LEGISLATIVE POLICY-MAKING
Mini-Course 90-840

SPRING 2015 SEMESTER

Instructor: Jonathan W. Delano, J.D.
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Day/Time: 6:00 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.
Thursdays, Room 1002, Hamburg Hall

Office Hours: Arrange by Appointment

Prerequisites: None

Course Description & Objective:

This is an eight-week mini-course on how the U.S. Congress works or, more aptly, how an idea -- a policy proposal -- becomes law.

In a short introductory course like this, the task may seem illusory. Moreover, for many, there is something genuinely mysterious about why some policies survive the legislative mayhem and others do not. Your instructor spent nearly 14 years working in the U.S. Congress and still does not pretend to know with certainty the rhyme and reason of this institution.

But trying to understand legislative policy-making is essential for every student of public policy and management.

In a democratic society all the great ideas in the world mean nothing if you cannot persuade those in legislative office not only to accept your proposals but also to enact them into law. Thousands of bills are introduced in the U.S. Congress every year, but only a few hundred are ever enacted. What is the key to effective policy-making in the United States? Why do some ideas become law, and most do not?
The focus of this course is the U.S. Congress and all the components that dictate whether a particular proposal becomes law. We will examine how the elected official's desires, both political and otherwise, interact with the goals of his colleagues, special interest groups, staff members, the media, and the legislative process to create legislation. And because of the growing power of the presidency and the Supreme Court, we will examine the tension between the White House, the Supreme Court, and the Congress when it comes to policy-making.

The objective of this mini-course is not necessarily to make the student an expert on the intricacies of the Congress -- many members of Congress have still not figured that out -- but, rather, to enhance an understanding of the complexity of legislative policy-making and the players in the process. In the end, this will help the student become a better advocate for the ideas that he or she seeks to advance in a democratic society.

Course Requirements:

(1) Participation: Each session will involve a discussion and analysis of assigned readings, as well as a Socratic method discussion of the week’s topic. Class participation is essential for each student and that requires attendance. Since we meet only eight times, perfect attendance ought to be the norm, not the exception.

This instructor also believes that students should be encouraged to speak freely and openly in the classroom. There is no such thing as “political correctness” in my classroom. You are free to argue any position you wish, but be prepared to defend your views. No comment is too unimportant, and no question is too silly. And there are rarely right or wrong answers. If you are NOT an active participant in the classroom, you cannot earn the highest grade. There are always a few students who love to talk, and I welcome them to my classes. I'm a talker, too. But to guarantee that everyone who wants to contribute has an equal chance, I will always give other class members the opportunity to speak before returning to someone who has already spoken.

Free speech requires students to feel free to say whatever they want without worrying that their words will come back to haunt them on YouTube! Consequently, no student may record or tape any classroom activity without the express written consent of this instructor. If a student believes that he/she is disabled and needs to record or tape classroom activities, he/she should contact the Office of Disability Resources to request an appropriate accommodation.

Finally, during class, if you use a laptop, I would request that you limit its use for note-taking and stay focused on the class discussion, rather than surfing the net or receiving emails, instant messages, etc. And, of course, please turn your cell phone OFF during class and no texting. Step outside if you must text. It's distractive to others in the class, and both rude and disruptive.
**Articles:** Each student is also required to read current newspapers and magazines to find an article that elucidates on-going problems with current congressional policy-making. Beginning with the third session (January 29), each student will share a copy of the article with classmates and then expound orally (3 minutes MAX) to the class on how the article helps us to understand policy-making in the Congress.

**Paper:** A major portion of a student’s grade will be his/her final paper. Each student will team up with other students (as prescribed by the instructor) for a course research project. By the third session (January 29), students will select partners, and by the fourth session (February 5), students will report to the instructor the particular piece of legislation they have chosen to examine (see below for details of project).

**Mini-Quiz:** On the last day of the class (March 5), students will be given a written mini-quiz designed to separate the “A” students from the others. The quiz will require the student to have read the materials assigned, including the articles provided by fellow students, and to have absorbed the class discussion.

**Research Paper:**

Each team of students is required to submit a paper analyzing a particular bill which was under consideration in the 113th Congress (2013-2014). The focus of the paper is not simply to report what the measure is all about, but rather to examine why the bill was approved, delayed, or defeated in the process.

The topic is deliberately broad so that students can choose a piece of legislation of special interest. The bill chosen should have been partially successful (i.e. approved by at least one subcommittee in either the House or the Senate) in the legislative process. Sometimes defeated bills make for more interesting analysis, but the choice is yours.

Students should focus on how all the different players in congressional policy-making (as we will discuss in this course) affected the success or failure of the particular bill.

Because you will need to assemble publicly available information and may want to contact the office of a Member of Congress or a particular committee, DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST WEEK TO START THIS PROJECT. We will discuss sources of information in the class.

Your paper should be a minimum of 12-pages, double-spaced, and is due on Friday, March 8, by midnight, emailed to me at jdelano@andrew.cmu.edu. NO EXTENSIONS.
Grading:

Grading will be based on the following:

- Research Paper 1/3
- Class Participation 1/3
- Mini-Quiz 1/3

You cannot succeed in the course if you miss classes, minimize the importance of your research paper, forget your article, or fail to participate in class discussion.

Texts:


Indiana University’s Center on Congress: http://congress.indiana.edu/learn-about-congress

Handouts from Instructor
CLASS SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS:

Thursday, January 15:

"THE POPULAR VIEW OF CONGRESS"
  Introductions
  Discussion of mini-course and its requirements
  What is legislative policy-making -- or how would you get Congress to approve your favorite idea?
  Who or what affects the passage of legislation?

Thursday, January 22:

"HOW THE STRUCTURE OF CONGRESS IMPACTS POLICY-MAKING"
  A primer on the Congress
  The Constitutional basis
  What is the legislative process?
  Any role for party leadership?

  Davidson, chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 & 9

Thursday, January 29:

"THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL POLITICS ON POLICY-MAKING"
  Are elections the only things that count?

Read: Arnold, The Logic of Congressional Action, pp. 3-87
  Davidson, chapters 3, 4 & 5

Group A Reports
Select Research Partners
Thursday, February 5:

"THE IMPACT OF SPECIAL INTERESTS ON POLICY-MAKING"
Special interests, lobbyists, political action committees
Who really controls Congress?

Read: Arnold, pp. 88-146
Davidson, chapters 13, 14 & 15
Kaiser, preface & chapters 1-4

Group B Reports
Research Topics Selected

Thursday, February 12:

"THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN POLICY-MAKING"
Policy-making in the era of television

Read: Handouts from Instructor
Kaiser, chapters 5-15

Group C Reports

Thursday, February 19:

"TENSION BETWEEN THE EXECUTIVE & CONGRESS ON POLICY-MAKING"
Signing statements & role of staff

Read: Davidson, chapters 10, 11 & 12
Kaiser, chapters 16-24

Group D Reports
Guest and/or Panel Discussion
Thursday, February 26:

"REFORMING POLICY-MAKING IN THE CONGRESS"
Any chance of change for the better?

Read:  Arnold, pp. 265-276
Davidson, chapter 16
Handouts

Thursday, March 5:

MINI-QUIZ (Cookies & Quiz)

Friday, March 6:

Research Papers Due by Midnight --Email them to me at jdelano@andrew.cmu.edu.

NO EXTENSIONS, PLEASE.