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PSC 387.01: Legislative Politics

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Political Science 387
Legislative Politics
Spring 2007
T, Th 8:10-9:30 LA 337

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Office: LA 354
Office Hours: M 2-4 p.m.; T, Th 7:30-8 a.m.

Course Content

America is not governed as a democracy; it is a representative democracy. 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.

How does representation work? That is, in what sense do politicians respect and reflect their constituents' wishes and/or interests? How do politicians manage the multiple conflicts that arise? This class addresses these questions through a systematic study of the modern Congress. In the process, we shall study the basic elements of legislative structure and behavior—elections, individual members, committees, parties—while noting the differences between the House and Senate.

Required Texts

The base text for the course is *The American Congress*, 3rd Ed. (“TAC3” below) Other readings and news clippings are assigned as appropriate. The course readings will be distributed to the class as cumulative pdf file that will also be available through the library reserve website. Students are required to print a copy of this file and bring appropriate sections to each class meeting. In addition, I may circulate news stories that are pertinent to class content. Students should check their “umontana” accounts each afternoon before class, or arrange to have these accounts forwarded to their regular e-mails.

Students are required to read all assigned readings, attend all lectures, take two exams, and complete a research paper. The grade breakdown is:

Class Participation: 10% (this may include participation in “Fantasy Congress”)
Midterm: 20%
Writing assignment: 40%
Final: 30%

Students will have the choice of writing papers solo or in teams of two.

Class Rules

Plagiarism will be strenuously punished in accordance with university policy. Turn your cell phones and pagers off. Show up on time and don't leave early. Participate in class discussions. Make-up exams are allowed in the event of illness or death in the family with documentation. There are no excuses for late papers; start papers early and protect yourself against computer failures.

| Class | Topics | Readings |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Jan. 23-Feb 1 | Constitutional Setting & Congressional History | Federalists 10, 52, 55, 57, 62&63; TAC3 ch. 2; Koger, "The Congressional Era" |
| Feb. 6-8 | Elections: Rules of the Game | TAC3 ch. 4; <i>campaign finance clippings</i> |
| Feb. 13-15 | Elections: Choosing to Run; Incumbency Advantage; Setting up a Campaign; Campaigning | Abramowitz et al "Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections" JOP 2006 |
| Feb. 20-22 | Elections: Party Strategies and Results | Campbell and Abramowitz Election forecasts, <i>The Forum</i> , 2006 |
| Feb. 27/ Mar. 1 | Review (2/27) and Midterm (3/1) | |
| Mar 6-8 | Members of Congress: Description, Goals, Staff. | TAC3 ch. 5; Salisbury & Shepsle, "U. S. Congressman as Enterprise." LSQ 1981 |
| Mar 13-15 | Overview. Floor decisions. Lobbyists. | TAC3 ch. 3, 8, 11 |
| Mar 20-22 | Committees | TAC3 ch. 7 |
| Apr. 3-5 | Parties | TAC3 ch. 6 |
| April 10, 17, 19 | Agenda-Setting, End-Games, and Productivity | Koger, "Cosponsoring as Position-Taking" LSQ May 2003; TAC3 ch. 9; Binder, "The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock," APSR 1999 |
| April 24-26 | Budget Politics | TAC3 ch. 12 |
| May 1-3 | Congressional reform. Review. | <i>Clippings—Senate ethics reform; Report: "Restoring Order"</i> |
| May 11 | Final (8:00-10:00 a.m.) | ALL |