

Legislative Politics and Policy-Making
Political Science 517

Professor Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier
Spring 1999
MWF 1:30-3:00
Call #: 18258-5 L
Classroom Location: Derby 0150
Web page: <http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/faculty/jbox/jboxstef.htm>

Ohio State University
Office Hours: MWF 12:00-1:30 and by appt.
Office: Derby Hall 2125
Phone: 292-9642
E-mail: jboxstef+@osu.edu

Objectives and Design

Although the Constitution provides for three Branches, the legislature was considered the First Branch -the center of lawmaking authority. The American legislature decides which policy proposals, regardless of their source, will be taken up, shaped, and made into public law. Policy innovations require legislative approval and earlier political settlements rest on legislative forbearance. Thus the ultimate responsibility for the thrust and scope of public policy rests with the legislature. It is a remarkably accessible institution, however, and the legislature's decisions may well be influenced by the preferences of outside actors.

Keefe and Ogul (1993) argue that more than any other institution of government, the legislature reflects the range and reality of American politics - in the behavior of the politicians who do business there, in the conflicts that arise and are resolved there, and in the struggles that take place there to gain the benefits that government can allocate or to avoid the penalties that it can impose. The legislature is a microcosm of all democratic politics and is thus a fascinating entity. The legislature also warrants careful examination because it is a changing institution. Media attention, election outcomes, strong leaders, and outside pressures are all impetuses for change.

This undergraduate course will examine legislatures and how they operate. It has several objectives:

- (1) to introduce students to data analysis on Congress. Empirical data analysis is one of the tools by which we can learn about American political processes. By using the Congressional Database computer package, students are given efficient and interesting ways to test hypotheses about politics with actual data.
- (2) to develop facility in applying the concepts of the Congressional literature to understanding current problems or situations.
- (3) to stimulate thinking and discussion about the role and effectiveness of Congress.
- (4) to interpret deeper questions about the American political system by focusing on Congress and its relationship to the President, courts, bureaucracy, and citizens.

This course seeks to provide you with a basic understanding of Congress and the analytical tools to enhance your ability to understand public policy as it unfolds throughout your lifetime. It rests on the assumption that virtually every facet of your life will be affected profoundly by the content of public policy and that unprecedented challenges to humankind will force everyone to become very concerned about public policy. Politics counts. To address the course objectives the course is designed: (1) to offer introductions to theories, concepts, and methods through a series of readings, lectures, computer assignments, and discussions; (2) to test students on their comprehension of these; (3) to encourage students to question methodologies, conclusions, and the larger role of Congress and government.

My goals for this course are: (1) to help you become knowledgeable about the role of Congress in the United

States with references to state legislatures and more generally, democracies; (2) to encourage you to evaluate and think carefully about what ought to be in the proper role of Congress; (3) and, finally, most broadly, learn a variety of techniques for critiquing or evaluating that will apply to numerous situations in the future.

Teaching Assistant: Scott Meinke

Office Hours: To be announced

Office: Derby Hall 2001

Phone: 292-9496

E-mail: meinke.3@osu.edu

Requirements

Students are required to take two examinations; to contribute to the classroom discussion with questions and commentary based on reading the materials *before* class sessions; and to complete all computer assignments.

Participation in class discussion (10%)

Computer assignments, which includes active participation in the lab discussions (25%)

Midterm (30%)

Final exam (35%)

The lab assignments (there are assignment sheets for all labs except the first one) should be turned in at the class period following the lab. For example, the lab assignment sheets for Lab A.2 and A.3 are due on April 14th, for Lab A.4 on April 21st, and so on. Any late assignments will be given 0 points unless previously approved by the instructor. The exams will be part multiple choice and part essay over lectures and readings, and labs.

Course Materials

The following three texts are required and are available in the Ohio State Bookstore.

- 1) Davidson, Roger H. and Walter J. Oleszek. 1994. *Congress and Its Members*, 4th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Davidson and Oleszek is a wonderful book that provides the structure and details about how Congress works. It highlights the legal, political, and institutional changes that have occurred while emphasizing the underlying constants in Congress's character and behavior.

- 2) Frantzich, Stephen. 1995. *Congressional Database Analysis Package*, 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: National Planning and Consulting Corporation.

The Congressional Database is an analytical computer program that contains current data for Congress. The empirical data analysis will provide a unique opportunity for you to gain experience in the computer lab and to perform your own analysis, test hypotheses, and reach your own conclusions.

Course Outline and Reading Schedule

Congress - Past and Present

March 29th & 31st: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 1 and 2

Congressional Elections

April 2nd: Interactive Video Session -Anna Cabral, Deputy Staff Director for Senate Judiciary Committee for Senator Orrin Hatch and Executive Staff Director for U.S. Senate Republican Conference's Task Force on Hispanic Affairs.

April 5th: Introduction to the use of the lab
Lab A.1: Profiling Your Own Members of Congress

April 7th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 3 and 4

April 9th: Interactive Video Seminar -David Dumke (senior staffer for Representative Dingell)

April 12th: Lab A.2: Profiling Congress as a Whole
Lab A.3: Comparing Republicans and Democrats in Congress

April 14th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 5

Organization and Structure

April 16th: No Class, Midwest Political Science Association Meeting

April 19th: Lab A.4: Professions and Career Patterns in Congress

April 21st: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 7

April 23rd: Interactive Video Seminar–Eric Heberlig, Congressional Fellow for Representative Tom Sawyer. Eric.Herberlig@mail.house.gov

April 26th: Lab B.1: Congressional Committees
Lab B.2: The Geography of Committee Assignments
Lab B.3: Ideology and Committee Assignments

April 28th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 6

April 30th: Interactive Video Seminar -Senator Richard Lugar, Indiana

May 3rd: MIDTERM EXAM

Congressional Interaction with Other Political Actors

- May 5th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 8
- May 7th: Interactive Video Seminar–Cameron Doolittle, Congressional Staffer
- May 10th: Lab B.4: Ideological Makeup of Human Condition versus Societal Protection Committees
Lab C.1: Analyzing Partisan Voting Patterns
- May 12th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 9 and 10
- May 14th: Interactive Video Seminar–Al Quinlan, Greenberg & Quinlan Research, Inc. Political Pollster and Consultant.
- May 17th: Lab C.2: Profession and Voting in Congress
Lab C.3: Wealth and Voting in Congress
Lab C.4: Bloc Voting in Congress

Policy Making

- May 19th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 11 and 12
- May 21st: Interactive Video Seminar–Robert Biersack, Federal Election Commission Official in the Data Division. bbiersack@fec.gov
- May 24th: Lab D.1: Over Time changes in Congressional Age, Gender and Ethnic Distribution
Lab D.2: Changing Occupational Demographics, 1990-1994
- May 26th: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 13 and 14
- May 28th: Interactive Video Seminar–Candy Crowley, Congressional Reporter for CNN Headline News. Candy.Crowley@turner.com

Problems and Perspectives

- May 31st: Memorial Day – No Class
- June 2nd: Davidson and Oleszek, chap. 15
Lab D.3: Ideological Moderation and Electoral Threat
Lab D.4: Voting Patterns and Changing Policy Challenges
- June 4th: Wrap up and Review
- June 7th: FINAL EXAM 11:30 a.m. to 1:18 p.m.