

TO: GOVT 370 Students
FR: Larry Evans
DT: January 19, 2011
RE: Course outline

GOVT 370, *Legislative Processes*, is a comprehensive introduction to the politics of the U.S. Congress. The course is primarily designed for Government concentrators. However, there are no prerequisites and any student with a strong interest in American national political institutions or campaign strategy is more than welcome in the class. Based on twenty years of course evaluations, most students appear to view GOVT 370 as a demanding class. The readings are extensive, certain of the assignments are time-consuming, and standards are fairly high.

The U.S. Congress is a microcosm of American politics in general. As a result, we will consider the entire range of political actors and processes, from campaigns and elections to the policy consequences of procedure and strategic interactions across different branches of government. Obviously, with divided party control of the Congress, a highly ambitious legislative agenda on Capitol Hill, and the upcoming congressional and presidential elections in 2012, this is going to be a fascinating period to closely observe congressional politics and inter-branch relations.

In this class, students will explore the full range of academic theories about congressional behavior and institutions, including the constitutional underpinnings of contemporary disputes about procedure and policy. In addition to introducing students to what scholars write about Congress, I also hope to expose you as much as possible to the practical exigencies of electoral and legislative politics in the contemporary era, primarily through two applied assignments. In the first, students will work in small groups to create campaign commercials for or against incumbent members of the House or Senate using the web for information and the studios in the Swem Media Center for production. The second applied assignment is an elaborate simulation exercise in which students will be assigned roles as current members of Congress.

Logistics

All students who signed up for the course should already be enrolled on the Blackboard course site for GOVT 370. I will regularly communicate with students through the email listserv on the course site. My office location is 137-B Morton Hall, and my office telephone extension is 1-3030. My office hours for spring 2011 are Friday afternoons from 2:00 to 5:00. I am in my office most days, however, so you should feel free to drop by any time. You also can arrange an appointment with me via email (clevan@wm.edu). On most days, I follow email closely between 8 a.m. and 11 p.m., and typically respond to messages within an hour or two.

Assignments and Grading

All of the readings for GOVT 370 are available as pdf's or other files on the Blackboard course site. There is no need to purchase any books. A schedule for the readings is attached to this memo. Although course lectures and discussions will sometimes parallel, sometimes diverge from the reading schedule, you will be expected to have read the assignment for a particular week prior to the first class meeting of that week.

Grading for the class will be based on five factors: a midterm exam (20%), a final exam (30%), the campaign commercial (20%), the simulation exercise (20%), and class participation (10%). Extensive information about the campaign commercial assignment will be provided during late January. It should be emphasized that there is no expectation that students will have any background or abilities in the area of video production. As part of the assignment, students will work closely with technical assistants at the Swem Media Center who will provide the necessary guidance. Over the past few years, the students enrolled in GOVT 370 have had no technical problems at all in completing the assignment. Indeed, they generally viewed it as the most straightforward and enjoyable feature of the course. I will provide specific information about the simulation exercise in late March. This exercise also will include web-based research, as well as the writing of two brief memos.

Reading and Assignment Schedule.

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| 1/19-1/21 | Galston, "Can a Polarized American Party System be 'Healthy'?"
Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation" |
| 1/24-1/28 | Hibbing and Larimer, "The American Public's View of Congress"
Mayhew, <i>Congress: The Electoral Connection</i> (selections) |
| 1/31-2/4 | Fenno, "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration"
Jacobson, "Modern Campaigns and Representation" |
| 2/7-2/11 | West, <i>Air Wars</i> , Ch. 3, 9
Jamieson, <i>Dirty Politics</i> , Ch. 2, 3
Herrnson, "The Campaign for Resources" |
| 2/14-2/18 | Hirsch, "The United States House of Unrepresentatives"
Canon, <i>Race Redistricting and Representation</i> , Ch. 1, 3 |
| 2/21-2/25 | Schickler, "Institutional Development of Congress"
Sinclair, "Why and How the Legislative Process Changed"
Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee, Ch. 7, 8 |
| 3/3 or 3/4 | Midterm |
| 3/14-3/18 | Oleszek, "The Congressional Budget Process" |

	Smith and Deering, "Member Goals and Committee Assignments"
3/21-3/25	Hall, "Participation and Purpose in Committee Decision Making" Aldrich and Rohde, "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era"
3/28-4/1	Kingdon, "Models of Legislative Voting" Evans and Grandy, "The Whip Systems of Congress"
4/4-4/8	Roberts and Smith, "Procedural Contexts, Party Strategy, and Conditional Party Voting in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1971-2000" Evans and Lipinski, "Obstruction and Leadership in the U.S. Senate" Binder, Madonna, and Smith, "Going Nuclear, Senate Style"
4/11-4/13	Sinclair, "Resolving Differences: Party Leaders and Procedural Choice"
4/14-4/22	Simulation Exercise
4/25-4/29	Krehbiel, "A Theory"
5/3	Final Exam Section 1
5/9	Final Exam Section 2