

Congressional Policymaking  
GOVT 215  
Fall 2015  
FISK 116  
Tuesday and Thursday  
2:40 – 4 p.m.

Professor Logan Dancey

Office: PAC 102

Office hours: Monday, 2-3 p.m.; T/Th, 4-4:45 p.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**

Dodd, Lawrence C. and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, ed. 2013. *Congress Reconsidered*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Mayhew, David. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Carnes, Nicholas. 2013. *White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class In Economic Policymaking*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Adler, E. Scott and John Wilkerson. 2012. *Congress and the Politics of Problem Solving*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## **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 research papers for this course. Both papers will be 8-12 pages, double-spaced. In the first paper (due Oct. 16) you will research the legislative behavior and presentation of self (e.g., bill sponsorship, speechmaking, website) of two members of Congress from the same party and compare/contrast their legislative styles. In the second paper (due Nov. 20) you will analyze the legislative history of a recent policy topic or bill. 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. 22), which will cover the readings through Oct. 15. The in-class exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of essay questions.

**Final Exam (25%):** There will be a final exam in this course (Dec. 15 from 7-10 p.m.) The final exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of essay questions.

**Moodle Posts (10%):** You are responsible for submitting 10 short reading response posts to Moodle (e.g., 1-2 paragraphs) over the course of the semester. These should be **uploaded to Moodle by 2 p.m. the day of class. You can only do one per class.** Good response posts will not just summarize an argument. Instead, they will *respond* to a particular aspect of the reading. A good response might do one of the following 1) Identify a theoretical question that is sparked by the reading and how one might go about answering that question 2) Explain how some evidence from a previous reading supports or refutes an author's point; 3) Explain how some contemporary aspect of congressional politics supports or refutes an author's point; or 4) Identify an area of disagreement with the author and explain why you disagree.

**Attendance/Participation (5%):** You are expected to attend and participate in class. I do not expect every person to have something to say every day, but regular participation that indicates engagement with the course material is expected. Multiple unexcused absences, disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping, using a laptop for non-course related purposes, texting) or failure to participate in class will lower your participation grade.

## **Key Due Dates**

Oct. 16: Paper #1 Due  
Oct. 22: Midterm  
Nov. 20: Paper #2 Due  
Dec. 15: Final Exam

### **Late Assignments**

Late papers will lose 2/3 of a letter grade for each day that they are late (e.g., a B+ becomes a B- if one day late). An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted more than 15 minutes after the deadline. An assignment due in class is considered due no later than 2:45 p.m. that day. The assignment becomes two days late after 24 hours. 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**

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

### **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.** I will notify you if I believe you are using your laptop for non-class related activities. A second violation will result in a one-grade reduction in your participation grade (e.g., B becomes a C) and a request from me to stop bringing your laptop to class. If you bring your laptop to class after the second violation it will result in a failing participation grade.

### **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:<sup>1</sup>**

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.

### **CR=Congress Reconsidered**

Sept. 8: Introductions

### **Foundations**

Sept. 10: Design and Evolution

- *Federalist Papers* 51, 52, & 62. <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>
- Davidson, Oleszek, and Lee. 2012. *Congress and Its Members: 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, chapter 2.
- Binder, Sarah. *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock*, chapter 1.

### **Elections and Representation**

Sept. 15: Electoral Motivations

- \*Mayhew, David. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection. Second Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 1-77 (part 1)
- Find the member of Congress that represents Wesleyan (zip: 06459) or your hometown. Skim his/her website for examples of advertising, position taking, and credit claiming (press releases are a good place to search). Bring an example to class.

Sept. 17: Electoral Motivations, II

- \*Mayhew, pp. 81-180 (part 2).
- Zelizer, Julian. 2014. "Is There Anything Wrong with a Little Pork Barrel Spending?" [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/12/opinion/zelizer-the-case-for-earmarks/), May 12: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/12/opinion/zelizer-the-case-for-earmarks/>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

#### Sept. 22: The Changing Electoral Environment

- Jacobson, Gary C. "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 77(3): 861-73.
- Abramowitz, Alan. 2012. "U.S. Senate Elections in a Polarized Era." In *The U.S. Senate: From Deliberation to Dysfunction*, ed. Burdett Loomis. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

#### Sept. 24: Polarization and Congressional Behavior

- McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, pp. 1-23.
- Aldrich, John H. and David W. Rohde. 2001. "The Logic of Conditional Party Government: Revisiting the Electoral Connection."
- Lee, Frances. 2014. "American Politics is More Competitive Than Ever. That's Making Partisanship Worse." *Washington Post (Monkey Cage Blog)*, Jan. 9:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/09/american-politics-is-more-competitive-than-ever-thats-making-partisanship-worse/>

#### Sept. 29: Views of the District

- Fenno, Richard F. Jr. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *American Political Science Review* 71(3): 883-917. (Moodle)
- Miler, Kristina. 2007. "The View from the Hill: Legislative Perceptions of the District." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32(4): 597-627.

#### Oct. 1: Descriptive Representation I

- Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes.'" *The Journal of Politics* 61(3): 628-57.
- Carnes, *White-Collar Government*, chapter 1

#### Oct. 6: Descriptive Representation II

- Carnes, *White-Collar Government*, pp. 26-49, 59-77.
- \*Pearson, Kathryn. "Congresswomen's Pursuit of Power in a Partisan Environment." Chapter 3 in CR.
- Butler, Daniel M. and David E. Broockman. 2011. "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 463-477.

#### Oct. 8: Descriptive Representation III

- Carnes, chapter 5-6.
- Pearson, Kathryn. 2010. "Demographic Change and the Future of Congress." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 43(2): 235-38.
- Grose, Christian R., Maurice Mangum, and Christopher Martin. 2007. "Race, Political Empowerment, and Constituency Service: Descriptive Representation and the Hiring of African-American Congressional Staff." *Polity* 39(4): 449-478.

#### Oct. 13: Money and Interest Groups, Day I (Campaign Contributions)

- Powell, Lynda W. 2013. "The Influence of Campaign Contributions on Legislative Policy." *The Forum* 11(3): 339-355.
- Jacobson, Gary. 2013. *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, pp. 66-95.
- Grossman, Matt. 2014. "Money Can't Buy you the NRA." *Sunlight Foundation Blog*, May 21: <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2014/05/21/money-cant-buy-you-the-nra/>

#### Oct. 15: Money and Interest Groups, Day II (Lobbying)

- Levine, Bertram. 2009. *The Art of Lobbying: Building Trust and Selling Policy*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Excerpts.
- Drutman, Lee and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2013. "The Inside View: Using the Enron E-mail Archive to Understand Corporate Political Attention." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 38(1): 5-30

#### Oct. 16: Paper #1 Due

Oct. 20: Guest speakers or documentary

Oct. 22: Midterm

Oct. 27: Fall Break!

## **THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

Oct. 29: “Unorthodox” and “Unconventional” Lawmaking

- Oleszek, Walter J. 2014. *Congressional Procedures and The Policy Process*, pp. 11-40.
- Sinclair, Barbara. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*. Chapter 1, 6.

Nov. 3: Legislating in the House

- Oleszek, Walter J. 2014. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*, pp. 160-191.
- \*Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde. “Richard Fenno’s Theory of Congressional Committees and the Partisan Polarization of the House.” Chapter 8 in CR

Nov. 5: Legislating in the Senate

- \*Sinclair, Barbara. “The New World of U.S. Senators.” Chapter 1 in CR.
- \*Koger, Gregory. “Filibustering and Parties in the Modern Senate.” Chapter 9 in CR.

Nov. 10: Budget and Taxes

- \*Thurber, James A. “The Dynamics and Dysfunction of the Congressional Budget Process: From Inception to Deadlock.” Chapter 13 in CR.
- \*Rudder, Catherine E. “Tax Policymaking and Fiscal Responsibility: Is Congress Capable of Doing Its Job?” Chapter 14 in CR.



#### Nov. 12: Passing Legislation: Case Studies

- Sinclair, Barbara. "A Tale of Two Stimuli: The Bush-Pelosi-Boehner Stimulus Bill of 2008 and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009." In *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, chapter 7.
- Prokop, Andrew. 2014. "Beating the Odds. Why One Bill Made it Through a Gridlocked Congress—and So Many Don't." Vox.com, May 22:  
<http://www.vox.com/2014/5/22/5723878/how-a-bill-becomes-a-law-in-2014>

#### Nov. 17: Congressional Problem Solving

- \*Adler, E. Scott and John Wilkerson. 2013. *Congress and the Politics of Problem Solving*, pp. 1-30, 53-87.
- Ornstein, Norm. 2014. "Twilight of the Congressional Problem Solvers." *The Atlantic*, Feb. 27: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/twilight-of-the-congressional-problem-solvers/284113/>

#### Nov. 19: Congressional Problem Solving

- \*Adler and Wilkerson, *Congress and the Politics of Problem Solving*, pp. 116-126, 167-210.
- Bump, Philip. "The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress is Historically Good at Not Passing Bills." *Washington Post*, July 9: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2014/07/09/the-113th-congress-is-historically-good-at-not-passing-bills/>
- Wilkerson, John, Nick Stramp, and David Smith. 2014. "Why Bill Success is a Lousy Way to Keep Score in Congress." *Washington Post (Monkey Cage Blog)*, Feb. 6:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/06/why-bill-success-is-a-lousy-way-to-keep-score-in-congress/>

#### Nov. 20: Paper #2 due

### **Congress in the Political System**

#### Nov. 24: Congress and the President, Day 1

- Lee, Frances. 2008. "Dividers, Not Unifiers: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004." *Journal of Politics* 70: 914-28.
- Watch Frontline documentary "Cliffhanger":  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/cliffhanger/>

Nov. 26: Thanksgiving

Dec. 1: Congress and the President, Day 2

- Wayne, Stephen J. 2009. "Legislative Skills." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*, eds. George C. Edwards III and William G. Howell. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, Ezra. 2014. "The Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency, explained." *Vox.com*, May 20: <http://www.vox.com/2014/5/20/5732208/the-green-lantern-theory-of-the-presidency-explained>
- Hulse, Carl, Jeremy W. Peters and Michael D. Shear. 2014. "Obama is Seen as Frustrating His Own Party." *New York Times*, Aug. 18: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/19/us/aloof-obama-is-frustrating-his-own-party.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/19/us/aloof-obama-is-frustrating-his-own-party.html?_r=0)

Nov. 21: Paper #2 Due

Dec. 3: Congress and the President, Day 3 (Foreign Policy)

- Howell, William G. and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2007. "When Congress Stops Wars: Partisan Politics and Presidential Power." *Foreign Affairs* 9 86(5): 95-107.
- Broder, Jonathan. 2013. "Damned if You Do..." *CQ Weekly*, Sept. 9:  
<http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/document.php?id=weeklyreport113-000004338987&type=hitlist&num=17>
- Reading on Iran nuclear deal TBD

Dec. 8: Confirmation Hearings and Oversight

- \*Binder, Sarah. "Advice and Consent: The Politics of Confirming Federal Judges." Chapter 11 in CR.

- Sanchez, Humberto. 2013. "A Landmark Change to Filibuster." *CQ Weekly*, Dec. 2:  
<http://library.cqpress.com/cqweekly/document.php?id=weeklyreport113-000004387403&type=hitlist&num=4>
- McCubbins, Matthew D. and Thomas Schwartz. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms." (Excerpt).

Dec. 10: Wrapping Up

- Readings TBD

Tuesday, Dec. 15: 7-10 p.m.

- Final Exam