Political Science 468/568
Congress
Spring 2011
M-W 4-5:20pm, 221 McKenzie Hall

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Content: The U.S. Congress—like legislatures in all republics—plays a critical role in determining how preferences in the electorate get mapped into national policy outcomes. This course will attempt to develop a picture of Congress’s role in this mapping. The depth of our analysis will necessarily be limited by the length of the term, but the scope of the class will be comprehensive in the sense that we will discuss members of the House and the Senate (a.) in relation to their constituents, (b.) in relation to each other, and (c.) in relation to members of the U.S. government outside of Congress. The course is divided into three sections to reflect this division. Sequentially, we will review some major scholarship pertaining to each of these sets of relationships.

In the conclusion of the course, by way of review, we will look at the U.S. Congress from a comparative perspective—i.e., by comparing it to state legislatures across the U.S., and national legislatures in foreign countries.

Philosophy: We will exploit this class as an opportunity to appreciate the power of formal (i.e., mathematical) modeling for making sense of politics. There are least two reasons for studying the “rat choice” approach in the context of the U.S. Congress: It is in congressional scholarship that the tools of formal modeling have seen their fullest expression in political science, and, it is in this field that the approach has accumulated some of its most impressive empirical successes. Moreover, the critical assumption of rational, strategic actors is highly defensible in the context of the Congress.

Grading: The final grade will be based on the following allocation of points.

- Participation: 10%
- Bi-weekly quizzes: 40% (four total, worth 10% each)
- Final paper outline: 5%
- Final paper: 30%
- Final exam: 15%

Quizzes will be given before lecture on the following dates: April 13; April 25; May 4; May 16. You will have 55 minutes to complete each quiz. The final will be held on Thurs Jun 9 at 3:15pm The final exam will have the same format as the quizzes but it will
be worth twice as much. I will discuss the quiz/exam format in greater detail prior to the first quiz.

I will hand out a detailed description of my expectations for the class paper and the warm-up “outline” when I assign them. The outline will be due in week 5 (April 29) and returned a week later. The final paper will be due week 10 (Jun 3). As I will explain, a large part of your grade will depend on the clarity and technical quality of your writing.

**Expectations:** My expectation is that you attend every class and make a serious effort to engage the material. There will be approximately 55 pages of reading per class. If you are reading correctly, the assigned readings will not take more than 5 hours per week. This is a very reasonable amount of reading for a college student. Do the assigned readings before the lecture for which they are assigned.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Do not engage in this behavior!

**Course books:**


**Course Outline:** All the readings in the outline below are either in one of the required texts or available on Blackboard. Articles found on Blackboard are denoted with a “*”.

The dates next to each section give a rough idea of when we will discuss the topics in lecture and what the corresponding reading will be. Note however that the dates and readings listed below are only approximate and are subject to change. We may move ahead or fall behind for unforeseen reasons, in which case it may necessary to modify the outline below. After each lecture I will make a definitive statement about the reading that should be done before the next lecture.

**I. Introduction (Weeks 1 & 2)**

1. **Course Logistics**  Mar 28

2. **A Congressional overview**  Mar 30
   
3. A Primer on formal models of politics  Apr 4
   Shepsle & Bonchek (1997), pp. 5-35
   Congleton (2002), pp. 1-11 (Replace this one)

II. Members of Congress in their districts  (Weeks 3 & 4)

   1. The concentric circles of constituent influence  Apr 6

   2. Legislators are single-minded reelection seekers  Apr 11
      Mayhew (1974), pp. 1-77

   3. A review of the legislative process  Apr 13
      Oleszek (1989); pp. 1-20
      Quiz 1  Apr 13

   4. MCs organize Congress to meet their reelection needs  Apr 18
      Mayhew (1974), pp. 78-180

III. Members of Congress in the Legislature  (Weeks 5 & 7)

   1. The industrial organization of Congress  Apr 20
      Cox (2006); pp. 141-158

   2. Parliaments versus legislatures  Apr 25
      Laver (2006); pp. 122-138
      Quiz 2  Apr 25

   3. Procedural aspects of the Congressional budget process  May 2
      Oleszek (1989); pp. 47-78
      “House and Senate Budget Committees” (Wikipedia)
      “House Appropriations Committee” (Wikipedia)

   4. The politics of tax reform  May 4
      Birnbaum & Murray (1987), ch. 1-2
      “House Ways and Means Committee” (Wikipedia)
      Quiz 3  May 9

IV. Members in relation to the other branches and bureaucrats  (Weeks 8 & 9)

   1. Congressional-Presidential veto bargaining  May 11
      Cameron (2000), pp. 1-31

   2. A “pivots” model of Congressional-Pres. policy-making  May 16
      Krehbiel (1998), pp. 21-48
      Quiz 4  May 23
V. The prospects for institutional reform in Congress  (Week 10)

1. A history of gerrymandering in Congressional elections  May 18
   Cox & Katz (2002), chapters 1 and 2

2. The prospects for reform in U.S. politics
   Kernell, Jacobs, & Kousser (2008), chapter 15

   Writing assignment  due Jun 3
   Final Exam  June 9, 3:15am