The purpose of this class is to prepare graduate students for professional research into congressional politics in particular and legislatures more generally. When the semester is finished, you should be well enough acquainted with the sweep of the congressional literature, both historical and contemporary, that you could do well on a PhD general exam question about Congress.

We will be reading eight books more-or-less in their entirety. Therefore, you should buy them (usually used and cheap), rather than just check them out of the library, and bring them to class when we discuss them. Please buy hard copies, not Kindle editions. Here are the books you should buy:


I will also make available to everyone the second edition of my textbook, *Analyzing Congress*, at no cost. I expect everyone to be familiar with all of the material covered in the book, since it is the textbook (based on my lectures) that forms the basis of 17.251 (Congress I), which is the prerequisite of this subject.

**Assignments**

There are three assignments.

1. Attend all classes, with all the reading done, ready to discuss. I will assign class members to take responsibility for keeping the discussion going, on a rotating basis. **There is a lot of reading. Don’t get behind.**
2. Discussion agenda memos. You will write brief, one-page memos, circulated by 5pm on the Monday before each class meeting, about the points you want to discuss at the next
day’s seminar. A list of bullet points is fine. The goal is to get us thinking ahead of time about the topics that interest you.

3. Seminar paper. You will write an empirical paper on one of the topics covered by the syllabus, or any other topic related to Congress that interests you. This should be the first draft of a paper you might want to present at a conference or submit to a journal for publication. You must get my approval of the topic no later than March 14. The paper is due at the end of the semester.

**Reading Schedule**

All readings not in the “additional readings” sections of each week are required. The “additional readings” are for your use, in case you are interested in diving in deeper, or you have read some of the required readings before. Mostly, the “additional readings” are intended to group together classic readings we don’t have time to get to into the major topics of the class.

You will notice that most weeks have a selection of readings from Dodd and Oppenheimer’s most recent edited volume. The intention is to get you up to speed on current developments in Congress, so that we have a common base of knowledge about recent history. I don’t expect detailed discussion of these readings, unless something catches the fancy of seminar participants.

*February 4.* First class meeting. Organizational matters.

*February 11.* Congressional representation

Dodd and Oppenheimer, chapters 4 (Erikson and Wright) and 10 (Volden and Wiseman)


**Additional readings**

**February 18.** Monday classes today. No class meeting.

**February 25.** Congressional elections
Dodd and Oppenheimer, chapters 5 (Jacobson) and 6 (Bernhard and Sulkin).

**Additional readings**


*March 4. Congressional candidates, careers, and the incumbency advantage*


Bruce E. Cain, John A. Ferejohn, and Morris P. Fiorina. 1984. The constituency service basis of the personal vote for US representatives and British members of parliament. *American Political Science Review* 78, pp. 110–125. [NB: This is essentially the same argument as the Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina book, *The Personal Vote*, in the “additional readings.”]


**Additional readings**


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March 11. No class today

March 18. Committees

Dodd and Oppenheimer, chapter 8 (Aldrich, Perry, and Rohde).


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**Additional readings**


March 25. Spring break. No class today

April 1. Parties and leadership I

Dodd and Oppenheimer, 10th ed., chapter 7 (Smith and Gamm)


Additional readings


John H. Aldrich. 2011. *Why parties? The origin and transformation of party politics in America*, 2nd ed. [While not about Congress, per se, it provides a framing for parties that is embraced by most students of Congress.]

April 8. Parties and leadership II


**Additional reading**


Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins. 2005. *Setting the agenda: Responsible government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. [NB: This book has a similar article to their *Legislative leviathan*, the 2nd edition of which is assigned this year.]


April 15. Decisionmaking

Dodd and Oppenheimer, 10th ed., chapter 9 (Koger).


**Additional readings**

Duncan Black. 1958. *The theory of committees and elections*


Steven S. Smith. 1989. *Call to order: Floor politics in the House and Senate*.


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April 22. Patriot’s Day. No class meeting

April 29. Policymaking and interbranch relations

Dodd and Oppenheimer, 10th ed., chapters 11 (Binder and Maltzman), 13 (Thurber), and 15 (Kriner and Howell).


**Additional readings**


May 6. History

Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal. 2007. *Ideology and Congress*, excerpts TBA. (Update and re-release of *Congress: A political-economic history of roll call voting* [1997].)


**Additional readings**


May 13. Party polarization and the new “New Congress”

Dodd and Oppenheimer, chapters 1 (Sinclair).
Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein. 2012. *It’s even worse than it looks*, excerpts TBA.
Nolan M. McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*, excerpts TBA.

Additional readings
Some Ways to Think about the Most Important Congressional Literature

The 20 most important books about Congress to have read to understand contemporary scholarship:
Lawrence Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, Congress reconsidered (many editions—keep current with the most recent)

The 10 most important articles that are not associated with these books:


Winners of the Richard F. Fenno, Jr. Prize from the Legislative Studies Section of the APSA (and some of the competition that didn’t win):


Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins. *Setting the agenda* (Cambridge University Press)


1998. No selection


John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as public enemy* (Cambridge University Press)

Barbara Sinclair, *Legislators, leaders, and lawmakers* (Johns Hopkins University Press)


Carol Swain, *Black faces, black interests* (Harvard University Press)


David R. Mayhew, *Divided we govern* (Yale University press)

David W. Rohde, *Parties and leaders in the postreform House* (University of Chicago Press)

Jon R. Bond, *The president in the legislative arena* (Chicago University Press)

David T. Canon, *Actors, athletes, and astronauts* (University of Chicago Press)


Steven S. Smith, *Call to Order* (Brookings Institution Press)

1989. No award


The 25 most-cited articles (on a per-year basis) in *Legislative Studies Quarterly* since 1973


