

Congress captures professor's attention

UNL political scientist wins top award for work on lawmakers, public opinion

By Kristine Long

John Hibbing said he could never live the life of a congressman.

Instead, Hibbing has chosen the life of a professor and researcher who studies and teaches about congressmen and government.

His research about the U.S. Congress recently won him the 1993 Outstanding Research and Creativity Award.

Susan Rosowski, chairwoman of the committee who selects the outstanding researcher, said this was highest award given by the university system.

"It is a high mark of respect to be nominated (for the award) by one's colleagues," she said.

The award is given each year to one or two University of Nebraska faculty members who conduct research of national or international importance, and the winner receives a \$3,500 stipend.

Hibbing, chairman of the political science department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said his curiosity helped him win this prestigious award.

He said he had been curious about congressional

careers ever since college. He wrote his dissertation on why congressmen leave their jobs, which led him to develop even more questions about Congress.

So Hibbing let his curiosity run wild.

One of the great aspects of being a researcher, he said, is that "if you wonder about something and you

these questions by collecting specific data about congressional records. He also interviewed groups of 10 to 13 people and conducted a national survey of 1,500 Americans.

He ended up with his new book "Congressional Careers."

Hibbing said his book "was one of the few that had

"Older members become more specialized and efficient," Hibbing said. "They have a better batting average" for getting bills passed.

One of the arguments of those wanting term limits is that they want to stop congressmen from making too many laws, Hibbing said.

But if they want fewer laws, then term limits are not

But Hibbing's curiosity isn't satisfied with just research. He said he equally loved teaching.

Teaching and research feed off one another, Hibbing said. Teaching can stimulate research ideas, and doing research furthers education, he said.

Teaching also "keeps you young," he said.

Currently, Hibbing is teaching a graduate seminar in comparative legislatures at UNL. Next semester he will teach a freshman class, Introduction to American Politics.

Hibbing said he liked teaching both levels of students. With graduates he said he could be more specialized and teach extreme details, and with freshmen he took a broader approach.

"In a democracy a crucial part of being a good citizen is understanding the political system," he said.

When he attended Dana College in Blair as a student, Hibbing said, he had planned on being a high school teacher and coach.

He admitted that his reason for going to the college was to play football, which he did.

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*John Hibbing
political science professor*

think it is important to find out about it, then you can do it."

Hibbing had specific questions he wanted to answer: Why does the public have such a bad opinion of Congress? How does the behavior of congressmen change throughout their years of service? Do they become more or less conservative? Do they propose more bills the longer they have been in Congress? Do they worry more or less about their constituents as they gain experience?

Hibbing set out to answer

data. I didn't just blab."

Hibbing admitted he did do a little blabbing, but he also found some interesting facts that gave him insight about a hot topic — term limits.

Although he doesn't like to get involved with issues of the day, Hibbing said he would disagree with term limits.

He found that newer members of Congress introduced more bills, but that their bills failed to pass more often than more experienced member's bills did.

the answer, Hibbing said. Having more new congressmen would mean more bills because they often propose bills just to tell their constituents that they did or to get practice.

Hibbing said he also wanted to continue research he had started on public attitudes toward Congress.

He found that Americans dislike Congress as a group but usually like individual members. Also, Americans think Congress has more power than it actually does, Hibbing said.