This seminar addresses the theoretical approaches to legislative politics and several of the core debates in the political science of legislative politics of the past two decades.

The seminar focuses on the U.S. Congress. Much of the theory and methods have carried over to the study of other parliaments, but the literature on other parliaments is reserved for other seminars.

While this seminar provides a good introduction to the study of Congress, I advise students to take a follow-up seminar on advanced topics, either as a regular seminar or independent study. The literature on congressional politics is vast and a specialist on the subject should pursue additional systematic reading before setting a research program in the subfield.

Seminar Requirements

Seminar assignments are intended to prepare you to (a) identify important research problems for future research and (b) prepare you for the comprehensive exam in American politics. Your primary responsibility is to complete the reading for each seminar and be prepared to discuss the theory, methods, and findings of each study. One quarter of your grade will be based on the quality of your participation.

Two papers are required. The paper topics will be distributed separately. Each topic will be similar to a comprehensive exam question. The paper should be 10-15 doubled-spaced pages in 12-point font, excluding a reference list.

A take-home final exam will be distributed on April 12. There will be one exam question and a complete answer will take the same form as the paper assignment—10-15 doubled-spaced pages in 12-point font, excluding a reference list.

Meeting Dates

January 17, 24, 31; February 7, 14, 21, 28; March 6 (morning session), 20, 27; April 3, 17, 24 (skip April 10); May 1 (flexible)
Reading

1. Essential Background (January 17)
   - Steven S. Smith, Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan Vander Wielen, *The American Congress*, 7th edition (Cambridge), Chapters 2-8, 12
   - Barbara Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, 4th ed. (CQ Press), Chapters 2-6

2. Theoretical Approaches, Social Systems (January 24)

3. Theoretical Approaches, Rational Choice and Spatial Models (January 31)
   - Mayhew, David R. *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Yale, 1974; or 2nd ed., Yale, 2004)

4. The Incumbency Advantage (February 7)

• Jeffrey Stonecash, *Reassessing the Incumbency Effect* (Cambridge: 2008)

5. Representation (February 14)

• Frances E. Lee, "Bicameral Institutions and Geographic Politics: Allocating Federal Funds for Transportation in the House and Senate." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29 (May 2004): 185-213.

Others:
• Evans, Diana. *Greasing the Wheels* (Cambridge 2004)
• Fenno, Richard F. *Home Style* (Little Brown, 1978; Longman 2002)

7. Party Influence, Part 2 (February 28)


7. Party Polarization (March 6)

8. Committee Membership and Assignments (March 20)


9. Committee Principals and Bias (March 27)


10. Theories of Procedural Development (April 3)


- Park, Hong Min. Unpublished.

11. Roll-Call Voting (April 17)


12. The Senate and the Filibuster Debate (April 24)

- Binder, Sarah, Anthony Madonna, and Steven S. Smith. Going Nuclear, Senate


13. The Divided Government Debate (May 1)


Other essential reading


Smith, Steven S. 1989. *Call to Order: Floor Politics in the House and Senate* (Brookings)


Rohde, David. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House.* Chicago:


Hall, Richard L. and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *American Political Science Review* 100 (February): 69-84

First Half Paper Topics

*Representation.* Describe and evaluate the ways in which congressional representation has been conceptualized. What are the major challenges in measuring the quality of representation provided by Congress and its members?

*Incumbency Advantage.* For the U.S. House of Representatives, describe and evaluate the contending theories the incumbency advantage. In doing so, answer these questions: What is the evidence for the size of and trends in the incumbency advantage? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the measures of the incumbency advantage? What are the contending explanations for the trends? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the contending explanations?

*Party Influence.* Describe and evaluate the contending theories of party influence in Congress. In doing so, answer these questions: What are the major kinds of party influence? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the contending explanations in the debate over party influence? What are the major challenges in testing the contending theories?

Second Half Paper Topics

*Committee Bias.* Describe and evaluate the contending theories about bias in the policymaking process of Congress introduce through its system of standing committees. In doing so, answer these questions: What is the evidence that committee are or are not biased? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the measures used? What are the contending theoretical arguments? What are the strengths and weaknesses of those arguments?

*Divided Party Control.* Describe and evaluate the contending arguments about the importance of divided party control of Congress and the presidency for policy outcomes. In doing so, answer these questions: What is the evidence that party control does or does not make a difference for policy outcomes? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the measures used? What are the contending theoretical arguments? What are the strengths and weaknesses of those arguments?

*Party Polarization.* Describe and evaluate the contending explanations for the polarization of parties in Congress.
Final Exam Topic

Rational choice theories have come to dominate scholarly studies of Congress. Cite and critique the most important examples. In doing so, answer these questions. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these theories? Is there something about legislative politics that make it particularly appropriate to use rational choice theories? Are there features of legislative politics that have gone unaddressed because of the reliance on rational choice theories?