during the first few weeks of the semester. I would recommend:


CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK I — January 16th — ADMINISTRIVIA and INTRODUCTION

WEEK II — January 23rd — CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS I

Articles:


**Book Critiques:**


WEEK III — January 30th — CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS II

**Articles:**


**Book Critiques:**


**WEEK IV — February 6th — ELECTORAL CONNECTION**

**Articles:**


**Book Critiques:**


**WEEK V — February 13th — CONGRESSIONAL CAREERS**

**Articles:**


**Book Critiques:**


WEEK VI — February 20th — CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES I

Articles:

Book Critiques:

WEEK VII — February 27th — CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES II

Articles:

**Book Critiques:**

**WEEK VIII — March 6th — CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP I**

**Articles:**

**Book Critiques:**
WEEK IX — March 13th — CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP II

Articles:

Book Critiques:

WEEK X — March 20th — VOTING BEHAVIOR

Articles:


Talbert, J. C. and M. Potoski. 2002. “Setting the Legislative Agenda: Dimensional Structure of Bill Sponsorship and Floor Voting.” *JOP*


**Book Critiques:**


**WEEK XI — March 27 — No Class: Spring Break**

**WEEK XII — April 3rd — CONGRESS AND ORGANIZED INTERESTS**

**Articles:**


Book Critiques:

WEEK XIII — April 10th — CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT

Articles:

Book Critiques:
WEEK XIV — April 17th — **CONGRESS AND THE BUREAUCRACY**

**Articles:**

**Book Critiques:**

WEEK XV — April 24th — **Catch Up and Review**

WEEK XVI — May 1st — **STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS**