

PSC 192W: Is the U.S. Senate Democratic?
(Writing in the Disciplines seminar)
Professor Sarah Binder
Spring 2008

Office: 467 Monroe (2115 G. St. NW)
Phone: 994-2167
Email: binder@gwu.edu

Class meets: Thursdays, 3:30-5:00 pm
Hall of Government 325
Office Hours: Tues. 2-4pm (or by appt.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the historical and contemporary United States Senate. Our goals for the seminar are two-fold. First, in substantive terms, the course is intended to broaden our collective understanding of the Senate as a political body. In examining the construction of the Senate in the 18th century, its evolution across the 19th century, and its contemporary electoral and institutional dynamics, our goal is to be able to explain why the Senate functions—or fails to function—as a democratic institution in the 21st century. Can we truly call the Senate a (small d) democratic institution given its structure and impact on policy making? Second, because this seminar is designated as “writing in the discipline” (WID), our goal is also to learn about, practice, and improve our ability to write in the discipline of political science. By the end of course, you will have tackled a number of different types of writing relevant to the study and practice of politics, and you will have produced a polished piece of research writing. Because this is a small seminar, our twin goals of understanding the Senate and improving our writing will both be pursued through everyone’s active participation in the seminar.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The required reading for this course consists of three books and numerous readings posted on Blackboard. All of the texts are available for purchase in the GW Bookstore (and all are paperback versions). (Please note that I do **not** receive royalties from your purchase of the Binder and Smith book.)

On occasion, I will post additional readings on Blackboard, or I will circulate them by email. These reading assignments will be announced in class or by email. You are responsible for making sure that I have a working email address for you at the beginning of the semester.

Sarah Binder and Steven S. Smith. *Politics or Principle? Filibustering in the United States Senate* (2007)
Richard Davis. *Electing Justice: Fixing the Supreme Court Nomination Process* (2005)
Frances Lee and Bruce Oppenheimer. *Sizing Up the Senate: The Unequal Consequences of Equal Representation* (1999).

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Seminars only succeed—and are only enjoyable—if you come to class prepared to contribute. Your participation in the seminar is extremely important, and will contribute to your final grade in the course. Your participation will be strongest if you complete all the readings and assignments due that day, if you bring the readings with you to class, and if you come to class ready to ask questions, to listen to your classmates, and to contribute your thoughts to our discussion.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

The course assignments are designed to help you to learn about the politics of the Senate and to fulfill the objectives of a WID seminar. You must complete all of the assignments in order to receive a passing grade in the course. Also, given the number of writing assignments in the course, assignments must be handed in on time. Late papers will be docked 5 points each day it is late (out of a possible 100 points). Exceptions to the no-late-assignments rule will only be given for illness or family emergencies, so long as you communicate with me before the assignment is due.

Your final grade will be a weighted average of each of the course assignments:

Participation:	10%
Writing assignment #1 (minority rights paper):	10%
Writing assignment #2 (small state senator paper):	10%
Writing assignment #3 (in class writing exercise):	10%
Writing assignment #4 (research paper topic/question):	5%
Writing assignment #5 (peer edit/review):	10%
Writing assignment #6 (research paper outline):	5%
Writing assignment #7 (research paper draft):	not graded*
Writing assignment #8 (final research paper):	40%

*If the draft paper is late, points will be deducted from the final paper grade as noted above.

WRITING RESOURCES

You may find it helpful over the course of the semester to seek guidance and advice on improving your writing. I am always available to assist you as you prepare your writing assignments. You may also wish to consult writing resources that are available at GW or on-line. I recommend two starting places in particular.

First, the GW Writing Center has a wealth of expertise and advice, and it provides one-on-one writing consultations. Its website is here: <http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/>

Second, I have been impressed with the range of writing resources provided on-line by the Dartmouth College writing program. You might wish to start here, as you explore their site:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/toc.shtml>

COURSE SCHEDULE

The seminar schedule on the following pages outlines the topics we will cover in seminar and the reading and writing assignments for each of the topics. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus as the semester progresses. You are responsible for any of the changes to the assigned readings. All of the articles on the syllabus are available on-line via Blackboard (<http://blackboard.gwu.edu>) (and are marked BB below). Once logged onto the course page on Blackboard, follow the links to "Syllabus," and you will see separate links for each of the articles. If you have any trouble accessing any of the on-line pieces, please let me know as soon as possible.

January 17: Introductory meeting

January 24: Origins and Development of the Senate

What were the intentions of the framers in designing the Senate? Why did the states receive equal representation in a small upper chamber? What are the origins of the filibuster? Can we say that the Senate reflects the deliberate design of the framers and early senators?

- Lee and Oppenheimer, Chapters 1-2
- Binder and Smith, Chapters 1-2
- Geoghegan, "The Infernal Senate," *The New Republic* 1994 (BB)
- Writing assignment #1: Write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) paper in which you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The Senate was designed to protect minority and states rights." You must (and can only) use evidence from the readings to support your position.

January 31: The Senate filibuster (yesterday and today)

Was there a "golden age" of the Senate? Why has the filibuster been maintained for so long? What is cloture? What are its effects on Senate policy outcomes?

- Binder and Smith, Chapters 3-5
- Wirls, "The 'Golden Age' Senate and Floor Debate in the Antebellum Congress," *LSQ* 2007 (BB)
- Herszenhorn, "How the Filibuster Became the Rule," *NYT*, Dec. 2, 2007 (BB)
- Victor, "Congressional Chronicle-Advice From the Minority," *National Journal*, Jan. 5, 2008 (BB)

February 7: Senate representation

What do we (and these authors) mean by "representation"? How do we account for the variation in citizens' views of their senators? How and why does the nature of representation vary across small and large states? And how do we know this?

- Lee and Oppenheimer, Chapters 3, 5
- Schiller, *Partners and Rivals*, Chapter 2 (BB)
- Maltzman, Sigelman, and Binder, "Senators' Home-State Reputations: Why Do Constituents Love A Bill Cohen So Much More Than an Al D'Amato?" *LSQ* (1998) (BB)
- Writing assignment #2: You are an aide to a newly-elected senator from a small state. Write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) memo for the senator that recommends a legislative agenda for his or her first year in office. What should be your senator's over-riding goal for the first year? Be sure to include advice on which congressional committees your senator should try to gain a seat on (and why) and what types of bills to introduce and why.

February 14: In-class writing

- Writing assignment #3: Your assignment is to prepare for an in-class writing exercise. Using Schillers, *Partners and Rivals*, as your model, choose a pair of senators representing the same state. Bring to class a collection of news stories, press releases, or other sorts of evidence that will allow you to write an essay comparing and contrasting the two senators' legislative agendas and reputations, and what forces likely shape the senators' agendas.

February 21: Women in the Senate

- *14 Women* (Movie 2007, 97 minutes)
- Writing assignment #4: Write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) paper outlining your research paper question.

February 28: Senate elections

Why are Senate elections more competitive than House elections? Why are "small state" elections less competitive than large state elections? What difference did the war in Iraq make for GOP candidates in 2006, and why? How do national forces affect Senate races more generally?

- Lee and Oppenheimer, Chapter 4
- Kriner and Shen, "Iraq Casualties and the 2006 Senate Elections," *LSQ* Nov. 2007 (BB)
- Smith and Braunstein, "The Nationalization of Local Politics, The South Dakota U.S. Senate Race," in *Electing Congress* (2007) (BB)

March 6: Writing workshop- peer editing

- We will collectively read and assess several of your classmates' short papers from this seminar.
- Please read Karen Gocsik, "Ways of Reading" (BB), and come to class prepared for this collaborative peer editing session.
- Writing assignment #5: Following Gocsik's guidelines for evaluating writing, prepare a one page peer review of one of your classmate's papers for this course. (Papers will be distributed in advance.)

March 13: Senators and presidential campaigns

Senators often run for president, but rarely get elected. Why not?

- Burden, "United States Senators as Presidential Candidates," *PSQ* (2002) (BB)
- Writing assignment #6: Write a 3-5 page outline of your research paper. Your outline should include the research question, your thesis or hypotheses, and a discussion of the types of evidence you will use to explore your thesis.

March 27: Policy making in the Senate

- Lee and Oppenheimer, Chapter 7

April 3: No class due to Midwest Political Science conference

- This is a good week to make progress on your research papers and to start the Davis book for next week.

April 10: Advice and Consent

What, if anything, is wrong with the system of appointing Supreme Court justices? What are the pros and cons of Davis's suggested reforms?

- Davis, *Electing Justice*, all
- Writing assignment #7: Draft of your research paper due

April 17: Can or Should the Senate Be Fixed?

Reform has proven exceptionally hard in the U.S. Senate. Why is that? What sorts of reform might be pursued? Would they—should they—make the Senate a more democratic institution?

- Lee and Oppenheimer, Chapter 8
- Binder and Smith, Chapters 6 and 7
- Geoghegan, "The Infernal Senate," *The New Republic* 1994 (BB)
- Toobin, "Blowing Up the Senate." *The New Yorker* (BB)
- Frenzel, "Defending the Dinosaur: The Case For Not Fixing the Filibuster," *The Brookings Review* 1995 (BB)

April 24: Optional writing consultations

- I will be available in class for consultation on your research paper drafts. We'll set up a schedule before class.

May 1: Final draft of research paper due

Research papers

Here are a few ideas for potential research papers. Papers will vary in length, depending on the questions asked. Most of these topics can be addressed within a 10-page framework. I am completely open to a wide range of topics beyond these listed. I am also open to more rigorous research papers that seek to test ideas empirically with data from the Senate. Please come to see me early on in the semester as you think about your paper topics.

1. Choose a bill considered by the Senate in the 109th (2005-6) or 110th (2007-2008) Congress. Recreate the legislative history for the bill, including the steps taken in the Senate. How can we explain the Senate's policy choices given electoral dynamics and incentives and given the institutional structure of the Senate?
2. Choose a pair of senators who serve a single state. Compare and contrast the two senators' agendas, strategies, reputations, and effectiveness. (In other words, what are these senators' goals, how do they seek to attain those goals, and how successful are they in pursuing those goals?) What forces help to account for the similarities and differences between the two senators?
3. Is the Senate democratic? Why or why not? In this paper, you will need to explore potential definitions of "democratic" institutions, and propose a standard for evaluating the Senate.
4. Evaluate Richard Davis' proposed reforms of advice and consent. What are the goals underlying the proposed reforms? Would such reforms achieve their goals? What would the consequences (expected or unexpected) of such reforms likely be? How likely is reform of advice and consent, and why?