Emergence of the Modern Congress

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Office hours: Friday mornings, 9:30-11:00

Through reading and research, this course examines major issues in congressional history and legislative organization. This course is appropriate for graduate students as well as qualified undergraduates with permission of the instructor.

Six books, which we will be reading in their entirety, are available for purchase in the campus bookstore. They are also on two-hour reserve at the circulation desk of Rush Rhees Library. (You might also consider online sources, including www.abebooks.com, for book purchases. Any edition of these books is fine; do not feel compelled to buy the newest edition if an older version is available for less money.) The required books are these—


All other readings are available at the course website on Blackboard. To access the Blackboard readings off-campus, you will first need to download and run VPN, so that your computer can be viewed as part of the University’s network. You can find VPN at http://rochester.edu/it/vpn/.
Track One: Graduate Students and Upper-Level Writing Undergraduates

Informed participation in weekly discussions (35%). Students are required to attend all scheduled class meetings, having read all assigned material; students who do not attend regularly will not receive credit for the course. Students are encouraged to listen attentively to others, to draw others into class discussions, and to take risks by asking questions and throwing out new ideas.

Three short papers (25% total). In 3-4 pages, students should address a central question in the week’s readings, critically evaluate the readings, or analyze underlying issues in the readings. These papers must be analytical: they should scrutinize the logic and evidence marshaled on behalf of an argument and, where appropriate, analyze the relationship between various arguments. These papers must be short—no paper shorter than 800 words or longer than 1,300 words will be accepted—so get to the main point fast. Students may choose for themselves when to write their papers, except that students must submit at least one paper by the third class meeting. Students may write as many as five papers; in calculating the course grade, only the three highest paper grades will be included. Papers are due in Professor Gamm’s box in Harkness 314 by Monday morning at 10:30. No late papers will be accepted without prior permission.

Congressional history narrative (10%). In about 5 pages, students should examine an episode in congressional history, drawing heavily on primary sources. At minimum, students should draw on the Congressional Record (or earlier records of debates, like the Annals or the Globe) and on contemporary newspapers. The episode could be an event (like the outbreak of a war), consideration of a particular bill, a discussion of caucus proceedings or committee assignments, a leadership battle, etc. By February 22, students must meet with Professor Gamm, receive approval on their topic, and set a deadline for submitting this paper.

Research paper (30%). This paper may be an extension of one of the three short papers, an extension of the congressional history narrative, or an entirely separate project. Undergraduates might review and analyze the secondary literature, with some attention to primary sources where appropriate. For graduate students, the paper should identify a modest research question, identify existing literature bearing on that question, and lay out a strategy for collecting and analyzing data. A review of secondary literature is not sufficient for graduate students; they must identify primary sources, sketch out a theory and possible hypotheses for testing, and otherwise outline a plan for future research. Graduate papers might report—briefly—on preliminary findings, but this is not required. The paper should be 10–15 pages in length. The paper is due April 26; incompletes are strongly discouraged and will not be given without good cause. By February 22, students must meet with Professor Gamm and receive approval on their topic and approach.

There is no exam.

Track Two: Undergraduates Not Receiving Writing Credit

Informed participation in weekly discussions (35%). See above.

Six short papers (55% total). In 3-4 pages, students should address a central question in the week’s readings, critically evaluate the readings, or analyze underlying issues in the readings. These papers must be analytical: they should scrutinize the logic and evidence marshaled on behalf of an argument and, where appropriate, analyze the relationship between various arguments. These papers must be short—no paper shorter than 800 words or longer than 1,300 words will be accepted—so get to the main point fast. Students may choose for themselves when to write their papers, except that students must submit papers in at least two of the first five weeks of the course. Students may write as many as eight papers; in calculating the course grade, only the six highest paper grades will be included. Papers are due in Professor Gamm’s box in Harkness 314 by Monday morning at 10:30. No late papers will be accepted without prior permission.

Congressional history narrative (10%). See above.

There is no exam.
Jan. 21  No class—Martin Luther King, Jr., Day

Jan. 28  The Electoral Connection


Feb. 4  Goals and Strategies


Feb. 11  Committees and Parties in the Modern House, Part A

Feb. 18  Committees and Parties in the Modern House, Part B


Feb. 25  Obstruction and Reaction in the Senate


Mar. 4  Civil Rights


Mar. 11  No class—Spring break
Mar. 18  Careers and Seniority


Mar. 25  No class—Passover

Apr. 1  Rules


Apr. 8  Institutional Development


Apr. 15  Origins of the House Speakership


Apr. 22  Electoral Institutions


Apr. 29  Separate and Divided Powers


