interested and less informed about politics than partisan voters. Wow! Did that ever set off a firestorm of calls from listeners claiming to be both informed and independent! I probably wound up losing that station about $300,000 in advertising despite my assurance to these callers that there are exceptions to the generalization. Of course, many of these topics were entirely tangential to the Contract, and to my book, but that doesn't matter on entertainment radio.

Although I have not studied the demographics of talk radio listenership, my childhood impression of old guys sitting around in barbershops is surely incorrect. My anecdotal experience confirms Traugott's research (1996)—that the audience is about as variable as the nation itself with an accent on the extremes. The shows on which I appeared were a mix of liberal and conservative, and the callers were truly all over the map in terms of information and political inclination, but there were far more callers on both the far right and far left than in the middle.

Anticipating the Audience: The Political Geography of Talk Radio

Trying to anticipate the ideological bent of the callers is helpful. After awhile, I learned to ask the producers of the shows about the ideological inclinations of their audience so I would know what to expect. My basic knowledge of American political geography also served as a good predictor. Southern stations were by far the most conservative. With a few exceptions, northeastern stations played to more liberal audiences. Midwestern stations seemed to play right down the middle. The book was treated most fairly by stations in Denver, Topeka, Grand Forks, Omaha, and Madison, WI. The callers and hosts on these shows were less interested in scoring political points. One midwestern caller actually thanked me for my objectivity. I was so shocked, I nearly choked on the air!

Maintaining your enthusiasm through the ordeal of repeated interviews is a real battle of the will. On some days, I spent five hours doing talk radio interviews. Often, I could not remember what points I made on one show, and which points I made on the one before. I tried to keep a list of talking points in front of me, and this did help, but one show tended to fade into another. Sounding like a broken record is a great way of boring the audience and losing advertising dollars for the station, as I learned when one host cut me off after 45 minutes for harping too long on one theme.

Making Money or Just for Fun

The whole point of publicity, of course, is to sell books. Why else would anyone consent to such abuse? Research shows that listening does make people more attentive to domestic news (Traugott 1996), but, again, do talk radio listeners actually buy books?

I think I earned about $30.00 in book royalties for every hour I spent on talk radio. But since I have no clue how many books would have sold without the publicity, I justify the time by confessing that riding the talk radio circuit was fun—another experience to share in the classroom and impress the folks back in Nebraska.

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About the Author

James Gimpel is assistant professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland in College Park. He has published two books, *Legislating the Revolution* (Allyn and Bacon, 1996) and *National Elections and the Autonomy of American State Party Systems* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996). He has also published articles on voting, Congress, and public opinion.

Researching Congress

Joseph K. Unekis, *Kansas State University*

New faculty or advanced graduate students who wish to pursue research on Capitol Hill, but who lack resources or experience, are often unsure how to accomplish the task. So here are some observations designed to help them get more out of their time and energy.

For most faculty on three-two, three-three, or even worse teaching schedules, finding the time to visit Washington usually means giving up some summer vacation. However, do not automatically write off other times of the year. The winter break is also good because faculty can usually squeeze out almost three weeks in early January. As a bonus, it is easier to deal with staff at this time because little else is on their agenda.

Once time is freed-up for research, make sure this is a good time for the people who have the information you seek. Interviewing members or high level staff requires knowledge of the Congressional schedule, especially the recess periods. In my case, this was not a problem because I focused on records, and the people in charge of records are usually around. In fact, I find that recess times are sometimes beneficial because the staff was more willing to spend time with me.

The staff at the National Archives is sympathetic to research concerns. The National Archives established the Legislative Archives Division in 1985 to preserve and provide access to publicly available congressional holdings. In 1988, the division was renamed the Center for Legislative Archives and in 1990, the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress was created. That year, Congress also upgraded the position of the director and provided a position for a congressional historian. Besides conducting research and generating publications that illustrate the research potential of the congressional holdings of the National Archives, the historian is also charged with serving as a liaison to congressional scholars. Dr. Michael Gillette has held the position of Director, Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives since 1991, and Dr. Richard T. McCulley was named the first historian at the Center for Legislative Archives in 1993. To facilitate research in congressional records, the National Archives recently opened the Congressional Research Room that makes available to researchers an impressive array of congressional publications, references, and resources. Their offices and the Congressional Research Room are located in the National Archives & Records Administration Building, 7th and Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20408.

Both the Senate and House employ professional historians. The Senate Historical Office is under the direction of Richard Allan Baker and is located in the Office of the Secretary, 201 Hart Senate Office Building. Effective July 1, 1995 the 104th House consolidated the previously separate House Historian's Office with the House Office of Records and Registration, House Documents Room and House Library into a new House Legislative Resource Center under the direction of the House Clerk, Robin Carle. One of the Center's responsibilities is to facilitate access to congressional records.

Gaining access to staff can be a problem since academic standing usually has limited cache. I suggest preceding any visits with letters printed on university stationary. In my letters, which are sent out a month or more in advance, I introduce myself, give a very brief (no longer than one page) reason for the visit, tell them when I will be in town and ask for an interview. In about 10% of the cases, I receive a return letter usually telling me which staff member to contact when I arrive in town.

In the other 90% of the cases where I receive no response to my inquiry, the letters can still prove to be useful. To be successful in working through the layers of bureaucracy which stand between the researcher and the materials, the researcher often needs some help. First, be sure to bring a copy of the introduction letter because there is no assurance staffers have the original handy or that it even still exists. Before I visit an office, I call, make reference to the letter, and ask for an appointment. If a call is not feasible, the letter still makes a very good opening move. Hand it to the secretary and ask him or her to forward it to the appropriate person. This is a way of gaining the attention of someone who is in a position to help.

A strategy I have successfully employed entails finding a congressional sponsor. The best bet is to contact the congressperson from your district or one of the senators from your state.

On early trips to the Capitol, I simply walked into offices. Because there is no place for scholars to work, you often must work out of your suitcase. The biggest problem with this approach is the inability to take phone calls. But you can always find an office that will allow you to make calls. The problem in Washington is that most staff members are extremely busy and your call will probably not be answered immediately. Hence the need to give a phone number where you can be reached.

On my last three trips, I have first secured a space in the office of either a congressperson or senator. They have provided this service after I assured them that all I really needed was a place to hang my coat in the morning and make and receive phone calls. The congressional offices are usually very helpful. Among the advantages afforded by affiliating with a congressional office is the ability to have someone take your telephone messages, have access to supplies and equipment and a place from which to operate. It also affords the opportunity to get a Hill ID.

When staying on the Hill for more than several weeks, obtain a temporary intern identification badge. These badges can be very useful in several ways. First, they permit access to entrances and other resources closed to the public. Second, a Hill ID badge imparts a "one of us" status, making it much easier to travel around buildings and gain access to resources like the Congressional Reference Service branch libraries and the occasional xerox machine. I suggest making arrangements with a member's staff to obtain an ID so they can process the proper paperwork in a timely fashion.

In dealing with potential interviewees or with any of the members of Congress and their staffs, it is wise to practice the "four P's." Be *prepared* and also be *polite*. Know what to ask in interviews and know what records are needed before approaching members or their staff with requests. They will appreciate the effort and the chances of gaining their further cooperation are enhanced. It also helps to be *patient* while remembering these people are dealing with their own pressing issues. Knowing exactly what you want and letting staff know how short your time is in Washington, increases the chances of getting the materials in a timely fashion. Be *persistent*. Hill staff belong to a bureaucracy whose main focus is on the here and now. They are rewarded for being responsive to the needs of their immediate supervisors not to an academic researcher. If you are too polite or patient, you might never get the materials you are after. Therefore, if I get an initial no, I usually try several other options. Keep trying, for most of the time you are only one layer of bureaucracy away from success.

Interviews

My experience with conducting interviews is not as extensive as it is with written records, but I have stumbled across some techniques which might be of some help. Sometimes high level staff are more difficult to reach than members. I solved this problem to some degree by first enlisting the aid of members who had their respect. Since I was interviewing in both chambers, this meant gaining the cooperation of both a senator as well as a representative. Senators are not much help on the House side, and needless to say, House members do not cut much ice on the Senate side.

For my interviews with Senate staff, I was able to secure the support of one of my state's senators. On the House side, I was able to convince a representative from my state to write a letter of introduction which was sent to the committee staff directors I wished to interview. While it took several weeks to gain final support from the congressional offices for this project, in the end I was successful in gaining interviews with all but a few committee staff directors. Several went out of their way to make it clear that the only reason they were giving the interview was because I had a letter of introduction.

How I structure the interview depends on what I wish to accomplish. It has been my experience that these individuals are more than willing to talk about their business, but you must keep the discussion focused. I go into an interview with at least five well-defined questions designed to elicit specific information. I strongly recommend taping the interview, if possible. I begin an interview by assuring anonymity, unless the interviewee specifically wishes to be identified. Then, I ask permission to tape the interview, pointing out that taping makes it easier to follow the conversation and minimizes the possibility of misinterpretation. No one has ever turned down my request to tape an interview, but several times it became apparent that the interviewee was not forthcoming in answering my questions. In those instances, I simply stopped the tape and began taking notes. I also find it useful to shut off the tape at the end of the interview, but still continue the conversation. On more than one occasion, the interviewee made further suggestions about other individuals who might shed light on a particular subject and volunteered to contact such people for me.

Written Records

Congress creates a great number of records. The trick is finding them. This, unfortunately, is a formidable task. This problem has been somewhat mediated by the publication of House Doc No. 100-245 *Guide to the Records of the United States House of Representatives at the National Archives: 1789-1989* Bicentennial Edition, and Senate Doc. 100-42 *Guide to the Records of the United States Senate at the National Archives: 1789-1989* Bicentennial Edition. These two volumes are essential to any orientation to congressional records, and fortunately the Archives is in the process of placing both of them on-line.

For my own purposes, I think of congressional records as falling into four categories. The first includes records created by the chamber as-a-whole and recorded, for the most part, in the *Congressional Record*. These records are readily available to scholars. The second includes records created by individual members. None of these records are deposited in the National Archives. They are scattered around the country in either private collections or deposited in presidential libraries.[1] The third encompasses records generated by informal groups within Congress: Caucuses, Legislative Study Organizations (LSO's), and the political parties. The National Archives holds some party records and recently received some records of the LSO's terminated by the 104th Congress. The fourth grouping is committee records.

Committees and Their Records

Committees are the heart of the legislative process and they create many of the most important documents. These documents can be found either in the committee offices or in the National Archives. Congress never relinquishes control over its records but has been under recent pressure to turn them over in a timely manner to the National Archives. Sometimes committees comply with these requirements; sometimes they do not.

Records which make it to the National Archives are subject to a number of restrictions. Before 1950, House records were completely closed to all private researchers (Nelson 1980, 82). House Resolution 288, passed in 1953, authorized the Clerk of the House to make available House records which had either previously been made public or had been in existence for over fifty years, except "when he determines that the use of such records would be detrimental to the public interest." The Senate reduced the access time to its records to twenty years, and the House to thirty years for its records at the beginning of the 100th Congress. However, the House still keeps the fifty year rule for investigative records and records involving personal privacy. Even after the required time period has expired, researchers still need to obtain the explicit permission of the Clerk of the House for access to any unpublished House records.[2] The process has been streamlined recently but still entails delay and outright denial of records.[3]

The key to gaining access to committee records unavailable because of time or sensitivity restrictions is to persuade the committee to retrieve the records for you. In my case, I was interested in the minute books of the House Ways and Means Committee going back to the beginning of the Franklin Roosevelt Administration (73rd Congress). Unfortunately, the committee had turned over the bound minute books to the National Archives several years before.

To obtain these records, I first had to request my congressperson to ask the Ways and Means Chairman for permission to retrieve the minute books from the National Archives. This took several weeks. Once permission was granted, I then had to get the committee to request the records from the Office of the Clerk which in turn secured the materials from the National Archives. After two months of negotiations, I was finally able to gain limited access (no xeroxing was allowed) to the minute books, but it was worth the effort.

Dealing with congressional staff and the records they control can be frustrating and time consuming. However, there are organizations and individuals who are more than willing to help a dedicated and resourceful scholar gain the information he or she is seeking. Plan your research trip with an eye toward the possible problems that may delay, or even frustrate, your efforts to gain information. Contact those agencies or individuals (Archives, Senate Historian, House Clerk, relevant committees or appropriate members of Congress) who might smooth your path before you embark on your project. Let them know your interests, then solicit their advise or support. You may be pleasantly surprised with the support you get if you approach the process in the correct way. Scholars will find that the value of congressional records will surely justify the effort required to obtain them.

Notes

1. Those interested in researching former members need to refer to the two superb reference works published by Congress as part of the bicentennial celebration. The first is House Doc. No. 100-171, *A Guide to Research Collections of Former Members of the United States House of Representatives 1789-1987*. The second is Senate Doc. 97-41, *Guide to Research Collections of Former United States Senators 1789–1982*.
2. Nelson (1980, 78) reports that the Clerk automatically excludes access to minutes of executive sessions and papers marked "confidential." I have made numerous requests of committee minute books, and have never been denied access provided they are at least fifty years old.
3. You can forget going to court to obtain the records if the Clerk denies access, since the records of Congress are not subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

Reference

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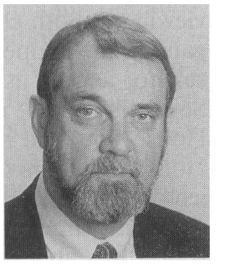
About the Author



Joseph K. Unekis is associate professor of political science at Kansas State University. His work on Congress includes *Congressional Committee Politics* (1984), co-authored with Leroy N. Rieselbach. He has authored articles appearing in the *Journal of Politics*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, and *Congress and the Presidency*.

Ratings and Rankings: Some Important But Slighted Aspects

Albert Somit, *Southern Illinois University*

The several *PS* articles recently (Spring, 1996) devoted to ranking and rating political scientists and political science departments evoked a by now familiar mix of emotions—feelings perhaps akin to those experienced by Dr. Frankenstein when, as the circumstances permitted, he pondered both his scientific accomplishment and the consequences thereof.

As some of *PS*' older readers may recall, Joe Tanenhaus and I were the first to undertake a study, utilizing responses from a sizable sample of the profession, of perceived departmental quality *and* of individual scholarly achievement (the so-called "Hall of Fame") (Somit and Tanenhaus, 1964). Needless to say, we were reasonably confident that these ratings and rankings would be of interest to the profession. We did not anticipate, however, the degree of that interest, the continuing controversies the rankings evoked, or the number of studies to which these controversies subsequently gave rise. Nor, surely, did we ever dream of the methodological ingenuity which would be brought to bear in what has since become almost a small scale cottage industry.

Now, three decades later, I wonder whether other disciplines have given so much attention to these matters; or, worse, how much political science itself has benefitted thereby. Understandable pride in being a pioneer is thus often alloyed by an equally understandable twinge of guilt.

These misgivings aside, the latest *PS* pieces once again reminded me that, despite a literature which now numbers perhaps a score of items, two important aspects of ratings and rankings have not received the attention I believe they deserve. One of them, dealing with the career consequences of departmental reputation, has been slighted; the other, related to individual achievement, has to the best of my knowledge been totally ignored.

Political Science: Still A Caste-Characterized Profession?

First, the career consequences of departmental reputation. As Tanenhaus and I reported in a subsequent publication (1967), political science was then clearly a two-caste profession: the Brahmins were those who had taken their doctorates at one of the "distinguished" departments; in the other and much larger caste ("Untouchables"?) were those who had not. Thus, of the sixteen "leading" members of the profession who