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PSC 387.01: Legislative Politics

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Political Science 387
Legislative Politics
LA 337, 1:30-3:20 p.m.
Office: LA 354

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Summer 2006
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Office Hours: *after class and by appointment*

Americans rule themselves through elected officials who are responsible for advancing the interests and preferences of their constituents. This relationship is most evident in the U.S. Congress: specific politicians are responsible to specific voters at regular intervals.

This class—specially designed for the summer session—focuses on Congressional reform from the 1930s to the present. Debates over the rules governing elections, committees, parties, and filibustering offer insight on how Congress works, how it has changed, and how it could work. These contests also illuminate the broader network of legislative actors: Presidents, interest groups, the Supreme Court, and the media all work to shape Congress to their tastes.

Key Questions

This class focuses on reforms related to filibustering, committees, parties, campaign finance, and elections. For each type of reform we are interested in these questions:

- 1) What motivates legislators and outside actors to seek institutional change?
- 2) What coalitions successfully achieved reform?
- 3) How do we explain the timing of reform? What factors differentiate successful reform efforts from failures?
- 4) What (if anything) did the players in each debate expect to happen if the reform succeeded? For example, which bills would pass after reform that would be blocked under the status quo? Who would have more power if reform succeeded? Who would be less likely to win elections?
- 5) Was the public interest served by the outcome of reform decisions?

Grading

There are three components to your grade: class participation (20%), four reading summaries (40%), and a final (40%). Note that attendance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for “participation;” you must come to class and *talk* to do well.

Readings

The core text is *On Capitol Hill* by Julian Zelizer (Cambridge, 2004). You should purchase this book as soon as possible. Other readings will be provided in paper or pdf form.

TIMELINE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Readings</u>
6/26	Opening Notes. Constitution.	
6/27	History & Reform	Zelizer ch. 2
6/28	The Conservative Coalition	Schickler ch. 4
6/29	The Classic Filibuster	Burdette ch. 6; Huey Long clippings
7/3	1946 Reform Law.	Davidson, "The Advent of the Modern Congress... 1946" <i>LSQ</i> Aug 1990 357-73
7/4	Independence Day	Today you are free.
7/5	Congressional Reform 1948-1964	Zelizer 3
7/6	Filibuster Reform 1949-1970	Wolfinger, 1971
7/10	Reapportionment Revolution	Zelizer 4
7/11	Scandal	Zelizer 5
7/12	The New Reform Coalition	Zelizer 6
7/13	1970 Reform Law.	Kravitz, "The Advent of the Modern Congress... 1970" <i>LSQ</i> Aug 1990 375-99
7/17	Reform 1970-89: Preview	Schickler ch. 5
7/18	Campaign Finance Reform 1970-74	Zelizer 7
7/19	Reform 1970-74	Zelizer 8
7/20	Reform 1975-6	Zelizer 9
7/24	Congress and TV	Zelizer 11
7/25	Reform 1992-1999	Zelizer 12
7/26	Review	
7/27	Final Exam	