Temple University
Department of Political Science

Political Science 8103: Legislative Behavior

Spring 2012 Semester

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Office Hours: By appointment

Class Schedule:
R 5:40-8:10 PM
613 Gladfelter Hall

Course Objective:
This course provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical studies of legislative politics. The title of this course (not of my choosing) is somewhat misleading, as the course will place a particular emphasis on rational choice institutional perspectives. Briefly, this paradigm suggests that individual-level strategic calculations are paramount in understanding political phenomena, and institutions both emerge from and serve to constrain these rational, utility maximizing political actors. While the main focus of the course is the U.S. Congress, much of what we cover will have direct relevance to the study of legislatures more generally (both cross-nationally and the American state legislatures). We will discuss congressional elections, the nature of congressional representation, positive theories of congressional organization, political parties, the committee system, institutional change, bicameralism, inter-branch relations, and comparative legislatures.

Course Evaluation:
Grading will be done on the basis of four components. Class participation will account for 50%, two literature critiques will be worth 10% each, and a final project will constitute 30% of the final grade.

Seminar Participation:
Your primary responsibility in this course is to complete the readings and to actively participate in seminar discussions each week. Participation is critical to making this seminar a useful learning
experience. As such, the success of this seminar relies on the preparedness of its participants. Each week, two individuals will lead discussion. As a discussion leader, you are required to submit a list of questions and/or discussion topics by 5:00 pm on Wednesday. These questions/topics should reflect a critical reading of the weeks assigned readings. Second, for sessions in which you are a discussion leader, you will be responsible for presenting a set of articles from the assigned readings (the two discussion leaders may divide the readings as they see fit). These presentations should:

- Describe the main themes of the reading.
- Explain what its contributions are to our understanding of legislative politics.
- Provide specific criticisms of the study (e.g., its theoretical argument, hypotheses, evidence, analysis, etc.).
- Raise questions about specific theoretical or empirical issues that you did not understand.

Literature Critiques:

For two of the topics on which you are a discussion leader, you will be required to write a literature critique. In writing the literature critique, you will evaluate the theoretical and empirical arguments of one or more of the readings contained in that unit. Each essay should be approximately 3-4 pages in length and is due no later than one week following the seminar on that topic.

Final Project:

You will be required to write a research paper (or research design) approximately 15 pages in length. This project will ideally lay the foundation for the completion of a piece that may eventually be publishable. All topics must first be cleared with me. Final projects are to be submitted to your classmates and me on April 19, 2012. You will present your paper to the class the following week and will be responsible for serving as a discussant on one of the other papers presented.

Required Texts:

All required texts are available at the Temple University Bookstore and on-line. In addition to the texts, we will be reading several articles. Most of these articles are available through JSTOR. If an article cannot be found on-line, I will post it on Blackboard. The required texts are as follows:


**Important Note:**


**Course Outline:**

**Week 1. Representation (1/26)**


**Recommended Readings:**

Week 2. Candidates in Congressional Elections (2/2)


Recommended Reading:


Week 3. Districting and the Incumbency Advantage (2/9)


**Week 4. Race, Gender, and Representation (2/16)**


**Week 5. Positive Theories of Legislative Organization: Distributive and Informational Approaches (2/23)**

*Rational Choice Approaches: Background*


*Distributive and Informational Approaches*
• Shepsle, Kenneth. 1979. “Institutional Arrangements and Equilibrium in Multidimensional Voting Models.” *American Journal of Political Science* 23: 27-59. **Note:** This paper is mathematically dense, but the general argument is straightforward. It is recommended that you master the material in the background readings on “structure-induced equilibrium,” and then peruse this article.


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**Week 6. Positive Theories of Legislative Organization: Partisan Perspectives (3/1)**


**Highly Recommended Reading:**


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**Week 7. Search for Party Effects (3/15)**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 8. Roll Call Voting (3/22)**


**Week 9. Institutional Change (3/29)**


**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 10. Committees (4/5)**


**Week 11. Bicameralism (4/12)**


8
Week 12. Congress and the Executive (4/19)


Week 13. Comparative Perspectives (4/26)


Recommended Readings:


**PRESENTATION OF FINAL PROJECTS**