

Fall 2009

University of Tampere
Department of North American Studies

Congress in U.S. Politics / NAM 4/8b

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Overview:

Legislatures are the quintessential democratic institution. Democracies from ancient Athens to today have featured some sort of policy-making assembly. The U.S.'s national legislature, Congress, is one of the oldest and most studied governmental bodies in the world. Scholars have been attracted to Congress because of its stability, its elaborate (and evolving) procedures, its significance in national politics, the oversize personalities of some of its members, and the openness of its deliberations and decisions. The result has been an enormous literature on congressional elections, organization, procedures, and policy-making that incorporates a variety of theoretical frameworks.

This class examines how Congress works. The first half of the course will focus mainly on elections, how candidates make their way to Washington and work to retain their offices. We will examine incumbency advantage, legislative districting, campaign financing and campaign strategies, the decision to run, and other topics. The second half concentrates on how representatives and senators do their jobs in Washington, including congressional organization and rules, the impact of the president and interest groups, legislators' roll-call voting, and the policy-making process. The goal is to increase students' knowledge of Congress, and, in the process, their understanding of American politics.

Since the broader goal is understanding American politics, I will try to incorporate current events, starting with the ongoing fight over health care reform, into class whenever appropriate. As a result, students are required to keep up with any major news emanating from the U.S. Congress. The best way to do that is to scan the headlines in the U.S. section of www.nytimes.com for stories about Congress, and to read those that seem important.

Class meetings/grading:

Class will meet once a week. Most meetings will be lectures during which some discussion and questions are welcome, and a few (noted on the syllabus) will be set aside purely for discussion of specific readings. Lecture slides will be posted shortly before or after the lecture. The notes will occasionally include one or two essay questions drawn from that day's material that students will be required to answer (see below). On days dedicated to discussion, a set of discussion questions will be posted ahead of time.

Most sets of lecture slides will end with one or two questions about the material covered. Over the course of the semester, students must turn in written responses to five of these questions, no more than one per week. These answers should be 1-2 pages long and can be handed in *before* the following class. Late work will not be accepted. These five short essays count as 90 percent of the semester grade, and class participation constitutes the remaining 10 percent.

Please note: all students must sign a class list and be admitted by the instructor during weeks 1 & 2 to receive a grade.

Plagiarism:

The *Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary* defines plagiarism as the “use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work.” Plagiarism is a particularly grave offense in the academic world where books and articles are a main part of what many scholars produce, the basis of their reputation and their livelihood. Plagiarism usually comes in two forms, unintentional and intentional. The first occurs when students fail to cite the work they use because of oversight or ignorance of the proper procedure. The second occurs when students deliberately try to cheat by passing off another's work as their own, for example changing a few words of a passage to make it appear less identical.

Neither form of plagiarism is acceptable in NAM 4/8b. Plagiarism deemed intentional by the instructor will result in an automatic failing grade for the course, irrespective of one's other work. Plagiarism deemed unintentional will result in an automatic grade of 0 (zero) for an assignment, and a second instance will lead to an automatic failing grade for the course. The penalties for plagiarism are harsh for simple reason: **DO NOT PLAGARIZE!**

There are some simple rules to follow to avoid plagiarism. If you are quoting someone else's words – as I quoted the *Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary* above – you should both a) put the passage in quotation marks to indicate to readers that the words come from elsewhere, and b) make sure you identify the source. In the case of using another's ideas as opposed to their words, the same general rules apply. So, if you are, for instance, echoing Mayhew's claim that Congress is organized to advance its members' singular goal of being reelected, you need to make clear that that argument comes from Mayhew. The difficulty comes in determining what ideas need to be cited. As a general rule, I am not interested in facts or theories that are common knowledge (e.g. the Senate has 100 members, or the committee system is important) as opposed to facts or theories that are not. If you have trouble telling the difference, and everyone does from time to time, then you should probably err on the side of caution by citing the author or the source.

How do you do that? There are many different ways to format citations, as you will see from the books you read here and in other classes. Personally, I do not care as long as you do two things. First, you must settle on a single format for each piece of writing you do. If you start with author's name (last, first) followed by date and title and publisher, then you must use

the same format for all succeeding citations of other books or articles. Second, whatever format you choose should include all the information needed for a reader to find the same source. So, a reference to Mayhew is entirely worthless unless it includes the specific book or article (he has many) and, in the case of a quote, the actual page number.

Finally, one last thing related to plagiarism. The ability to cite lots of material is nice, but it does not and cannot substitute for your own argument. You should think about the material you read and the lectures you hear as raw material for I will rarely ask you to regurgitate something someone else has already written or said. Instead, what someone else has written and said can influence your thinking and it can back up an argument you make. So citing Mayhew may lend authority to your answer to a question I ask, but it likely will never suffice as an answer.

Schedule/readings:

All readings are available either on-line through an electronic database like JSTOR or through the class website (NAM web), or can be xeroxed from the NAM office. The lectures are meant to build off of each set of readings, so reading is to be completed by the day it is assigned.

<u>Week/date</u>	<u>Topic/reading assignment</u>
1. (1.9)	Course Intro - No reading
2. (8.9)	Getting to Congress – the basics - Mann, Thomas E. and Raymond E. Wolfinger. 1980. Candidates and Parties in Congressional Elections. <i>The American Political Science Review</i> 74: 617-63. (JSTOR)
3. (15.9)	Incumbency advantage, part 1 - Fiorina, Morris P. 1977. The Case of Vanishing Marginals: The Bureaucracy Did It. <i>The American Political Science Review</i> 71: 177-81. (JSTOR) - Mayhew, David R. 1974. Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals. <i>Polity</i> 6: 295-317. (NAM web)
4. (22.9)	Incumbency advantage, part 2 - Jacobson, Gary C. 1978. The Effects of Campaign Spending in Congressional Elections. <i>The American Political Science Review</i> 72: 469-91. (JSTOR) - Jacobson, Gary C. 1989. Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946-86. <i>American Political Science Review</i> 83: 773-93. (JSTOR)

5. (29.9) Campaigning – class discussion
 - Sidlow, Edward I. 2004. *Challenging the Incumbent: An Underdog's Undertaking*. Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press. (NAM office)
6. (6.10) Campaign finance
 - Weine, Kenneth. 1998. *The Flow of Money in Congressional Elections*. New York: Brennan Center.
(http://brennan.3cdn.net/f177515ac99d23ad12_v8m6ibwe4.pdf)
 - Krasno, Jonathan and Conor Dowling. 2008. *Political Parties and the Shrinking Field of Play in U.S. House Elections*. Unpublished manuscript. (NAM web)
7. (13.10) Congressional organization – class discussion
 - Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press. (NAM office)
8. (27.10) Congressional committees & parties
 - Smith, chap 6-7. (NAM web)
9. (3.11) Outsiders – the president, interest groups, and the courts
 - Smith, chaps 9 & 11. (NAM web)
10. (10.11) How a bill becomes a law – class discussion
 - Redman, Eric. 2003. *The Dance of Legislation* (Third edition). Seattle: University of Washington Press. (NAM office)
11. (17.11) Special policymaking – the budget process
 - Smith, chaps 3 & 12. (NAM web)
12. (24.11) *No class*
13. (1.12) Senate v. House
 - Smith, chap 8. (NAM web)
14. (8.12) Abuse and reform – does Congress work?
 - Mann, Thomas E. and Norman J. Ornstein. 2008. *The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get it Back*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chaps 1-3, 7. (NAM web).