Course Description
If we accept John Locke’s argument that the legislative power is the supreme power in a democratic commonwealth, then it follows that a thorough understanding of democratic systems requires a thorough understanding of legislatures. The vast amount of energy and effort that has been put into the study of legislatures throughout the history of the discipline suggests that there is broad agreement among political scientists with Locke’s assertion. This has had implications not just for our understanding of how democracy works, but also for the way the discipline has evolved. Legislative scholars have long been in the theoretical and empirical vanguard of political science. Theoretical and methodological innovations have often occurred first in the field of legislative studies and then have diffused to other areas of the discipline.
In the past decade, these kinds of innovations have continued through a surge in work on legislatures from historical and comparative perspectives. A key reason that this work has advanced our understanding of legislative behavior is that it takes advantage of institutional and contextual variation. Institutional structure has been viewed as central to understanding legislatures since the birth of the discipline, but only recently has there been serious engagement with variation across historical and comparative dimensions in order to better understand why and how institutional structure matters. The goal of this course is to provide an in-depth exploration of this work, focusing not just on the substantive issues that the literature grapples with, but also on the methodological approaches it employs to grapple with them.

Course Requirements
Participation in class discussion accounts for 30% of your grade. This is not a lecture course. I expect you to share your comments and criticism about the course’s subject matter with the class. You should exert as much effort as I do to keep the class discussion lively and enlightening. Each student will choose at least one week in which he/she will facilitate discussion by doing a 15 to 20 minute presentation on the assigned readings. The participation component of the grade is not limited to the presentations, however. Depending on enrollment in the course, students may be called on to do additional presentations.

A 20 to 30 page term paper accounts for the remaining 70% of your grade. The term paper will consist of original research on a topic of your own choosing but conditional on my approval. Midway through the semester you will submit a short proposal that clearly and concisely lays out the question you will address in your term paper and discusses in detail how
you propose to answer this question (what sources and data you will use, etc.). This proposal
will be due in class on March 12. Students will give short presentations of their papers on the
last day of class.

Course Readings
All books have been ordered through Book Culture (the book store formerly known as
Labyrinth). All readings are either on reserve at Lehman Library or are available through the
course web site or the various online services that Columbia subscribes to ([E] denotes online
availability through Columbia libraries).

Outline of Classes

Week 1: Introduction  January 23

Week 2: Perspectives on Historical and Comparative Research  January 30

  Press.

- Gamm, Gerald and John Huber.  2002. “Legislatures as Political Institutions: Be-
  yond the Contemporary Congress.” In Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, eds.,
  Association/W.W. Norton.

  Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, eds., *Political Science: State of the Discipline III*.

- Wawro, Gregory and Ira Katznelson.  2007. “Congress and History: Enhancing the
  Methodological Repertoire.” Paper presented at the History of Congress Conference,
  Princeton, May 18–19 (pdf version available from course web site).

Week 3: Theories of Institutions/Institutional Theories  February 6

- Carey, John M.  2000. “Parchment, Equilibria, and Institutions.” *Comparative Po-
  litical Studies* 33 (6/7): 735–761. [E]


  *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 15 (2): 123–44. [E]

  Quarterly* 13: 259–319. [E]
Week 4: Democratic Transitions and Legislative Origins


Week 5: The Electoral Connection in Historical and Comparative Perspective


Week 6: Institutional Development and Change


Week 7: Congressional Parties in Historical Perspective


Week 8: Committees and the Floor

March 12


Week 9: Spring Break–No class

March 19

Week 10: Legislatures in Governing Systems

March 26


Week 11: Cabinet Formation and Stability

April 2


Week 12: Bicameralism  


Week 13: Legislatures and Bureaucracy  


Week 14: Lawmaking and Obstruction  


Week 15: Discussion of Research Papers  

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