

PLS 301: The American Congress

Fall 2013

Professor Josh M. Ryan

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2-3:30 pm. Tuesday 10-12 and by appointment. You are also welcome to stop by my office at other times and I'll make every attempt to meet with you.

Class Time: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10-10:50 am.

Course Description

This course is meant to provide an advanced understanding of the American Congress and its members within the framework of social science. We will discuss congressional rules and procedures, member behavior and motivation, and the role of parties and leaders. We will also ask some important questions about the operation of the modern Congress. Does Congress represent the public interest, has it changed over time for the worse, and how does Congress address increasing complex national issues? Finally, the course will touch on some complaints and controversies about the modern Congress, including the lack of competition for seats, polarization, redistricting, the filibuster and pork-barrel politics. It is my hope that we can address all of these topics within the framework of social science. That is, we will not discuss these issues the same way the media or "pundits" do—instead we will analyze Congress in a way that allows us to advance our understanding of the institution.

The course is loosely organized into three sections. The first section of the class develops some basic tools that we will need to fully understand Congress and provides some background and context. The material includes an introduction to theories of rationality, as well as an introduction to formal and spatial modeling. We will discuss how certain assumptions apply to members of Congress and the institution's basic structure. Next, we will examine congressional operation. This section includes the lawmaking process, voting procedure, and the institution's interaction with other political actors. Finally, we will discuss some of the potential problems of the modern day Congress, and try to understand where Congress is headed and how well equipped the institution is to deal with future issues.

Because we will use rational choice theory to analyze Congress, there may be some differences between this class and other political science classes you may have had. Rationality broadly assumes that actors are utility maximizers. This means that we assume political actors have preferences, and they work to achieve those preferences within the constraints of the institution. Because this is an abstract model of congressional action, it requires a little bit of math. The math allows us to make predictions of behavior based on some simple assumptions. This class will not have as much as some other political science courses or even other Congress courses. However, there will be some and you should be aware of it.

This class, like many in political science, often deals with subjects that are controversial. Engaging with these issues is an important part of being an informed citizen and as such, we will not shy away from discussing controversial current events. This also means you should never feel embarrassed or afraid to share your opinion, even if it means disagreeing with other students in the class. However, each of us should remember that we have different experiences and different viewpoints. We must always be respectful of other students and other opinions. I take this policy very seriously and have **zero tolerance** for inappropriate, crude, disrespectful, or demeaning comments. I reserve the right to use an appropriate punishment for any student who engages in disrespectful behavior. This may include removal from

the class, receiving a zero on participation for the semester, or being reported to university officials. Please speak with me promptly if you feel there is a civility problem in the classroom. See the Bradley Standards of Conduct at <http://www.bradley.edu/campuslife/studenthandbook/policies/conduct/>

Reading

The course has one required textbook:

Smith, Steven S., Jason M. Roberts & Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2009. The American Congress. 7th edition. New York: Cambridge University Press. Referred to as TXT in the schedule below.

Additional articles and readings are listed in the syllabus. These readings are posted to Sakai.

There will also be additional readings that will either be emailed or given out in class. Finally, you are required to read either the Washington Post or New York Times (both can be read online) as well as either politico.com, rollcall.com, or thehill.com. All of these are free online, although for the Times and Post you have to register with an email address.

Course Requirements and Other Information

The prerequisite for this course is PLS 105. I will not be enforcing this prereq strictly, but I highly recommend you take 105 prior to taking this course.

The course is both lecture and discussion based. Some days will be mostly lecture, some days will be a mix, and some days will be mostly discussion. In general, parts of Friday's class will be reserved for discussing current events in the United States, and understanding how they relate to Congress and other political actors. This is one of the reasons it is important you read the newspaper and one of the other websites.

Readings are assigned for the week and should be completed by the start of the first class for the week (Monday). This ensures that you more fully understand the lecture topics, and that you are able to engage with other students and myself. There are many things I will not cover that will be in the reading, or topics that I will assume you know already from which I will build on. Because there is a relatively light amount of reading, you will be expected to complete all of it.

There will be one midterm and one final (see below). The tests will cover both the readings and lectures. Anything mentioned in class is fair game. This includes current events and any other topics discussed in class but not mentioned in the reading. If you need to miss one of the tests for any reason, you must notify me immediately. I will decide whether or not a make up exam is appropriate on a case by case basis. I reserve the right to refuse to give you a make up exam. Make up exams will be essay format and will be given during the last hour of the final.

I have a no cell phone or laptop policy. If I see or hear a cell phone the entire class will have a pop-quiz on the spot which will count toward the participation portion of your grade. For the sake of your classmates, please ensure your cell phone is on silent and please do not text in class. I do not allow laptops because experience has shown me they create distractions for other students. Please go to the bookstore and buy a notebook to take notes in.

I will periodically send out emails to the class list. You are automatically subscribed to the list if you are enrolled in the class through your campus email account. The list will allow me to inform you of changes in assignments, the schedule or to attach additional reading. I cannot send emails out to a non Bradley email account. The Bradley email account is an official means of communication between myself

and the students. If you have any questions, please see <http://www.bradley.edu/irt/policies/5.02.html> and/or talk to me.

Grading

There are six grades for this class: participation, pop quizzes, current events, one midterm, one final, and the paper.

Participation 10%

I do not take attendance *per se* so if you miss a class it is not necessary to tell me. However, there are some costs to missing class. First, you will miss items that are discussed in class that will be on the test. Second, you will be graded on your participation in class. This means that you should be an active learner, asking questions in class of me, and engaging in discussion with your fellow students. If you miss class you cannot participate in discussions and you will miss important information that will be on the test.

I know that some students will be uncomfortable about participating in class. I have a few thoughts about this. First, I understand that even very good students may have trouble speaking in front of groups. However, I also recognize that first, without discussion the class will be extremely boring and will consist of me giving boring lectures for an hour a day, three days a week. This is bad for both me and you. Second, learning to speak in front of other people, especially about controversial issues like politics in general, and voting, participation, religion, and race specifically (all things we will discuss in this class) is one of the most important skills you can learn in life, and being able to formulate coherent thoughts verbally and respond to others' arguments is part of the point of a liberal arts education. I will do my best to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable speaking to the class and to me. If you absolutely feel like you cannot speak in class, you should come to my office and have discussions in person with me.

Quizzes 10%

There will be a quiz at least once a week. Quizzes will consist of four questions and students will receive one point for taking the quiz, for a total of five points per quiz. Though quizzes will be given at least once a week there may be additional pop-quizzes given at my discretion based on the participation level of the class. There will be no makeup quizzes given if you miss class for any reason; however, I will drop one quiz grade. This means that you can miss one quiz and not be penalized. Missing three or more quizzes however will negatively affect your grade. The material on the quiz will mostly consist of material from the reading so it is absolutely critical you keep up with the reading.

Current Events Days 5%

On Current Events days (every other Thursday) all students will come to class prepared to offer a summary of, and discuss at least one article they found in a national paper or political magazine pertaining to Congress or congressional elections. The article should be in hand (printed out, cut out, etc.) Students will be called on to offer their current events topic and get a brief discussion going. Students who are called on but are not prepared to discuss a current event will receive a zero for the current events grade. Students will be called on up to three times during the semester, and students may be called on twice before everyone else has presented once. I will also be circulating articles for students to look at in preparation for class.

Midterm, 25% and Final, 25%

The format of the midterm and final will be short answer/essay. There will be constrained choice on the short answer and the essay (meaning you will have to answer 2 of 3 for example). There will be no multiple choice. The short answer/identification will be worth 50% of the test grade, with the essay worth the other 50%. You will receive a list of questions prior to the test and I will select a few of these for the midterm and final. The format of the final will be the same as the midterms, but slightly longer. The final will be cumulative. As with the midterm, the short answer/identification section will be worth 50% of the test grade, with the essays worth the other 50%. The midterm will be on Oct. 20th in class, and the final is scheduled on Tuesday, December 13, 9-11am.

Paper 25%

A research paper of approximately 15-20 pages will be due on Tuesday, December 6th in class. We will discuss the paper topics in class in a few weeks. A 1-2 page prospectus will be due on October 27th. I will provide comments within the week, after which you may schedule meetings with me as you see fit to discuss your paper further. This portion of the assignment is marked as either complete or incomplete. If you choose not to turn in a prospectus, you will be marked down one-third of a letter grade on your final paper (i.e. from a B+ to a B, or B to B-.)

Misc. Grading Information

I will be happy to regrade anything with the understanding that the grade could be higher or lower than the original grade. In order to have me regrade something, you need to give me a written explanation of your specific concerns within one week. As mentioned, the tests are short answer/identification format. I will give you a list of possible test questions about a week ahead of time. This will serve as your review sheet or study guide. For the test, I will select some of these questions for the test. There will be no extra credit assigned or accepted.

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Please note, using someone else's clicker or allowing someone else to use your clicker is cheating. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating will a grade of zero on the assignment and be reported to the Director of Residential Life and Student Judicial System.. Please see the Student Handbook and Undergraduate Catalog for Bradley's policies on plagiarism.

You must complete all assignments to pass the class.

Schedule

Part 1 - Introduction and Background

Please note this schedule is tentative. I reserve the right to change it or add or subtract readings or assignments.

Aug. 28: Syllabus

Reading: The syllabus

Aug. 30: No class

Reading: TXT Chapter 1

Sept. 2: Review of Congressional Basics

Reading: TXT Chapter 1 (cont.)

Sept. 4-6: Historical Context

Reading: The Constitution, Federalist 10, 51, 62 and 63. TXT chapter 2. Polsby 1968, "The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives."

Sept. 9-13: Congress in Political Science and Spatial Modeling

Reading: TXT Appendix, Weisberg, "The Study of Congress," and "Veto Powers and Leg. Coalitions."

Sept. 16-18: Member Goals and Strategies

Reading: TXT Chapter 4, Jacobson 2007, "Referendum: The 2006 Election," and Adler, Ensley, and Wilkerson ND, "Is Congress Accountable?"

Sept. 20: Current Events

Reading: None

Sept. 23-27: Parties and Leaders

Reading: TXT chapter 5, Smith 2000, "Positive Theories of Congressional Parties," Cox and McCubbins 1994, "Bonding, Structure, and the Stability of Political Parties."

Part 2 - Rules, Procedures, and Other Institutions

Sept. 30-Oct. 4: Committees - What They Do and Why

Reading: TXT chapter 6 and Shepsle and Weingast 1987. "The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power."

Oct. 7-11: Legislating - The Rules of the Game

Reading: TXT chapter 7.

Oct. 14: No class, Fall break

Oct 16-18: Legislating - Floor and Voting Procedures

Reading: TXT chapter 8 and Krehbiel 1995. "Cosponsors and Wafflers from A to Z."

Oct. 21: Floor and Voting Procedures cont.

Reading: Koger 2006, "Cloture Reform and Party Government in the Senate, 1918-1925."

Oct. 23: Review for Midterm

Reading: None.

Oct. 25: Midterm

Oct. 28-30: Congress and the President

Reading: TXT chapter 9

Nov. 1: Current Events

Research Prospectus due on Nov. 1.

Nov. 4-6: Divided Government and Productivity

Reading: Edwards 1997 "The Legislative Impact of Divided Government," and Binder 1999 "Dynamics

of Legislative Gridlock.”

Nov. 8-13: Congress and the Courts

Reading: TXT chapter 10 and Clark 2009, “The Separation of Powers, Court Curbing, and Judicial Legitimacy.”

Nov. 15: Paper Discussion

Reading: None

Part 3 - Elections and Representation

Nov. 18-22: Elections, Resources, Policy, and Pork

Reading: TXT chapter 3, and Jacobson 1989, “Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections.”

Nov. 25: Redistricting

Reading: Abramowitz et al 2007, “Don’t Blame Redistricting,” and McDonald 2007, “Drawing the Line on District Competition.”

Nov. 27-29: No class, Thanksgiving Break.

Dec. 2-4: Representation

Reading: Cameron et. al. 1996, “Do Majority-Minority Districts Maximize Substantive Black Representation in Congress?” and Mansbridge 1999, “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent Yes.”

Dec. 6: Current Events

Reading: None

Dec. 9: Review for Final

Research Paper due.

Final on Friday, Dec. 13th at 12pm