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. Within political science, the study of legislative institutions and behavior arguably has been the most active and theoretically innovative—building one of the few areas of “cumulative knowledge” in our discipline. 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 House 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 for 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 or which they are assigned. Your full participation in the seminar (even if you are auditing) is fundamental to its success.

EVALUATION:

Evaluation of your seminar performance 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: December 1, 2010.
Formal presentations of your research (a 10-15 minute presentation, such as those given at a professional conference) will be given during the final class meeting (December 1, 2010). 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.

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.

Grade Scale:

All grades will be assigned based on the following criteria as evaluated by the instructor:

A to A+ (Excellent): Student demonstrates exceptional mastery of the material by offering novel and insightful comments about the readings and demonstrates the ability to integrate ideas from multiple readings.

B+ to A- (Good): Student demonstrates normal mastery of the material by offering cogently argued points that accurately reflect the content of the reading, but did not necessarily demonstrate novel insights or integrate the readings with other material.

B- to B (Fair): Student was able to clearly articulate the main arguments and evidence of the assigned research, but did not argue beyond basic reiteration of main points.

C+ or lower (Poor): Student did not participate, or the student’s writing or participation reflected a general lack of knowledge about the readings.

Students will be given a 0 for participation if absent from class without being previously excused. Incompletes are only granted in the case of a non-academic, documented emergency or illness.

Texts: The following texts have been ordered through the FSU Bookstore and are required for this course:


The following book is highly recommended and also has been ordered through the FSU Bookstore.


Additional required readings (articles and book chapters) can be obtained from the course’s Blackboard library. Many readings are available electronically on JSTOR.

**POLICY ON ACADEMIC HONESTY**

All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense. All academic work must meet the standards contained in the Academic Honor Code, published in the *Florida State University Bulletin* and *The Graduate Handbook*. Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing academic work. Students who are suspected of violating the principles of academic honesty will be reported to the Graduate Director.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the Student Disability Resource Center, 97 Woodward Ave. South (Student Services Bldg.), 850-644-9566, or on the web at [http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/](http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/)
OFFICE HOURS AND AVAILABILITY

If at any time you feel confused by the material or simply want to discuss your academic progress, please feel free to seek my help during office hours or by appointment. My formal office hours are Tuesday and Thursday from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. If you need to contact me outside of office hours, email is probably the best way to do so. I check my email regularly and will respond as quickly as possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: The Historical Congress and an Overview

Required:


Recommended:


Week 2: Constituencies and Representation

Required:


Recommended:


**Week 3: Congressional Elections: Challengers and Incumbents**

*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:**


**Week 15: Student Research Presentations**