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Personal: <http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www>

Subject: <http://web.mit.edu/17.251/www>

There is also a Stellar site that will redirect you to the subject URL.

Purpose

The United States Congress is the most open of the national branches of government and therefore the most closely studied. The purpose of this subject is to find ways to deal with the vast array of information we have about Congress. The two basic questions we will be asking are (1) what does Congress do and why and (2) What are the various ways of studying congressional behavior?

To accomplish these goals, this subject is organized around two major learning modes: lectures/discussion and paper/presentation. The lecture/discussion part will expose you to the basic social facts about Congress: what it takes to get elected, how Congress works internally, and how the relationships between Congress and the rest of the federal government are organized. The paper will focus on the 2014 congressional election and its aftermath. It will allow you to analyze the outcomes of this important national election in light of the research on elections and internal politics you will learn about.

This subject introduces students to Congress, primarily undergraduates, but graduate students who have never studied Congress are welcome, too. It is more empirical than theoretical, although theory encroaches here and there. The second subject in this sequence, which will be offered next year, is a seminar that is more theoretical than empirical, and is aimed toward graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

Having an introductory subject in American politics or policymaking, or receiving a 4 or 5 on the AP American Politics exam, is a prerequisite to taking 17.251.

Subject requirements

Readings

The core reading will be my textbook. I will pay you \$1 for each typo you find in the book, so that the third edition (let's hope!) will be better than the first two.

In addition to the textbook, there are several assignments that will augment the lectures and the text. You will do all the readings to coincide with the schedule at the end of the syllabus.

The following books are available for purchase at the Coop:

Charles Stewart III, *Analyzing Congress* (New York, W.W. Norton, 2011).

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, *Congress Reconsidered*, 10th ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press). (While earlier editions are interesting, make sure you have the 10th edition.)

Lectures

The lectures serve two purposes. First, they will fill in basic material which the readings presuppose. Second, they will put the readings in their larger contexts and, I hope, set the stage for discussions of the readings. I especially encourage you to ask questions during the lectures, either for clarification or to explore topics of interest to you.

Examinations

There will be a midterm and a one-hour final. The final will be held during the final examination period.

Paper

This past congressional election was interesting, from a number of perspectives. You will be responsible for taking a broad topic that is pertinent to the study of Congress and writing a 12–15 page paper about it in the context of the 2014 congressional election. You will also make a brief presentation about your research in class on May 12. Topics you might write about include new patterns of campaign finance, membership turnover, congressional redistricting, the performance of statistical models predicting the 2014 outcome, and the Senate election in any particular state. The election also provided the opportunity for institutional changes in Congress, and you can write about that, too. More on this assignment once the class gets going.

Problem set

There are two problem sets in the term. You will be penalized for turning them in late.

Class attendance

You must come to class. If you can't come to class because you are sick or out of town, e-mail or call me ahead of time and let me know. Students who do not come to class, or who come and appear to be disengaged with the material (as evidenced by the fact that they never ask questions or contribute to discussions) will receive a lower grade.

Congressional roundtable

Each Thursday we will start the class with a brief (15 minutes?) informal discussion about the previous week's developments in Congress. Everyone will be required to come into class with a newspaper/magazine/web page clipping to talk about. You will also need to e-mail me, by Wednesday night at 5:00 pm, the citation to the article. Late Wednesday night I will e-mail the class and suggest some agenda items for this discussion. Come prepared to talk.

Laptops, cell phones, etc.

You may use portable computers (including tablets) *only* to take notes or, occasionally, to look up a fact related to the class discussion/lecture. You may not do anything else with your portable computer during class. I wander around the class, so if I see you doing something other than taking notes, I will know about it.

Grading distribution

Class attendance and discussion, 15%

Midterm examination, 15%

Final examinations, 30%

Problem sets, 15%

Paper, 25%

Lecture/reading schedule

Topic	Date(s)	Assigned readings	Notes
I. Introduction	Feb. 3		An assignment (not quite a problem set) will be given out at the end of the class.
II. Unidimensional spatial model	Feb. 5	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 1, pp. 3–23, 47–49 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chaps. 1 & 2	Roundtable Problems will be assigned at the end of class
	Feb. 10		
III. Constitutional origins of Congress	Feb. 12	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 2; Appendix B.	Roundtable
	Feb. 17		No class (Monday schedule)
	Feb. 19	Stewart, “The Constitutional Origins of Congress” (available on the Stellar site)	Roundtable
IV. Origin & development of Congress	Feb. 24	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 3 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 16.	Hand in problems that were distributed on Feb. 5
	Feb. 26		Roundtable
V. Congressional candidates	Mar. 3	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 4 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 4	
	Mar. 5		Roundtable
VI. Congressional voters	Mar. 10	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 5 Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, “The 2010 Congressional Elections” (available on the Stellar site)	
	Mar. 12		Roundtable
	Mar. 17		
	Mar. 19		Roundtable
	Mar. 24		Spring Break
	Mar. 26		
VII. Regulating congressional elections	Mar. 31	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 6 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chaps. 5 & 6	Prof.’s birthday
	Apr. 2		Roundtable
	Apr. 7		Midterm
VIII. Multidimensional spatial model	Apr. 9	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap 1, pp. 23–47	Roundtable Problems will be distributed at the end of class

Topic	Date(s)	Assigned readings	Notes
IX. Congressional parties & leadership	Apr. 14	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 7 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 7.	
	Apr. 16		Roundtable Hand in problems that were distributed on Nov. 3./Apr. 9
X. Congressional committees	Apr. 23	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 8 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 8..	Roundtable
	Apr. 28		
XI. Rules of the chamber/ Roll call voting	Apr. 30	<i>Analyzing Congress</i> , chap. 9 Dodd & Oppenheimer, chaps. 9 & 10.	Roundtable
	May 5		
	May 7		Roundtable
XII. Paper presentations	May 12		
XII. Review/wrap-up	May 14	Mann and Ornstein (all) Dodd & Oppenheimer, chap. 17.	Roundtable

The average weekly reading load is around 60 pages/week before midterm and 80 pages/week after the midterm. In addition, you need to be working on the paper/project throughout the term, and not wait until the very end. Please plan your use of time wisely.