Course Description

This course is a graduate seminar to study politics in the U.S. Congress. Thus, our goals are both to gain an understanding of the major behavioral and institutional features of the U.S. Congress and to scrutinize political science approaches to the study of congressional politics. Ultimately, by the end of semester, we should be ready for conducting original research on congressional politics.

Prerequisites

It is generally assumed that all seminar participants have taken “Intro American Politics” and “Congressional Politics” in their undergraduate education (or, at least, are familiar with materials covered in these courses). Taking a graduate level American Politics Pro-seminar (POL SCI 749) would be a great resource, but not required.

Textbooks and Additional Materials

The following books are required for this seminar:

In addition, during Week 13, we will need to choose ONE from the following books:


**Course Requirements and Grading**

Each time we meet in the seminar room, we will first “learn” several important concepts and themes. Of course, completing the reading assignment is the first step to prepare for that task. However, in order to bolster the quality of our meeting, we would like to focus particularly on the following elements in each reading:

1) Main (theoretical) argument(s);
2) Data and methods (if it’s an empirical work); and
3) Contribution(s).

Then, we will discuss and debate on how to improve our research on a given topic. Of course, we will start with the limitation of each reading and we are open to most of interesting discussion topics. However, for an effective use of seminar time, we would like to answer the following questions:

1) Can we make a theoretical argument that is different from the existing literature but is equally convincing enough to explain empirical puzzles?
2) Is there a better way to empirically test our theoretical claims?
3) How can we understand congressional politics in a more systematic way?

Ultimately, the final course grading will be based upon three parts:

1) Discussion Preparation Report (20%): For three of the seminar meetings (Week 4-8, 10, 12, 14-15), seminar participants are required to submit a list of questions and/or discussion topics by 9am on Thursday (via email). These should reflect a critical reading of the week’s assigned readings.
2) Seminar Participation (30%): Even though not all of the seminar participants submit discussion preparation reports, all participants are *required* to fully engage in discussions and debates every time in the seminar room. Note that *quality* is more important than quantity in general.
3) Research Design Paper (50%): At the end of the semester, all seminar participants are required to submit their original research design (10 pages). Even though we will have several opportunities to discuss the details throughout the semester (research question due on 3/1 & literature review due on 4/5), a final version of the paper is due on 5/17 at noon.

Seminar participants who take this course under the Pass/Fail option must receive a grade of C or higher in order to obtain a Pass on their final grade. A final grade of “Incomplete” will only be given under exceptional circumstances and is solely at the discretion of Professor Park.
In general, make-ups for any course requirements will not be given. Seminar participants who miss any requirements because of scheduled activities of an official University student organization, a religious holiday, or a verifiable illness should contact me in advance so that alternative arrangements can be made.

If there is a dispute regarding a grade, re-grading is possible under two conditions:

- We will have a “cooling” period of at least two business days. Any complaints or disputes will NOT be accepted in this period.
- Then, all complaints must be typed and must clearly express specific concerns. These written statements must be accompanied by citations of support from course materials, i.e. required and recommended readings and/or class discussion, in order to ensure accuracy.

Classroom Policies and Instructor Availability

I expect all students to behave professionally. I am intolerant of disruptive behavior in the classroom, including talking during class, reading newspapers, and especially the ringing of cell phones or pagers. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom in order to preserve the learning environment for other students. Students are expected to be civil, rational, and respectful of others’ opinions. Please do not intimidate, patronize, or ridicule anyone else during the course of class activities.

Feel free to stop by my office during regularly scheduled office hours (Tuesdays 9:30am-11:00am). If you are unable to attend office hours, contact me via email to arrange an appointment. I usually work in my office during work hours, but I unfortunately cannot guarantee that I will be able to meet with people who come to my office without first scheduling a time to see me.

Academic Integrity

No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has detailed its policies on academic integrity (http://www3.uwm.edu/Dept/Acad_Aff/policy/academicmisconduct.cfm). You should acquaint yourself with policies concerning cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and academic interference. Any submission of work in this course constitutes a certificate that the work complies with university policies on academic integrity.

Student Disabilities

Any students with disabilities of any kind (e.g. physical, learning, psychiatric, systemic, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations should contact Professor Park and the Student Accessibility Center (Mitchell 112, 414-229-6287, http://www4.uwm.edu/sac) at the beginning of the semester.
Tentative Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (1/25) – Introduction

We will meet and discuss the seminar plan. It includes seminar requirements, reading list, and some possible schedule adjustments.

Week 2 (2/1) – U.S. Congress and Legislative Procedures

The objective of the week is to let you be familiar with legislative procedures and legislative jargons. Complete the reading and write a two-page summary.

Required:

Recommended:

Week 3 (2/8) – Theoretical Perspectives

We will discuss how to research Congress. Notably, there are multiple approaches and perspectives in conducting a scientific examination of the U.S. Congress. Ultimately, you should be familiar with assumptions and premises of the rational choice institutionalism, upon which the current congressional studies will be heavily based.

Required:

Recommended:
The fundamental function that Congress performs would be to represent people in the United States. Assuming that a better representation is good for American democracy (i.e. normative concerns), we will discuss an empirical aspect of this issue.

Required:

Recommended:
Week 5 (2/22) – Three Perspectives on Standing Committees

The two most important organizations within Congress are standing committees and political parties, which were never mentioned in the Constitution. This week, we will first discuss politics in committees. In particular, we focus on (1) to whom committees are responsible, (2) what functions committees serve for, and (3) how we can understand committees in a more theoretical way.

Required:

Recommended:

Week 6 (3/1) – Two Perspectives on Political Parties

This week is devoted to study political parties. Specifically, we will discuss (1) why parties form at first (goals and motivations), (2) what parties do (strategies), and (3) how we can understand parties in a more theoretical way.
Required:

Recommended:

**Assignment #1:** Each of you will need to write at least one paragraph or two to introduce the research question for your research design paper. It should be typed, and double spaced with 1-page limit. It would be important to know that you should email your research question to all seminar participants by 9am on 3/1. In class, everybody will have an opportunity to get some feedback both from me and your classmates.

**Week 7 (3/8) – Where’s the Party?**

*Keith Krehbiel has argued (he still does...) that the effect of political parties in the U.S. Congress is an observational equivalence to that of ideology. We will discuss what this means and how his argument has shaped research agenda in congressional politics.*

Required:
Week 8 (3/15) – Voting and Ideal Point Estimation

Poole and Rosenthal (1997) made a significant step by “estimating” ideology for every congressional member. As we can easily expect, this has significantly changed the whole world in congressional politics. Therefore, we will learn how to do “ideal point estimation,” at least in an intuitive way.

Required:

- Voteview.com [Especially, the section of Data and Software]
Recommended:


Week 9 (3/22) – No Class. Enjoy Spring Break

Week 10 (3/29) – Unidimensional Congress?

*Is the U.S. Congress unidimensional?* Poole and Rosenthal (1997) argue yes. We will discuss controversies regarding unidimensionality vs. multidimensionality.

Required:


Required:

Week 11 (4/5) – No Class. Professor Park attends the Midwest Meeting.

**Assignment #2:** Even though we do not meet in class, each of you will need to submit the literature review for your research design paper. It should be typed, and double spaced with 5-page limit. It would be important know that you should place the hard copy to my department mailbox (not to all seminar participants) by the end of 4/5.

Week 12 (4/19) – Party Polarization

*Party polarization became one of the key themes in recent decades. We will discuss various aspects of party polarization.*

**Required:**

  [It is important to note that this book came from the *Monkey Cage* discussion. Each chapter will be fairly short in length, but it has “suggested” readings. Whenever needed, you are encouraged to read these additional materials.]

**Recommended:**

Week 13 (4/19) – Partisan Messaging

*Party polarization has transformed the way in which political parties talk to voters and the mass media. Some call it “partisan messaging.” Seminar participants will divide into three groups, each of which will be in charge of discussing one of the following books. Although the books discuss more than just partisan messaging, our discussion will be limited to partisan messaging.*

Week 14 (4/26) – Rules and Procedural Development in the House

Rules are known to be crucial in shaping final policy outcomes. In this week, we will discuss the dynamics in procedural development in the House.

Required:


Recommended:


Week 15 (5/3) – Rules and Procedural Development in the Senate

Filibuster and Senate procedures have been controversial recently, but we do not know much about it. This week, we will discuss both historical and contemporary aspects of Senate procedures in depth.

Required:

Recommended:


**Week 16 (5/10) – Presentation of Research Design Project**

*Each of seminar participants will present their research design project in front of the class. Ideally, each verbal presentation should last for 15 minutes, possibly with the help of “technology” (i.e. presentation slides or handouts). Non-presenting students should be prepared to give helpful feedbacks.*

**Assignment #3:** You should email your presentation materials to all seminar participants by 9am on 5/10. The format and length are up to you.

**Week 17 (5/17) – Due Date for Final Version of Research Design Paper**

**Assignment #4:** You should email me the final version no later than 5/17 at noon.