This research seminar explores the theoretical and empirical issues that confront scholars of legislative institutions and behavior, with a specific focus on the U.S. Congress. The subject of our exploration is, indeed, dynamic. As a subfield within American politics, the study of legislative institutions and behavior arguably has been the most active and theoretically innovative (the same holds true for its Comparative counterpart). While once dominated by sociological approaches, the study of legislative politics has become the stronghold of the rational actor model. Starting with the assumption that legislative actors are rational, goal-seekers (though the goals are sometimes debated), congressional scholars have addressed a litany of topics using the “rational choice” approach, ranging from electoral behavior, legislative parties, congressional rules and procedures, separation of powers, to the very nature of representation. Methodologically, the work has been formal theoretic (mathematical), empirical, and even historical/narrative. Combined, recent scholarship in this tradition has greatly increased our core knowledge of legislative institutions and behavior.

Our study will be conducted at an advanced theoretical and empirical level. For the student, this means: 1) A basic knowledge of Congress, including how members are assigned to committees, how bills are drafted and referred, the function of the Rules Committee, and how floor voting proceeds, is assumed. (The recommended Oleszek book is an excellent resource for this discrete knowledge). 2) We will read several works that utilize mathematical models and game theory as a means of theoretical exposition. This is bound to be challenging to many students, but it would be abhorrent to exclude this work from our study. Students should give these works their best effort (i.e., attempt to work through the mathematics). 3) Most importantly, students will be asked to think creatively about the literature, share their insights with the group, and examine these insights more closely in their research.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

The main requirements for this course are simple – READ, THINK CRITICALLY, and DISCUSS! You are expected to read all the assigned books and articles listed on this syllabus, and do it before the class for which they are assigned. Your full participation in the seminar (even if you are auditing) is fundamental to its success.

**EVALUATION:**

Your seminar evaluation will be based upon a research paper, a presentation of your research, ten (10) weekly précis, and your class participation:

The research paper accounts for 40% of your seminar grade and should be a 20-30 page work of original research, conforming to the APSA Style Manual, and of potentially publishable quality. The topic and methodological approach of the paper is your choice, but it would be wise to make these decisions in consultation with me. A two-page research proposal is due in class during Week 6. Beginning in Week 7, we will spend the first five minutes of class time discussing your progress. Papers are due: April 18th.
Formal presentations of your research (a 10-15 minute presentation, such as those given at a professional conference) will be given during the final two weeks of the semester. Your presentation is worth 10% of your seminar grade. You will be evaluated on your personal presentational style, graphical presentation of the problem, theory, hypotheses and results, and, most of all, clarity. Presentations: April 24th.

Students will prepare a 2-to-3-page (assuming it is typed and double-spaced) précis on an assigned reading for 10 of the 14 weeks for which we meet. The choice of weeks is the student’s. These précis will summarize the main argument of a reading, sketch the model, and summarize the approach of its key proofs. Précis are to be turned in at the class meeting for which readings are assigned. They will be graded for conciseness as well as for evident effort and success in understanding the assigned reading. Your ten précis will comprise 30% of your course grade.

Finally, seminar participation will account for 20% of your grade.

Texts: The following texts have been ordered through the Russell House Textbook Store and are required for this course:


The following book is highly recommended and also has been ordered through the Russell House Textbook Store.


Additional required readings (articles and book chapters) can be obtained for copying directly from the professor. Many readings are available electronically on JSTOR.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: The Historical Congress and an Overview

Required:


Recommended:


Week 2: Constituencies and Representation

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 3: Congressional Elections: Incumbency Advantage**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 4: Congressional Elections: Aggregate Outcomes**

**Required:**


Recommended:


Week 5: Theoretical Perspectives: Institutions and Equilibrium

Required:


Recommended:


Week 6: The Committee System

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 7: Congressional Parties**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Week 8: Agenda Control**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Week 9: Inside the Senate and Bicameralism**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Week 10: Congressional Decision-Making, Roll Call Voting, and Ideology**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


Week 11: Congressional Policy-Making: Pass the Pork

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 12: Lobbying**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Week 13: Causes and Consequences of Divided Government**

*Required:*


*Recommended:*


**Week 14: Oversight of the Executive Branch**

*Required:*


Recommended:


