

**Congressional Reform**  
**GOVT 373**  
**Spring 2014**  
**PAC 413**  
**Tuesdays, 1:10-4 p.m.**

Professor Logan Dancey

Office: PAC 102

Office hours: Tuesday, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and by appointment

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### **Course Overview**

The modern Congress is often criticized for being too partisan, inefficient, and beholden to special interests. This seminar will examine the development of the modern Congress by focusing on the history of congressional reform. We will also evaluate proposals for reforming the modern Congress to remedy potential shortcomings in the lawmaking and ethics process. Students will write an original research paper on the topic of congressional reform.

### **Course Objectives**

At the end of this course students will:

- 1) Better understand the development of the modern Congress.
- 2) Better understand the conditions under which reforms are more likely to succeed or fail.
- 3) Better understand the feasibility and implications of existing reform proposals.
- 4) Have a polished piece of original research on the topic of congressional reform.

### **Course Structure**

Course sessions will be almost entirely discussion based. I may do some short lectures at various points during the semester if more background is needed on a topic. Since the course will be mostly discussion based, it is incumbent upon all participants to show up ready and willing to engage in thoughtful discussion of the material. That means students should do the required reading before class and be prepared to analyze the arguments, evidence, strengths, and shortcomings of the pieces we read. I will also post some “questions to ponder” online before each class session so that we can come in with a few pre-set things to discuss, although I want people to feel free to raise other questions and points.

### **Required Books**

Adler, E. Scott. 2002. *Why Congressional Reforms Fail: Reelection and the House Committee System*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lessig, Lawrence. 2011. *Republic, Lost*. New York: Twelve.

Rohde, David. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schickler, Eric. 2001. *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress*. New Haven: Yale 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**

**Participation (15%):** Seminars operate best when **everyone** participates, so you should be prepared to participate in class discussion each week. It is expected that you will attend every class session and arrive on time. Excessive lateness (10+ minutes) or unexcused absences will hurt your participation grade. Excused absences are reserved for documented medical emergencies, family emergencies, or university events. On March 4 I will give you a midterm assessment of your participation.

**Reaction Papers (15%):** A short reaction paper covering the readings is **due every class session except May 6**. See the reaction paper guidelines handout for more instructions. Reaction papers are due at the start of class (either hardcopy or uploaded to Moodle). Reaction papers turned in after 1:30 p.m. will not be accepted for credit.

**Topic (5%):** A brief (1-2 paragraph) statement of the topic for your research paper is due by Feb. 21 by 5 p.m. (on Moodle). Students may be asked to resubmit this assignment if for some reason their initial topic proposal isn't feasible (e.g., research can't be done in a semester, topic is too broad, etc.)

**Literature Review (10%):** A draft of the literature review section of your final paper is due April 4 by 5 p.m. Each student will meet with Professor Dancey sometime April 9, 10, or 14 to discuss his/her literature review and progress on final paper. More information on what the substance and style of your literature review should look like will come in a separate handout.

**Rough Draft/Peer review (15%):** A rough draft of your research paper is due Thursday, May 1 at 5 p.m. Students will meet in groups of 3-4 students on May 6 to review one another's work. Students will be responsible for reading the rough drafts of group members and completing a peer review assignment prior to class on May 6.

**Final Paper (30%):** Your final paper is due by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 16.

**Presentation (10%):** Students will present the findings from their research during the scheduled final exam time (7-10 p.m. on Thursday, May 17).

## **Key Dates**

Feb. 21: Topic due by 5 p.m. on Moodle

April 4: Literature review due by 5 p.m.

April 9, 10, or 14: Meet with Professor Dancey to discuss lit review/paper

May 1: Rough draft due by 5 p.m.

May 6: Peer review

May 16: Final draft due by 5 p.m.

May 17: Presentations

## **Late Assignments**

I will not accept reaction papers for credit after 1:30 p.m. the day they are due. You will also not be able to make up your presentation if you miss the day you are scheduled to present.

Late research paper assignments (i.e., topic, lit review, rough draft, final draft) will lose 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B+ becomes B-) for each day they are late. An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted more than 10 minutes after the stated deadline. The assignment becomes two days late 24 hours after the deadline, 3 days late after 48 hours, 4 days late after 72 hours, and 5 days late after 96 hours. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted for credit.

## **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 research paper 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.

## **Contested Grades**

If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate within two weeks of getting the assignment back. 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. This policy is meant to address disagreements with my assessment of your work. It does not pertain to calculation errors on my part. If you believe I have made a mistake adding up points, converting your points to a percentage, etc. you can let me know immediately, and I will be happy to correct any mistakes.

## **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 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

## **Technology in the Classroom**

You may use laptops or tablets 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:<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.

### **January 28—An Introduction to Current Debates**

- Binder, Sarah A. and Frances Lee. 2013. "Making Deals in Congress."
- Kane, Paul. 2013. "Reid, Democrats trigger 'Nuclear' Option; Eliminate Most Filibusters on Nominees." *Washington Post*, Nov. 21: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/senate-poised-to-limit-filibusters-in-party-line-vote-that-would-alter-centuries-of-precedent/2013/11/21/d065cfe8-52b6-11e3-9fe0-fd2ca728e67c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/senate-poised-to-limit-filibusters-in-party-line-vote-that-would-alter-centuries-of-precedent/2013/11/21/d065cfe8-52b6-11e3-9fe0-fd2ca728e67c_story.html)
- Binder, Sarah. 2013. "Fate of the Filibuster in a Post-Nuclear Senate." *Washington Post* (Monkey Cage Blog), Nov. 24: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/11/24/fate-of-the-filibuster-in-a-post-nuclear-senate/>.
- Lipton, Eric. 2014. "A Loophole Allows Lawmakers to Reel in Trips and Donations." *The New York Times*, Jan. 19: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/20/us/politics/a-loophole-allows-lawmakers-to-reel-in-trips-and-donations.html?emc=eta1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/20/us/politics/a-loophole-allows-lawmakers-to-reel-in-trips-and-donations.html?emc=eta1&_r=1)

### **Feb. 4—Members' Goals**

- Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Excerpt.
- Fenno, Richard F. 1973. *Congressmen in Committees*. Boston, Little Brown. Chapter 1.
- Cox, Gary and Mat McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the Agenda*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-2.

### **Feb. 11—Collective Action in Congress**

- Fiorina, Morris. 1989. *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press. Excerpt.
- Mayer, Kenneth R. and David T. Cannon. 1999. *The Dysfunctional Congress? The Individual Roots of an Institutional Dilemma*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Excerpt.
- Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein. 2012. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, pp. 1-80.

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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.

- Galston, William A. 2012. "Why Republicans Aren't the Only Ones to Blame for Polarization." *The New Republic*, May 18:  
<http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/05/18-politics-galston#>

### **Feb. 18—Congressional Change, Day I**

- \*Rohde, David. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Post-Reform House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Entire book.
- Lee, Frances E. 2012. "Individual and Partisan Activism on the Senate Floor." In *The U.S. Senate: From Deliberation to Dysfunction*, ed. Burdett Loomis, pp. 110-31. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

### **Feb. 21 (Topic due by 5 p.m.)**

### **Feb. 25—Congressional Change, Day II**

- \*Schickler, Eric. 2001. *Disjointed Pluralism*. Chapters 1-2, 5-6, and epilogue.

### **March 4—"Failed" Reforms**

- \*Adler, E. Scott. 2002. *Why Congressional Reforms Fail: Reelection and the House Committee System*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-3 and 5-8. Look at intro and conclusion of chapter 4.

### **March 11—Spring Break!**

### **March 18—Spring Break!**

### **March 25—Fixing Congress**

- Read all entries in Boston Review's "Fixing Congress" Forum:  
<http://www.bostonreview.net/cooper-fixing-congress>
- "Look at Make Congress Work!" Proposals from No Labels:  
<http://www.nolabels.org/work>

### **April 1—Fixing Elections to Fix Polarization**

- Harbridge, Laurel and Neil Malhotra. 2011. "Electoral Incentives and Partisan Conflict in Congress: Evidence from Survey Experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 494-510.
- Abramowitz, Alan I., Brad Alexander, and Matthew Gunning. 2006. "Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 68(1): 75-88.

- Kraushaar, Josh. 2013. "Why Reforming the Primary Process Would Produce a More Productive Congress: Closed Party Primaries are the Leading Culprit Behind Growing Polarization." *National Journal*, Feb. 6: <http://www.nationaljournal.com/columns/against-the-grain/why-reforming-the-primary-process-would-produce-a-more-productive-congress-20130206>.
- Sides, John. 2013. "Reforming Primary Elections Won't Make Government Better." *Washington Post* (Monkey Cage Blog), Oct. 18: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/10/18/reforming-primary-elections-wont-make-government-better/>.
- Galston, William A. 2011. "Telling Americans to Vote, Or Else." *The New York Times*, Nov. 5: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/opinion/sunday/telling-americans-to-vote-or-else.html?pagewanted=1&r=1&emc=eta1>.
- Sides, John. 2011. "Mandatory Voting Isn't a Solution to Polarization." *The Monkey Cage Blog*, Nov. 8: <http://themonkeycage.org/2011/11/08/mandatory-voting-isnt-a-solution-to-polarization/>.

#### **April 4—Literature Review Due**

#### **April 8—Reforming the Senate/Filibuster**

- Binder, Sarah A. 2010. "The History of the Filibuster." Congressional Testimony. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2010/04/22-filibuster-binder>
- Arenberg, Richard A. 2012 and Robert B. Dove. *Defending the Filibuster: The Soul of the Senate*, excerpt.
- Bondurant, Emmett J. 2011. "The Senate Filibuster: The Politics of Obstruction." *Harvard Journal of Legislation* 48(2): 467-513.
- Koger, Gregory. 2011. "The Past and Future of the Supermajority Senate." *The Forum* 9(4): Article 10.
- Schickler, Eric and Gregory J. Wawro. 2011. "What The Filibuster Tells Us About the Senate." 9(4): Article 11.

#### **April 15—Corruption and the Appearance of Corruption**

- Warren, Mark E. 2006. "Democracy and Deceit: Regulating Appearances of Corruption." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(1): 160-74.
- Lessig, Lawrence. 2011. *Republic, Lost*, pp. 1-89 (skim chapters 6-7).

- Persily, Nathaniel and Kelli Lammie. 2004. "Perception of Corruption and Campaign Finance: When Public Opinion Determines Constitutional Law." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 153(1): 119-80.
- Will, George F. 2013. "Supreme Court Can Rescue Another Freedom in a Campaign Cash Case." *Washington Post*, Oct. 4: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/george-will-supreme-court-can-rescue-another-freeom-in-a-campaign-cash-case/2013/10/04/77bd9e42-2d23-11e3-97a3-ff2758228523\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/george-will-supreme-court-can-rescue-another-freeom-in-a-campaign-cash-case/2013/10/04/77bd9e42-2d23-11e3-97a3-ff2758228523_story.html).
- Sunlight Foundation. "Sunlight Agenda 2014." <http://sunlightfoundation.com/policy/agenda/>

#### **April 22—Campaign Finance**

- Lessig, 89-317.
- Smith, Bradley. 2010. "The Myth of Campaign Finance Reform." *National Affairs*, <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-myth-of-campaign-finance-reform>
- Klein, Ezra. 2012. "Our Corrupt Politics: It's Not All Money." *The New York Review of Books*, March 22: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/mar/22/our-corrupt-politics-its-not-all-money/?pagination=false>.

#### **April 29—Is Congress Responsive?**

- Hibbing, John and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. Excerpt.
- Theriault, Sean. 2005. *The Power of the People: Congressional Competition, Public Attention, and Voter Retribution*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. Chapters 1-2, 5.
- Dancey, Logan. Working Papers, TBD.

#### **May 1—Rough Draft Due by 5 p.m.**

#### **May 6—Peer review sessions**

- In-class peer review session followed by course wrap-up

#### **Wednesday, May 14, 5 p.m.**

- Final papers due

#### **Thursday, May 15, 7-10 p.m.**

- Paper Presentations