

**Rhodes College**  
**Department of Political Science**

Political Science 360  
Congress and the Political Process  
Fall 2008

Prof. Wirls  
Buckman 303  
Office hours:

“How do we get everyone in on the act and still get some action?”  
Anonymous

“Suppose you are an idiot. And suppose you are a member of Congress.  
But I repeat myself.”  
Mark Twain

We begin with a curious pair of facts. On the one hand, public approval of Congress is, in general, abysmally low. On the other hand, Congress is the most distinguished legislative body in the world. Unlike almost all other legislatures, and certainly all of the legislatures in developed nations, the United States Congress *actually legislates*. A mere glance at the British constitution reveals a legislative process centralized in the executive arm of the government. Ordinary members of parliament (backbenchers) have relatively little power to effect law and policy. An ordinary representative in the United States, however, has an immediate and often quite large hand in the formulation and passage of the laws of the land. Why are we not more proud of this living monument to representative democracy?

At the very least, should we not be more sympathetic? Congress and congressmen face the complicated task of representing astoundingly diverse populations to the end of legislating for good of the whole. Indeed, Congress in particular bears the burden of fulfilling the promise of our confederated republic: *e pluribus unum*. This nice phrase disguises a political nightmare that has baffled political scientists and politicians for centuries. A study of Congress is, in a word, a study of the dilemmas of *e pluribus unum* in theory and in practice.

Our study of Congress will of course focus on the contemporary structure of the body and the behavior of its many parts: individual representatives, committees, caucuses, and leaders in two houses; how they relate to each other, what they produce or fail to produce. However, we also want to *evaluate* Congress as a representative legislature. More precisely, we should reconsider our current evaluations of the representative branch. This task requires a framework of appropriate standards: what is representation? what ought Congress to look like? what are reasonable expectations? Consequently, we will be exploring the full scope of constitutional government in the United States, from the formative understanding of representation, to the separation of powers and the division of functions between the different branches. Exactly where and how do the House and the Senate fit into this design of government? Then we will have the equipment to distinguish inherent characteristics from historical developments from circumstantial events from actual and remediable defects.

We will proceed through a mix of discussion and lecture, with the emphasis on the former. You should be coming to this course with some knowledge and many opinions. *Venture those opinions*. If you do not, you will not learn. You should come away from the readings with questions: Ask. You are encouraged to argue with the readings and with classmates, including me.

Office hours are not a mere formality. Some of the best and most enjoyable learning occurs one to one. Use them, and you will be welcomed.

Your final grade will be based on a series of essays (80%) and contributions to class discussion (20%). The essays (see last two pages of this syllabus) will be graded as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> essay: 15%, second essay 10%, third essay 10%, fourth essay: 20% , final paper 25%. If you do not complete and submit all written work, you *will* fail the course. If you do not attend class, your grade will be lowered because you did not attend *and* because you did not participate.

**You will, at the end of all written work, affirm your adherence to the principles and terms of the College’s honor code. You are responsible for reading and understanding that code. Ignorance will not be accepted as an excuse. If you are ever unsure of its meaning and any particular application, contact either me or the writing center. Above all, know what plagiarism is and avoid it like the plague.**

You are, in this course, allowed to discuss the paper topics *with other members of this class*. But such discussions must be limited to the substance of the question and the relevant readings. *They must not extend into the outlining, writing, and rewriting of the essays.*

**Texts for purchase:**

*Congress and Its Members* (11th ed.), Davidson and Oleszek  
*The President, Congress, and the Constitution*, Pyle and Pious eds.  
*The Federalist*, Hamilton, Madison, and Jay  
*All Roads Lead to Congress*, Panagopoulos and Schank

- Aug. 27 Introduction: The Legislative Branch: Sapless, Overgrown, or Rotten?
- I. Essential tensions in theory and practice
- Aug. 29 A. Representation and legislating: public perceptions and reality
1. D&O, Chapter 1  
“Images of Congress,” Hibbing (photocopy)
- Sept. 3 2. “Too Representative Government,” Stark (photocopy)
- Sept. 5 B. Representation I: term limits  
Petracca and Mann (photocopy)
- Sept. 8 C. Representation II: Delegate and trustee  
J.S. Mill: *Representative Government*, chapter 3 (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)  
Edmund Burke: “Speech to the Electors at Bristol” (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)

- Sept. 10 D. Representation III: Liberal representation  
 Declaration of Independence (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)  
 Locke (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)
- Sept. 12 **Sketch of your district and representative (2 pages): to be submitted by e-mail by 4 PM Saturday** (While you at this task, photocopy the relevant sections from the sources 1-3 listed at the end of the syllabus under “Information about congressional districts.” You will need this information for later work, and it will be difficult to find.)
- Sept. 15 **Discussion of districted and representatives**  
**Printout and read all of the sketches.**
- Sept. 17 E. Representation IV: liberal republics, small and large  
 1. Democracy, homogeneity, virtue in small republics:  
*Centinel, Brutus* (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)
- Sept. 19 2. Liberty and diversity in a large republic:  
*Federalist #10*
- Sept. 22 3. Checks and balances:  
*Federalist # #10, 51*
- Sept. 24 F. Representation IV: Locality in the constitution of the House  
 1. *Federalist ##52, 56, 53*
- Sept. 26 2. *Federalist # 57*  
 Mill, chapter 7 (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)
- G. Representation V: Deliberating and legislating in the Senate
- Sept 29 1. Mill, chapter 5 (Acad\_Dept\_Pgm)  
*Federalist #62*
- Oct. 1 2. *Federalist ##63, 72*
- \*Additional sources:  
 D. Epstein, *The Political Theory of the Federalist*  
 J. Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason*  
 Wirls and Wirls, *The Invention of the U.S. Senate*
- III. Powers and evolution: Is a legislative Congress still practicable?
- Oct. 3 A. Powers and history  
 1. Continuity and change in Congress:  
 D&O, chapter 2  
**First essay due (4:00 PM)**



- Nov. 3                    B. Leaders and parties in House:  
                                  D&O, chapter 6 (pp. 153-172)
- Nov. 5                    **Election aftermath**
- Nov. 7                    C. Senate rules and leadership. Senate  
                                  D&O, chapter 8 (pp. 259-267), chapter 6 (172-186)
- Nov. 10                  D. Two parties, two bodies  
                                  D&O, chapter 6 (186-195), chapter 8 (267-270)
- Nov. 12                  E. *All Roads*, chapters 3-4
- \*Additional sources:  
                                  Fenno, *Congressmen in Committees*  
                                  Smith and Deering, *Committees in Congress*  
                                  Smith, *Call to Order*  
                                  Binder, Smith, *Politics or Principle? Filibustering in the U.S. Senate*
- VI. How these pieces fit together:
- Nov. 14                  A. Decision and deliberation  
                                  D&O, chapter 9  
                                  **Fourth essay due (4:00 PM)**
- Nov. 17                  B. Bargaining and policy  
                                  D&O, chapter 17
- Nov. 19                  C. Politics and policy  
                                  1. Outside influences I: interests  
                                  D&O, chapter 13
- Nov. 21                                                 2. Outside influences II: bureaucrats and presidents  
                                  a. Davidson, chapter 10
- Nov. 24                                                 b. Davidson, C. 11
- Nov. 26                                                 c. *All Roads*, chapters 5-6
- \*Additional sources:  
                                  Arnold, *Congress and the Bureaucracy*  
                                  Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason*;  
                                  Birnbaum and Murray, *Showdown at Gucci Gulch*  
                                  Bond and Fleisher, *The President in the Legislative Arena*  
                                  Edwards, *Presidential Influence in Congress*  
                                  Peterson, *Legislating Together*;  
                                  Stern, *The Best Congress Money Can Buy*

- Nov. 28 VI. Congress and the presidency: legality and exigency  
A. Foreign policy and war powers, the original design:  
The Constitution: Article I, section 8; Article II, section 2  
D&O, chapter 15
- Dec. 1 B. The constitutional dilemmas: emergency powers  
Roosevelt, Taft, and Roosevelt (P&P, pp. 68-73)  
Jefferson and Lincoln (P&P, pp. 62-68)  
Nixon (P&P, pp. 74-75)
- Dec. 3 C. (Un)Leashing the “Dog of war” and Iraq  
P&P: 290-99, 304-315, 319-21, 331-335, 338-41
- Dec. 5 Oral presentations
- Dec. 8 Oral presentations
- Dec. 10 Conclusion

**Final essay due at the end of the scheduled final exam period.**

The general purpose of these essays is to analyze the dimensions and dilemmas of representing and legislating. You will do this through a full portrait of your member of Congress as a representative and legislator (if your representative has been a member for fewer than four years, you may choose another). At each stage, you should be comparing your specific data with the general theories and arguments covered in class. In the end, you should integrate these parts into an analysis of a representative and the institution of Congress.

Steps:

1) Describe and analyze the functions of representatives and legislators. (5 pages)

2) Draw a political portrait of your Congressional district: politically significant history; mix of urban/ suburban/ rural; major social and economic interests/employers; religions; partisan make-up and any significant changes in that make-up over the last two decades; any effects from redistricting over the last two decades; safe or competitive; voting patterns in local state and national elections over the past two decades. Part of this assignment is to get a map of your district and explain its shape and any politically significant changes in its shape. 4 pages. Davidson and Oleszek, pp. 44-52.

3) Summarize and analyze your representative's background, partisanship, and political career leading up to election to the House, and a summary and analysis of your representative's congressional elections: primaries, opponents, who supported him, margins of victory, and so forth. Relate these facts to the characteristics of the district. What is your representative's home style: district offices and staff? trips home per year? how used? newsletters? 5 pages. Davidson and Oleszek, pp. 56-73, 81-90, 101-115, 130-146.

4) Summarize and your representative's career in Congress: committee and subcommittee assignments and changes; leadership positions; caucuses; bill sponsored. Summarize and analyze your representative's legislative voting patterns: ratings from various groups, general (ADA) and specific (NRA, NARAL, COPE, and so forth). Relate this information to the information on district and elections. 5 pages. Davidson and Oleszek, 117-130, 203-213, 272-294.

5) Analyze and evaluate your representative as a representative. Begin by reconsidering your first essay, on representation. From that, develop a coherent standard for evaluation. Then use that standard to assess your representative. Be precise and specific...and subtle; your representative's choices and activities may not fit neatly into any one box. You may cite your fourth essay. 5 pages.

### **Regulations:**

1) For those using a computer, the paper must be printed in this font (Times) and this type size (12 point) with standard margins. Double spacing is required. *If pages are not numbered, your essay will be docked 1/3 of a grade.*

2) In-text citation with a "Works Cited" page.

3) Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade a day (A- = B+).

**4) Reread what the syllabus says about the Honor Code. You may discuss the topic, the readings, and your ideas with other members of the class. You may not work with others, or the work of others, in outlining, writing, and rewriting your essay.**



### **Resources for the research paper:**

What follow are the ones I know of. There are, I am sure, many others. As you discover new ones, you should report them to the class. Your member's office and your local newspaper are other useful resources. Many newspapers are available through Nexus. *All sources should be used carefully and critically. You need to consider the quality and biases of the source.*

### **Information about the House:**

<http://www.house.gov/>

*Congress A to Z*, JK1067 .C67 1993 (Ref. sect.)

*The Official Congressional Directory*, JK1011 2003-04 (Ref. sect.)

*Guide to Congress*, JK1021 .C565 2000 (Ref. sect.)

### **Information about current legislation, including The Congressional Record**

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

### **Information about congressional districts:**

1) *Politics in America*, Congressional Quarterly, JK1010 .P64 2006 (Ref. sect.)

2) *Almanac of American Politics*, M. Barone, JK1012 .A44 2004 (Ref. sect.)

3) *Congressional Districts in the 1990s*, CQ, JK1341 .C64 1993 (Ref. sect.)

4) <http://nationalatlas.gov/printable/congress.html> (maps of districts)

\*\*Photocopy the relevant sections from sources ##1-3.

5) [www.fastfacts.census.gov](http://www.fastfacts.census.gov). Type in your zip code, or select a your state and district. There are lots of information if you keep looking. The statistics give the figures for the US as a whole, which is very helpful. You can also get the same statistics for your state.

6) [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com) (religious affiliation data)

7) [www.nationaljournal.com](http://www.nationaljournal.com) (look in the Almanac and search the whole site)

8) [www.cqpolitics.com](http://www.cqpolitics.com).

### **Information about members:**

[www.ontheissues.org](http://www.ontheissues.org) (lots of information on voting records and ratings.)

[www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW.html](http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW.html) (members' webpages)

<http://www.congresslink.org/index2.htm> (variety of pages)

<http://capwiz.com/cl/home/> [Congresslink page for member information]

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp> (biographies of members)

<http://www.vote-smart.org/> [Project Vote Smart] (member information, ratings, key votes)

Congressional Quarterly (weekly and quarterly) Reports (periodicals)

Articles on specific representatives, committees, policies, etc. Scan the name index for the all relevant years.

<http://www.politics1.com/states.htm> (click on your state. Access to local newspapers and campaigns sites of representatives)

[www.nationaljournal.com](http://www.nationaljournal.com) (look in the Almanac and search the whole site)

### **Information about campaign finance:**

<http://www.opensecrets.org/index.asp>

**Group ratings and evaluations of members:**

[www.vis.com](http://www.vis.com) [Voter Information Services]. Need our ID number to use this site.

See the **Project Vote Smart** site listed above