Congressional Policymaking  
GOVT 215  
Fall 2012  
Public Affairs Center (PAC) 107  
Monday and Wednesday  
11 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.

Professor Logan Dancey  
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Office hours: Tuesday, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and by appointment  
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Course Overview

The contemporary Congress is a much-maligned institution, with approval ratings rarely topping 20%. Disgust with Congress is not just reserved for the general public, however, with politicians, scholars, and pundits all criticizing the way the current Congress functions. Although Congress is rarely popular, recent approval levels have reached historic lows. What happened?

This course will provide an in-depth look at the U.S. Congress, with a specific focus on the changes that have taken place in the institution over the last several decades. In particular, we will analyze why the two parties seem more polarized today than in the past, how the policymaking process has changed as a result, and what the consequences are for lawmaking in the United States. Along the way, we will touch on longstanding topics of interest to congressional scholars, such as the motivations of members of Congress, the role interest groups play in the policymaking process, and the relationship between Congress and the other branches of government.

Course Objectives

There are four main objectives to this course. By the end of the course you will be better able to:

1. Understand how the congressional policymaking process functions  
2. Explain how the congressional policymaking process has changed over time  
3. Identify the ways in which members of Congress seek to represent their constituents  
4. Articulate a position on key debates about the state of the contemporary Congress

Course Structure

This course will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to finish the required readings for each class session and come ready to engage in a critical discussion of the arguments and evidence presented in the readings.
**Required Books**


**Course Website**

You can access the course website through moodle.wesleyan.edu. Please check the course website regularly (i.e. at least twice a week).

**Assignments**

**Two papers (20% each/40% total):** You will complete two short research papers for this course. Both short papers will be 6-8 pages, double-spaced. In the first paper (due Oct. 1) you will research a member of Congress’ legislative behavior and presentation of self (e.g., bill sponsorship, speechmaking, website) and analyze the member’s representational style. In the second short paper (due Nov. 5) you will analyze the legislative history of a recent law and assess the extent to which it followed an “unorthodox” path based on the standards laid out in Barbara’s Sinclair’s *Unorthodox Lawmaking*. I will pass out assignment sheets with more information at least two weeks before the due dates.

**Midterm Exam (20%):** There will be one midterm exam in this course (Oct. 8), which will cover the readings through Oct. 3. The in-class exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of short identification and essay questions.

**Final Exam (25%):** There will be a final exam in this course (Wednesday, Dec. 12 2-5 p.m.). The final exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of short id questions from the second half of the class (post-midterm) and essay questions that may cover the entire semester.

**Op-Eds (10%):** During the course of the semester you will write three op-eds (approximately 750 words in length). The purpose of these op-eds is for you to take what you learn in this class and condense it into a concise and accessible commentary on a particular issue of the day. I expect that you will become better at writing these op-eds after some practice, so the first two op-eds are each worth 2.5% of your overall course grade and the final op-ed is worth 5% of your overall course grade. The op-eds are due Sept. 19, Nov. 14, and Dec. 7. You will receive more information on the topic and style of these op-eds in a separate handout.

**Attendance/Participation (5%):** You are expected to attend and participate in class. I will take attendance beginning Sept. 17. One unexcused absence will not affect your participation grade. A second unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1—out of 5—participation points. You will lose two additional participation points for a third unexcused absence. If you have four or more unexcused absences you will not receive any participation points. You can also lose participation points for
disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping or texting) or failing to participate in class. I do not expect every person to have something to say every day, but semi-regular participation that indicates engagement with the course material is expected.

**Key Due Dates**

Sept. 19: First op-ed due  
Oct. 1: First short paper due  
Oct. 8: Midterm exam  
Nov. 5: Second short paper due  
Nov. 14: Second op-ed due  
Dec. 7 (5 p.m.): Final op-ed due  
Dec. 12 (2-5 p.m.): Final Exam

**Late Assignments**

Late papers and op-eds will lose one letter grade for each day that they are late (e.g., a B+ becomes a C+ if it is one day late). An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted after the start of class the day it is due. The assignment becomes two days late the following day. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted. Exams must be taken during the time scheduled. Makeup exams will only be granted in rare cases (e.g., a documented medical emergency).

**Contacting the Instructor**

I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Dancey in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your papers are best dealt with in office hours where we can have a more productive conversation than over e-mail. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible [during the 2nd week of the semester], so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/index.html.

**Contested Grades**
If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation.

**Technology in the Classroom**

You may use laptops, iPads, etc. in class for note taking purposes only. Refrain from using these devices for Facebook, instant messenger, e-mail checking, or anything else that may distract you, your fellow students, or me. It is obvious when someone is using his or her laptop for non-class related activities, and I reserve the right to discontinue the use of laptops (unless you contact me about an exception) if they become a distraction. Texting is not permitted during class.

**Academic Integrity**

I take plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct seriously. Please see this helpful website: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html

Suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Board. I expect students to follow the Wesleyan honor code, which can be found here: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/honorboard/honorcode.html

**Course Schedule:**

Readings noted with an asterisk (*) are from assigned books. The rest of the material can be found on Moodle or by going to the url listed next to the reading.

Sept. 3—Introductions

**Foundations**

Sept. 5: Design and Evolution


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1 I reserve the right to make modifications to the course schedule during the semester. If I make changes I will both announce them in class and on the website.
Elections and Representation

Sept. 10: Elections


Sept. 12: Electoral Motivations


Sept. 17: Electoral Motivations, II

- *Mayhew, pp. 81-180 (part 2).


Sept. 19: Views of the District (First op-ed due)


Sept. 24: Descriptive Representation


Sept. 26: The Electoral Roots of Polarization, I


Oct. 1: The Electoral Roots of Polarization, II (First paper due)


• *Abramowitz, Alan. “U.S. Senate Elections in a Polarized Era.” Chapter 2 in Loomis.*

Oct. 3: Partisanship


**MIDTERM**

Oct. 8—Midterm Exam

**POLICYMAKING PROCESS**

Oct. 10: The Way it Was

• *Shickler, Eric. “The U.S. Senate in the Mid-Twentieth Century.” Chapter 1 in Loomis.*


Oct. 15: No class, fall break

Oct. 17: Policymaking in the House


Oct. 22: Policymaking in the Senate

- *Sinclair. Unorthodox Lawmaking. Chapter 3


Oct. 24: Budget Process and Conference Committees

- *Sinclair. Unorthodox Lawmaking. Chapter 4-5


Oct. 29: Consequences of the New Process


Congress in the Political System

Oct. 31: Congress and the President


Nov. 5: Congress and the President, II (Second paper due)


- Lindsay, James. “The Senate and Foreign Policy.” Chapter 11 in Loomis.

Nov. 7: Congress and Interest Groups


Nov. 12: Guest Speaker

• Chris Licita (Campaign Director and former Communications Director) for Rep. John Larson


• Larson profile in *Almanac of American Politics* (Moodle)

Nov. 14: Congress and the Courts (Second op-ed due)


Nov. 19: Congressional Oversight


Nov. 21 (No Class—Thanksgiving Break)

Nov. 26: What’s Wrong with Congress?

• *Mann and Ornstein, Introduction and Chapters 1-3.

Nov. 28: What Wrong with Congress?

• *Mann and Ornstein, Chapters 4-7.
Dec. 3: A Different Perspective on What’s Wrong with Congress


Dec. 5 (Final op-ed due Dec. 7 by 5 p.m.)


Wednesday, Dec. 12: Final Exam (2-5 p.m.)