TO: Students in GOVT 491-01, Seminar on Congress  
FR: Larry Evans  
DT: January 25, 2010  
RE: Course description and assignments

**Focus.** The purpose of this seminar is to expose students to scholarly research about the U.S. Congress. Our focus will be on a number of leading academic treatments of important aspects of congressional politics. In contrast to other courses in the department, however, the emphasis will be on the different ways that professional scholars study the national legislature, rather than standard textbook treatments. This semester, the seminar will consider the kinds of questions scholars often ask about congressional representation, committees, party leaders, floor decision making, and interbranch relations. GOVT 370 is a prerequisite for the course.

**Logistics.** All students who signed up for the course already should be enrolled on the Blackboard course site for GOVT 491-01. 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 offices hours for spring 2010 are Friday, 1:30-4:30. 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.

**Requirements.** Since this is a seminar, we will not be successful unless students have carefully read the assignments for a given meeting prior to that meeting. There are no books to purchase for the seminar. All of the readings are available on-line via the Blackboard course site. In addition to participation during regularly scheduled class periods, I will expect you to complete an in-class exam and write and present a research proposal (about twenty-five pages, double-spaced). The proposal and exam will each count for 35 percent of the final grade and class participation will count for 30 percent.

**Schedule**

**January 26**  
**Introduction**


**February 2**  
**An Example of Research in Progress**

February 9    Elections and Representation


February 16    History: Elections and Representation


Jamie Carson, Erik Engstrom, and Jason Roberts 2007. “Candidate Quality, the Personal Vote, and the Incumbency Advantage in Congress.” American Political Science Review.


February 23    Committees


March 2  Floor Decision Making


March 16  Institutional Development


Sarah Binder. 2006. “Parties and Institutional Choice Revisited.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* (Skim)


March 23  History: Structure and Procedure


**March 30 Gender and Race**


**April 6 Congress and the Bureaucracy**


**April 13 Exam**

**April 20 Individual consultations about research proposal**

**April 27 Research Proposals Due**