Exploring the Historical Congress: A Research Experience
POLI 399/POLI 498

The U.S. Congress underwent a remarkable transformation between the mid-19th and the early 20th centuries. House members shifted from an electoral process grounded in “rotation in office” to professional “careerism” built upon accruing seniority in the chamber. The electoral landscape witnessed major reforms including the Australian (secret) ballot, the widespread adoption of party primaries, and the introduction of direct election of senators. Within the two chambers, party leadership was cemented and the daily job of serving in Congress changed in fundamental ways, most notably in the legislative process. In what ways did this multitude of forces shape the institution, particularly in how it handled its essential function of lawmaking?

In the spring of 2013, a research experience involving students interested in learning more about this era and getting involved in basic social science research will be offered. A small cohort of researchers will meet about once per week to discuss scholarly work on congressional development and history as well as to collaborate and be mentored in data collection and research development. Students who complete the course will advance their understanding of the U.S. Congress, apply the insights of social science research to American politics, participate in a data collection enterprise on historical legislation, and develop their own research proposal on a topic of their choice related to legislative politics.

Students should expect to be able to meet the following commitments:

- 1 one-hour meeting per week
- 5 hours per week (average) in data collection and/or analysis
- Gradual development of research proposal over the course of the semester

To learn more or to sign up, please contact Professor Charles Finocchiaro, Department of Political Science, at finocchi@mailbox.sc.edu

Students approved for the project will need to complete an Undergraduate Independent Study Contract in consultation with Prof. Finocchiaro. Two options are available: an Independent Study (POLI 399) or Research Experience (POLI 498). The latter may be particularly attractive to students considering a B.A. with Distinction. POLI 499 (Senior Thesis) may be offered as well in particular circumstances.