

PLAP 335  
The American Congress

Spring 2008  
9:30 – 10:45 T-TH  
215 New Cabell Hall

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General Synopsis:

This is an introduction to the study of the U.S. Congress. We will attempt to do three complementary things in this course. First, we will examine the basic legislative processes in the contemporary House and Senate; in doing so, we will focus on a “nuts and bolts” understanding of the Congressional environment and organization. Second, we will examine how the House and Senate have developed over time, both in terms of structure and process, by exploring the more than 200-year history of each chamber. Third, we will examine Congress in a *scientific* manner. At the heart of our scientific approach will be the individual member of Congress (MC). Why? Because by analyzing the preferences and goals of individual MCs, we will begin to understand how Congress works. That is, many of the questions surrounding the Congressional experience — why the institution has developed as it has, why certain rules are in place, why committees assignments are important, why electoral outcomes occur as they do, why voting outcomes break down as they do, etc. — can be traced back to the particular interests of individual MCs. To understand the individual MC, then, is to understand the U.S. Congress.

Required Texts:

- (1) The American Congress, 5th Edition, by Steven S. Smith, Jason M. Roberts, and Ryan J. Vander Wielen. 2007. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-0-521-70836-4
- (2) Analyzing Congress, by Charles Stewart III. 2001. W.W. Norton. ISBN: 0-393-97626-2
- (3) The House: The History of the House of Representatives, (reprint edition), by Robert V. Remini. 2007. Crown. ISBN: 978-0-061-34111-3
- (4) The Most Exclusive Club: A Modern History of the U.S. Senate, by Lewis L. Gould. 2006. Basic Books. ISBN: 978-0-465-02779-8
- (5) Congressional Travels, by Richard F. Fenno, Jr. 2007. Pearson, Longman Publishers. ISBN: 0-321-47071-0
- (6) Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making, by Barbara Sinclair. 2006. University of Oklahoma Press. ISBN: 978-0-806-13779-7

Supplemental Text:

- (1) Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process, 7th Edition, by Walter J. Oleszek. Congressional Quarterly Press. ISBN: 978-0-872-89303-0

### Class Format:

The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion. I will cover the main points of each chapter and highlight current examples from the news – and I will also elicit responses from the class. Questions and examples from everyday life are encouraged.

### Attendance:

Attendance in my class is not mandatory. No grades will be lowered for missing classes. It will be left up to you whether or not to attend. However, there are clear incentives to attend: exam questions will be structured around lectures and classroom discussion, as well as course readings.

### Grading:

The course grade will be based on two in-class, closed-book exams (a midterm and a final), a research paper, and 3-4 problem sets from the Stewart book. The percentage breakdown of the course grade is as follows: problem sets (10%), midterm (25%), research paper (25%), and final (40%). Make-up exams will be given only upon receipt of a note from the Dean. Details regarding the content and requirements of the research paper will be provided by Week 4.

I will follow a strict scoring system in tallying the final grade:

A-range: 90-100  
B-range: 80-89  
C-range: 70-79  
D-range: 60-69  
F-range: below 60

If there is a dispute regarding a grade on an exam, I will reassess the grade under two conditions:

- (1) The request for a grade reexamination is timely (immediately following receipt of the grade).
- (2) The entire exam is subject to review. This means that I will re-grade the entire exam, not just the section under dispute. Thus, it is possible that a lower grade could eventually result.

### Academic Integrity:

The University of Virginia has a long-standing Honor Code with detailed policies on academic/personal integrity. Students should acquaint themselves with the Code and the criteria for an “honor offense.” Please see: <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/intro/explain.html>. Note that I will fully enforce the tenets of the Honor Code in my class.

### Class Rules:

I only have a few class rules; however, I feel each is important:

- (1) Each person’s opinion is valuable and should be respected. Please do not intimidate, patronize, or ridicule anyone else during the course of classroom discussion.
- (2) Do not make a habit of arriving late to class. Walking in after 9:30 will disrupt the lecture/discussion.
- (3) Should you miss class, you are responsible for acquiring class notes. Do not ask me for class notes. I encourage you to make note-sharing arrangements early in quarter with students sitting around you.

Calendar of Events:

Below is a tentative schedule for the semester. I reserve the right to alter the reading assignments and test dates, depending on the progress of course.

Week 1 (1/17)

General Introduction

Week 2 (1/22 and 1/24)

Smith et al: Chapter 1 and Appendix  
Stewart: Chapter 1

Week 3 (1/29 and 1/31)

Smith et al: Chapter 2  
Stewart: Chapter 2  
Start Remini book

Week 4 (2/5 and 2/7)

Stewart: Chapter 3  
More Remini book  
Start Gould book

Week 5 (2/12 and 2/14)

Finish Remini and Gould books

Week 6 (2/19 and 2/21)

Smith et al.: Chapter 3  
Stewart: Chapter 6

Week 7 (2/26 and 2/28)

Finish off and review pre-Midterm material  
Midterm Exam: 2/28

Week 8 (3/4 and 3/6)

Spring Break

Week 9 (3/11 and 3/13)

Go over midterm (perhaps start Smith et al: Chapter 4)  
No Class on 3/13

Week 10 (3/18 and 3/20)

Smith et al: Chapter 4  
Stewart: Chapters 4 and 5

Week 11 (3/25 and 3/27)

Fenno book  
Start Smith et al: Chapter 5

Week 12 (4/1 and 4/3)

No class on 4/3

Finish Smith et al: Chapter 5  
Stewart: Chapter 7

Week 13 (4/8 and 4/10)

Smith et al: Chapter 6  
Stewart: Chapter 8

Week 14 (4/15 and 4/17)

Smith et al: Chapters 7 and 8  
Stewart: Chapter 9

Week 15 (4/22 and 4/24)

Smith et al: Chapter 10 (maybe)  
Sinclair book

Week 16 (4/29)

Finish off remaining material and review for Final  
Research paper due.

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 6, 2:00 – 5:00 pm (215 New Cabell Hall)