

**TO:** GOVT 491 Students

**FR:** Larry Evans

**RE:** Seminar paper

**DT:** March 3, 2004

As mentioned on the syllabus, the course requirements for GOVT 491-01 include a research proposal, which should be approximately 20 pages in length (double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12 font, English language). There is no need for you to actually conduct the research you suggest (e.g. collect data). The assignment is to write a proposal.

The paper will be due on the last day of class for this seminar – Wednesday, April 28. There will be no class on Wednesday, April 21 to facilitate the preparation of these papers. I will instead be meeting individually with students in my office. You should organize your seminar paper in a manner that is appropriate for your topic. But the best approach probably would be to divide the paper into five main sections.

1. The first section should present a research “question” relevant to the salient themes and concepts found in the academic literature about the U.S. Congress. You should state your question clearly and explain why it is of interest. What normative issues are raised by the question? What positive theoretical issues are raised? Why should we care?
2. The second section of the paper should review the relevant academic literature. How much do scholars know about your question? What data sources typically are used to address the matter? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature in this area? What is left to be learned about your topic? Be sure to include full citations for all relevant works.
3. Section 3 should present the theory and hypotheses at the heart of your research proposal. As we will discuss, a theory is a deductive structure that is based on clear assumptions about human motivations, behavior, strategies, and institutions. Most of the studies we will read in this class are oriented around rational choice theory – reflecting the current focus of congressional scholarship. An hypothesis is an expectation, prediction, or other declarative statement about the real world of congressional politics. The hypothesis you develop should be testable in some way. Examples of hypotheses in the literature include: Incumbents tend to get reelected because of the constituency services activities of the typical congressional office; Congressional committees are seldom composed of preference outliers; Party leaders exert a significant and independent impact on legislation relevant to the party agenda, and so on.
4. In Section 4, you should overview the data that could be collected to test the hypotheses you present in Section 3. Why would these data be appropriate? Where would you find this information? Have these data already been examined in some way in the existing literature? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these data for evaluating your hypotheses?

5. Section 5 should be a brief summary of the results you would expect if you actually conducted the empirical analysis that you have proposed. It should serve as the conclusion for your research proposal.