THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS
(Political Science 345 L32)

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Fall 2013
Tue/Thu 1:00-2:30
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course blog: http://legislativeprocesswustl.blogspot.com

PURPOSE. This course examines legislative politics in the United States, focusing mostly (though not exclusively) on the U.S. Congress. Much of the course is devoted to tracing the development of legislative institutions and examining their effects on policymaking. We will also investigate how factors external to legislatures—including the executive branch, the courts, and the public—affect the dynamics of legislative politics. The course is oriented around the following main concepts:

1. Political preferences: how are legislators elected into office, and what explains their behavior as members of a legislative body?
2. Political institutions: what are the “rules of the game,” and how and why have they changed over time?
3. Political outcomes: how does the combination of preferences and institutions help us to understand when new laws are passed and (just as importantly) when they are not? And, as just one political actor among many, what institutions besides legislatures affect the policymaking process?

The course's goal is to help us come to a deeper understanding of the complexities of legislative politics. Along the way we will address some of the core themes of democratic government, including representation, legitimacy, and accountability.

CLASS MEETINGS. This is a survey-based course. The assigned readings are somewhat extensive (typically 75-100 pages per week), and the lectures will cover even more material. Attendance at all lectures is a natural expectation of the course, as students are responsible for all readings as well as the material presented in lecture.

Class meetings will be a combination of lecture and discussion. The purpose of the lectures is to help place the readings in context and provide additional material for discussion.

Students are expected to be active participants in the class discussion. This includes answering the instructor’s questions, responding to arguments, claims, and evidence
found in the readings, engaging the comments and inquiries of fellow classmates, and the like. To this end, laptops will not be permitted in class. If the course is fully engaging, it will not be necessary to refresh Facebook and nytimes.com every few minutes; such behavior will only distract you and your fellow classmates. If, instead, you find the course unengaging and uninteresting, I encourage you to let me know so that we can find a way to make the course a more productive experience for all of us.

COURSE TEXTBOOKS. The material for this course will rely primarily on two texts, available in the campus bookstore:


I will also assign a number of journal articles and books chapters in addition to these textbooks. These assignments are posted online on the course website. All readings should be completed prior to that lecture.

REQUIREMENTS. Each student’s grade will be based on the following components:

(a) Mid-term exam (October 10) 20% of grade
(b) Final exam (December 5) 25% of grade
(c) Course paper (due on December 3) 30% of grade
(d) Group blogging project (throughout the course) 25% of grade

Students cannot pass the course without completing all four components. I reserve the right to change due dates, with sufficient notice, depending upon the course’s progress.

Exams. Both exams will be administered in class. The exams will not be designed to test your memorization of the material presented in the course, but rather will examine how critically you have thought about the core concepts discussed in class and your ability to apply them to the study of legislative politics. The midterm exam will cover material from the first half of the course (through October 8). The final exam will ask you to think comprehensively about what you have learned throughout the course, but with an emphasis on the material from the second half.

Course paper. The course paper should be 8-10 pages typed, double-spaced, and with 1” margins. The paper should address some sort of institutional reform that has implications for Congress or state legislatures. Examples include electoral reforms (e.g., partisan vs. nonpartisan elections), the design of legislature institutions (e.g., unicameralism vs. bicameralism), changes in legislative rules or procedures (e.g., the cloture rule), etc. Final papers should address the institutional context in which reform might be (or is being) discussed, what would be necessary for it to occur, the likely consequences of such
Group project. The legislative process receives lots of attention from the media. Unfortunately, much of this coverage overlooks basic facts of institutional design that have important implications for how and why policy change occurs (or fails to occur). The goal of this project is for you to apply your knowledge of the material from the course to the real (and often messy) world of politics. An excellent example of the basic idea for this project can be found at http://www.themonkeycage.org. You should form groups containing either two or three students (no exceptions) with whom you will work together on a blog project this semester. You may use any platform to host your blog. For instance, the course blog was created using http://www.blogger.com.

Each group should focus their blog on either a nationally significant area of legislation currently under consideration by the 113th Congress, or a state legislature of your choosing. During the semester, you will be responsible for monitoring media coverage of your chosen subject area and writing blog posts that reflect thoughtful application of our class material to the subject you have chosen. (For instance, if you have chosen to follow the Alabama state legislature, you might discuss how the governor’s reported opposition to a particular bill will shape the legislature’s behavior since a gubernatorial veto can be overridden by a simple majority.) Again, your job is to lend insightful, critical commentary to current events in legislative politics.

There are three basic writing requirements. First, each student will be responsible for authoring six blog posts over the course of the semester. Generally speaking, blog posts should be about 500 words in length, but can be as long or as short as you’d like so long as you say something insightful and can keep your readers engaged. Second, each group should coordinate their efforts so that there is at least one post per week. (For instance, the first post must be published by Sunday, September 15. The last post should be published by Sunday, December 1.) Furthermore, students should regularly visit their classmates’ blogs. Thus, beginning on September 16, each student is required to post at least two comments per week (total of 24 comments) on their classmates’ blog postings. All posts and comments should be clearly identified with your name and the date. Each group is responsible for the technological maintenance of their blog.

By Friday, September 8, one member from each group should email the following information to the TA: names of all members of the group; the blog URL; and the blog’s subject matter.

Group projects require the full commitment and participation of all group members. Please come see me immediately if there are any concerns about this issue. At the end of the course each student will anonymously rate the level of participation from each group member.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. Students will be bound by the University’s academic integrity policy (available at: http://academicintegrity.wustl.edu/policy). Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding this policy.
COURSE OUTLINE

August 27  
Introduction

August 29  
NO CLASS  
(Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association)

September 3  
The Spatial Model  
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 1

September 5  
Congress and the Constitution  
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 2  
- The American Congress, Chapter 1 (skim), Chapter 2 (30-44)

September 8: Email TA with information on group project

September 10  
Historical Developments  
- The American Congress, Chapter 2 (pages 45-53)  
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 3  

September 12  
Congressional Elections, Part I  
- The American Congress, Chapter 3  
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 5

September 17  
Congressional Elections, Part II  
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 6  

September 19  
Congressional Elections, Part III  
September 24
Representation, Part 1

- The American Congress, Chapter 4
- Pitkin, Hannah. 19xx. *The Concept of Representation*.

September 26
Representation, Part 2


October 1
Accountability


October 3
Parties in Congress

- The American Congress, Chapter 5
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 7.

October 8
Committees in Congress

- The American Congress, Chapter 6
- Krehbiel, Keith. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Chapters 1 and

October 10
Midterm Exam

October 15
Rules of the Game

- The American Congress, Chapter 7.

October 17
The Congressional Agenda


October 18: Research Paper topics due (one page) via email to TA

October 22
Roll Call Votes

- The American Congress, Chapter 8
- Analyzing Congress, Chapter 9 (stop at page 373)

October 24
The Budgetary Process, Part I


October 29
The Budgetary Process, Part II

- The American Congress, Chapter 12.
October 31  Policymaking and Gridlock


November 5  Institutions and Obstructionism


November 7  Executive-Legislative Relations

- The American Congress, Chapter 9.

November 12  Legislative Oversight and the Bureaucracy


November 14  Congress and the Courts

- The American Congress, Chapter 10.

November 19  Lobbying and Interest Groups

- The American Congress, Chapter 11.
November 21  

Polarization and the Contemporary Congress


November 26/28  

Happy Thanksgiving; No Class

December 3  

Exam Review

*December 3: Final papers due via email by 12 noon*

December 5  

Final Exam