POLI 763: Legislative Process and Behavior

Spring 2017
Tuesdays 11:40am–2:25pm
335 Gambrell Hall
University of South Carolina

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Course Description: This course is a research seminar on the U.S. Congress. As such, we will be reading contemporary scholarly work, along with some “classics,” on the electoral and institutional arenas of congressional behavior and organization. Some of the topics to be covered include: representation, elections, parties, committees, rules and procedures, roll-call voting, House-Senate comparisons and relations, and institutional development and organization. This course is integral in the field of American politics, and will be beneficial to students with interests in comparative politics and political institutions more broadly.

Learning Outcomes: Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate the ability to:

- identify and describe the key theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of Congress
- apply and evaluate theories and evidence relating to legislative politics
- actively and deeply participate in class discussion
- identify unresolved questions in the literature
- produce an original piece of scholarly research that contributes to existing knowledge of congressional politics.

Prerequisite(s): While there are no formal prerequisites for this course, it is tailored for Ph.D. students in political science. Students will benefit from having taken POLI 760, the proseminar in American politics, in a previous semester. I do not recommend that M.A.-level students take this course, although I would be happy to discuss it as an option under certain circumstances.

Credit Hours: 3

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 3:30-4:30pm and by appointment.

Course Materials: Required readings for the course will be drawn primarily from selected books and numerous journal articles. Books should be purchased in advance, and all of the articles are available either online via the USC Libraries’ electronic journal subscriptions (including JSTOR) or posted on Blackboard. When referring to the Course Schedule, materials made available on Blackboard are identified by a † while books on reserve in the Thomas Cooper Library are identified by a ‡. Students should bring all required readings with them to class on the day they are assigned.

Required Books:


**Recommended Books:**


**Expectations and Evaluation**

Because this is a Ph.D.-level research seminar and not a lecture-oriented course, the success of the class will depend heavily on the full participation of each student. Broadly speaking, students will be expected to do all the required reading prior to each scheduled meeting and to participate actively and thoughtfully in class discussion. Additionally, one or more students will be assigned the task of leading discussion for particular weeks or topics, and in that case are expected to read well beyond the requirements (the recommended readings in the course schedule are a good starting point).

You have now moved past the “consumer” stage of your academic career and into the phase in which your interaction with what you read takes on the form of a dialogue as you become a “producer” of knowledge. This requires reading and writing much more than you may be accustomed to doing. As such, I cannot stress enough how important it will be to keep on schedule, to constructively give and receive criticism, to take intellectual risks, and to persevere. What that means for this class is that you should not hesitate to engage deeply in discussion, start thinking right now about your research paper, and begin reading beyond the syllabus.

Grades for the course will be comprised of the following three components:
1. **Class participation and discussion (25%)**
   As described above, it is imperative that every student attend each class session prepared to be an active participant in discussion. Both the quantity and the quality of comments are important, including leading discussion on the days that correspond with submission of a critical review. Let me emphasize that you will not earn higher than a B+ in this course unless you are a frequent, well-prepared, and thoughtful participant in class discussion. This also means that you should be prepared to lead discussion on any article when called upon to do so, even if it is not your “assigned” week.

2. **Homework (5%)**
   At least one brief homework assignment, covering the basic tools and logic of spatial modeling and formal theory, will be due over the course of the semester.

3. **Critical Reviews (30%)**
   Students will be required to complete at least two critical reviews of the literature assigned for specific weeks. These papers need not be excessively long (5-7 pages is often adequate), but they should *concisely* synthesize the theory, methods, and findings and — most importantly, and at greater length — critique the literature for that particular week. More effort and attention should be focused on analysis and criticism and comparatively less on summarization; the best reviews will go beyond the required readings for the week. In addition to the critical reviews, students may be asked to submit smaller written assignments and/or brief reactions to the readings. More details on these assignments will be provided separately.

4. **Research paper (40%)**
   The capstone of the course is an original research paper, which will be judged according to the same criteria applied to a paper presented at a professional conference or submitted to a journal. Thus, it must address an interesting question related to Congress, relate that question to the existing literature, develop a theoretical account, and provide evidence in support of the conclusion(s) drawn. Over the course of the semester, we will devote time inside and outside of class to discussing progress, challenges, etc., with respect to students’ projects. Toward that end, a brief research proposal (identifying the question, key literature, theoretical contribution, and method of analysis) is due Tuesday, February 21. An annotated bibliography covering the relevant literature is due Tuesday, March 21. The final paper is due by 5pm on Friday, April 28. While these represent the formal deadlines relating to the research paper, students are strongly encouraged to consult informally with me throughout the semester regarding the development of their papers. Further details on the research paper (and related assignment deadlines) will be provided separately.

**Formatting:** All papers should be prepared professionally. This means using standard fonts and formatting (such as double spacing), as well as disciplinary standards for citations and references. It would be a good idea to begin familiarizing yourself now with the APSA Style Manual, which covers the format required for submissions to many (albeit not all) political science journals. You can access it here: [http://www.apsanet.org/files/APSAStryleManual2006.pdf](http://www.apsanet.org/files/APSAStryleManual2006.pdf). While not required, I encourage production of papers in L\TeX.  

**A Note on Grading:** A minimum grade of a “C” in this course is required in order for it to count toward fulfilling the Ph.D. degree requirements. However, a grade less than a “B” is typically considered unsatisfactory, and in fact a student receiving three grades below a “B” is at risk of removal from the Ph.D. program. All work will be graded on a letter scale, with an “A”
representing exceptional work, a “B+” good performance, and a “B” minimally satisfactory output.

**Accessibility:** Any student with a documented disability should contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 803-777-6142 and then follow up with me to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations.

**Incompletes and Academic Integrity:** All work must be turned in no later than the start of class on the day when it is due. I do not give incompletes save for truly exceptional circumstances of a serious and unforeseen nature. In accordance with the USC Honor Code and professional standards, I expect that all work will be your own and take very seriously any form of academic misrepresentation, including improper or omitted citation of sources and misappropriation of another’s work. Students are also expected to conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner.

## Course Schedule

**Week 1 (Jan. 10):** Introduction; Theoretical Foundations and Congress Primer


**Recommended:**


**Week 2 (Jan. 17):** Theories of Legislative Organization I: Distributive & Majoritarian Perspectives


*Recommended:*


* Homework from Week 1 due 1/17

**Week 3 (Jan. 24): Theories of Legislative Organization II: Partisan Theory and Its Critics**


*Recommended:*


**Week 4 (Jan. 31): Congressional Elections I: Candidates, Voters, and Party Elites**


Dowling, Conor M., and Amber Wichowsky. 2015. “Attacks without Consequence? Candidates,


**Recommended:**


**Week 5 (Feb. 7): Congressional Elections II: Districting, Money, and the Incumbency Advantage**


Recommended:


Week 6 (Feb. 14): Representation, Home Style, and Accountability


Recommended:


**Week 7 (Feb. 21): Polarization**


Hill, Seth J., and Chris Tausanovitch. 2015. “A Disconnect in Representation? Comparison of


Recommended:


*Paper proposal due 2/21*

**Week 8 (Feb. 28): Procedural Politics and Agenda Setting**


Recommended:


**Mar. 7: No Class (Spring Break)**

**Week 9 (Mar. 14): Committee Politics**


Recommended:


**Week 10 (Mar. 21): Roll Call Voting, Coalitions, and Ideal Point Estimation**


Recommended:


Stratmann, Thomas. 2000. “Congressional Voting over Legislative Careers: Shifting Positions and


* Annotated bibliography due 3/21

Week 11 (Mar. 28): New Research on Legislative Information and Influence


Recommended:


Week 12 (Apr. 4): Lawmaking & Legislative Success


Recommended:


**Week 13 (Apr. 11): Institutional Development & Congressional History**


Recommended:


### Week 14 (Apr. 18): Congress & Interbranch Relations


*Recommended:*


*Final research paper due by 5pm on Friday, April 28*