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PSCI 210.01: Introduction to American Government

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University of Montana
Department of Political Science

PSCI 210
Introduction to American Government
Spring 2016

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. Thus, we shall investigate American constitutionalism, American political culture, civil rights and liberties, bureaucracy, political parties, interest groups, the media, and the policy process. More generally, the aim of this course is to survey the general institutions and cultural underpinnings of American government, as they shape our policy and political experience. Throughout the semester we will thus try to answer core, guiding questions, concerning American government and politics. Who governs? Do the people rule? Is political change in the air? What does government do? Is government the problem or the solution to human predicaments and challenges? How does American politics work? Is politics something to be embraced or something to be avoided? Who are *we* – what, that is, makes one an American? Ultimately, through an exploration of these and other related questions we will gain an understanding of the critical institutions of American government, how they shape our political life, the dynamics of political change, and how each of these can help us understand the dilemmas now facing the American political system.

In addition to helping you learn about politics and American government, the course is also designed to help you develop the following skills:

- Learn to read primary and secondary sources for content and argument
- Learn to think holistically – i.e. strengthen the capacity to synthesize and interpret large amounts of information, so as to “see” various connections and thus implications of the material under consideration
- Develop the capacity to write effective “argumentative essays” through out of class writing assignments – i.e. strengthen your capacity to put forth reasons for your claims, and through the process of “giving good reasons” figure out what you believe and think
- Strengthen the ability to engage in constructive critical public argument through class participation and discussion

Format

The course is divided into three thematic sections and a conclusion, each structured by a core *Guiding Question*.

1. Foundations: Ideas, Rights, & Structure (weeks 1-5)

Guiding Question: Who governs? Do the people rule? If not, then who is in charge? Is change in the air?

2. Political Institutions (weeks 6-9):

Guiding Question: What does government do? Is government the problem or the solution?

3. Democratic Politics (weeks 10-15):

Guiding Question: How does American politics work? Should we embrace politics or shun it? Is it an evil to be minimized or an art to be cultivated?

4. Conclusion: Who are *We*? (week 15):

Guiding Question: What makes one an American?

Readings

The following books can be purchased at the University Bookstore.

Required Reading:

1. James Morone and Rogan Kersh, *By the People: Debating American Government* (Oxford; 2nd edition, 2015)

2. Ryan Emenaker and James Morone, *Current Debates in American Government* (Oxford: 2016)

Recommended Reading:

1. Mark Leibovich, *This Town* (Blue Rider Press: 2014) (Selections are also up on Moodle)

Procedures and Requirements

Grading and Assignments:

Seven Short Quizzes (15%; see syllabus for dates)

Group Discussions (5%; see syllabus for details)

Three One-Page Paper Assignments (15%):

*#1 One-Page Paper (Feb., 26)

*#2 One-Page Paper (March 25)

*#3 One-Page Paper (May 6)

Three Exams (45%):

*#1 Exam (Feb., 19; ch. 1-4; lectures wk. 1-3; wk. 1-3 readings from *Current Debates in American Government*)

*#2 Exam (March 18; ch. 5, 6, 13, 14; lectures wk. 4- 8; readings from *Current Debates in American Government*)

*#3 Exam (April 22; ch. 15, 16, 7, 9, 10; lectures wk. 9-15; readings from *Current Debates in American Government*)

Final Exam (20%): The final will be held on May 10, 10:10-12:10 pm. The exam will be cumulative, but with a particular focus on ch. 11, 12, 17, 18 and lectures wk. 14 and 15.

Short Quizzes:

On Friday most weeks we will have a short 15 question multiple choice quiz. **These quizzes will cover material from the reading and lectures for that week.** They will be open book and open note. The quizzes will last approximately 20 minutes. The lowest scoring quiz will be dropped from the calculation of one's overall grade (i.e. you can miss one quiz without it effecting your grade).

Exams:

The course requires 3 exams and a final exam.

- Three exams will be given throughout the term, covering between 4 and 5 chapters of material at a time, in addition to lectures from the course. These exams will consist in approximately 40 multiple-choice questions. The exams will be closed book and closed note.
- The final examination also will consist in multiple-choice questions. While the test will be cumulative, it will focus primarily on the chapters and lectures not thus far covered in previous tests. The exam will be closed book and closed note; it will take place at 10:10-12:10 pm, on Tuesday, May 10.

Make-Up Exam and Quiz Policy:

All students are expected to take the exams and quizzes at the times specified above. Make-up exams and quizzes will only be permitted if Professor Peel has been notified *prior* to the missed exam/quiz and only if he agrees that the absence was necessitated by a serious, documented emergency. Check your calendar now to make sure you do not have any conflicts with the exams and quizzes.

Essays:

The course requires 3 out of class writing assignments. Each one-page essay is to be an “argumentative essay.” These essays are an opportunity for you to put forth a point of view about the material and your reasons for thinking you are right about the material – so, stay away from writing a book report. Rather, what we want are claims, supported by good reasons and solid argument.

Two books that are particularly helpful for learning how to write college level argumentative essays are: Anthony Weston, *A Rule Book for Arguments* and William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*. Consulting these books should give you a sense of what constitutes strong college level writing.

The papers will be graded along a 100 point scale, which will consist in the following:

0-30: Clear argumentative claim (i.e. thesis statement, including a What and How claim, and perhaps a Why)

0-40: Content (coherence/logic of claims, depth of thought, novelty of ideas)

0-30: Style (grammar, flow, meatiness of prose)

Total: 100 pt

Sources for Papers:

Please use the texts for the class in formulating your response papers.

Late Paper Policy:

Papers are due at the beginning of class and are not to be emailed. Papers not turned in on their Friday due date may be turned in the following Monday in class. However, papers submitted on Monday will be marked down 40 points (or approximately two letter grades). After that date, late papers will not be accepted.

Extra-Credit:

If students wish, they may write a book review or analysis of *This Town* or any of the “chapter questions” listed in Emenaker and Morone’s *Current Debates in American Government*. The

book review or analysis is to be 3 pages double-spaced and is due April 27th. The extra-credit assignment is worth up to 5% of a student's final grade, and will be graded along the same scale as the other papers for the course.

Writing Help:

The Writing Center is located in LA 144. To make an appointment with a writing advisor, call 243-2266, email growl@mso.umt.edu, or stop by LA 144.

Academic Dishonesty:

Students in this course are expected to follow the University's standards of academic integrity and honesty. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you may receive a failing grade for the assignment and/or class and may be reported to the University. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism. The Code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321>

Group Discussions:

On Monday and Wednesdays, I will give you the basic facts. But on Fridays you will join the debate – that is, students will participate as citizens in deliberative democratic discussions (I know, I know... democracy can be messy. But please no fist fights...). We will talk more about this as the term progresses.

Grades:

Grades will be assigned according to the following percentages:

A 93-100	B+ 87-89.9	C+ 77-79.9	D+ 67-69.9	below 60 F
A- 90-92.9	B 83-86.9	C 73-76.9	D 63-66.9	
	B- 80-82.9	C- 70-72.9	D- 60-62.9	

General Education Requirement:

In order to satisfy the General Education Requirement, you must take the course for a traditional letter grade and earn a C- or better.

Class Drop Policy:

The University allows students to drop courses until February 12th (i.e. the 15th instructional day). After that, students are required to obtain the signature of the faculty member teaching the course. **Generally speaking, it is my policy to not sign students out of classes.** That said, our first exam is Feb. 19 and our first paper is Feb. 26th. I will thus sign students out of the course a week after students have received their grades on the first exam and paper. That is, you have approximately five weeks to decide if you wish to take this course. If you do not drop the course by the deadline, I will assign students the grade they have received in the class. (Side note: It is not good for you or for the class to have students not committed to taking a course, and hence the policy...)

Accessibility:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction by supporting collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). Students requesting accommodations on exams, papers, or other course requirements must contact the instructor as soon as possible and must contact DSS in order to arrange for and provide the instructor with a letter of approval for accommodations at least one week prior to the first exam. DSS is in Lommasson Center 154; phone: (406) 243-2243.

Part I: Foundations: Ideas, Rights & Structure

Guiding Question:

Who governs? Do the people rule? If not, then who is in charge? Is change in the air?

Week One: Foundations

1. Mon., Jan. 25: Making Sense of Government & Politics; Is Change In The Air?

Ch. 1, pp. 1-25

2. Wed., Jan. 27: The Origins of Government; The Ideas that Shape America

Ch. 2, pp. 27-63

3. Fri., Jan. 29: Discussion

Discussion: Which American ideas seem the most powerful and important to you? What powerful ideas animate the Declaration of Independence? Do these ideas still animate the United States today? What views of human nature are presupposed in the Declaration? Is it optimistic or pessimistic about human nature and self-government? Does the history of American slavery demonstrate that American ideals and values (those, for instance, embodied in the Declaration of Independence) are a sham? Put another way, what, indeed, is the Fourth of July to a slave? What is Douglas' answer? Finally, what is and what is not necessary for the stability and survival of human society over time? Order, freedom, citizenship, virtue, wealth, power, law, or what and why?

By the People, pp. A1-A2:

**The Declaration of Independence*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 16 – 20:

*Nicholas Kristof, "It's the Canadian Dream Now" (2014)

*Clifford May, "American Exceptionalism and Its Discontents" (2012)

Fredrick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (1852) [M]

Week Two: Constructing a Government: The Founding & the Constitution

1. Mon., Feb. 1: The Revolution and the Founding

Ch. 3, pp. 65-92

2. Wed., Feb. 3: Consent and the Constitution

Ch. 3, pp. 92-109

3. Fri., Feb. 5: #1 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: How well, and in what ways, does the Constitution institutionalize the ideas introduced by the Declaration of Independence? (Lincoln said the Constitution was merely the means to realize the ends of the Declaration (although he used fancier language...)) Is he right?) Does it matter how other countries view the American Constitution? Should other countries use the US as a model? Perhaps the American Constitution is an 18th century artifact that today is obsolete in the 21st century? If not, then does the American Constitution need to be radically changed to respond to contemporary challenges, or perhaps it merely needs to be reformed? What say you?

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 23-25, 39-49:

*Adam Liptak, “‘We the People’ Loses Appeal with People around the World” (2012)

*Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia’s Comments Before Senate Hearing (2011)

*Louis Seidman, “Let’s Give Up on the Constitution” (2012)

Week Three: Federalism and the Separation of Powers

1. Mon., Feb. 8: Who Does What? Federalism

Ch. 4, pp. 111-33

2. Wed., Feb. 10: Collective Action or Gridlock? The Separation of Powers

Ch. 4, pp. 133-41

3. Fri., Feb. 12: #2 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Does it matter what level of government makes the decision as long as the policies you prefer are adopted? How should we determine the types of policies best left to the states versus the types best left to the national government? Further, what is the optimal relationship between the national and state governments with a view to enhancing both liberty and equality? Do you view Louis Fisher’s article as an example of the separation of powers leading to dysfunction or furthering a constructive dialogue that produced, ultimately, a better outcome? Would American be better off without the separation of powers? Put otherwise, should we have a parliament?*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 50-63; 47-49; 235-36:

*George Annas, “Jumping Frogs, Endangered Toads, and California’s Medical Marijuana Laws” (2005)

*Governing, “Could Gay Marriage, Guns and Marijuana Lead to a Fragmented United States of America?” (2013)

*Louis Fisher, “Crush Videos: A Constructive Dialogue” (2011)

*Ari Shapiro, “Would the U.S. Be Better Off with a Parliament?” (2013)

Week Four: Civil Liberties

1. Mon., Feb. 15: NO CLASSES: PRESIDENT’S DAY

2. Wed., Feb. 17: Origins; Nationalizing the Bill of Rights; the Bill of Rights Today

Ch. 5, 143-81

Discussion: *Are some liberties more important than others? How should competing rights be balanced? Which liberties should receive stronger protections than they do now? Which ones should receive lesser protections? How would one distinguish between the fundamental and non-fundamental liberties?*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 67-74:

*Jonathan Tobin, “Freedom for Religion, Not From It” (2010)

*Nina Totenberg, “High Court Struggles with Military Funerals Case” (2010)

3. Fri., Feb. 19: Exam 1 (will cover ch. 1-4; lectures wk. 1-3)

Week Five: Civil Rights

1. Mon., Feb. 22: What are Civil Rights? The Struggle for Civil Rights

Ch. 6, pp. 183-207

2. Tues., Feb. 24: The Politics of Rights; Affirmative Action

Ch. 6, pp. 207-27

3. Fri., Feb. 26: #1 One-Page Paper Due & Discussion

Paper #1 Prompt: *Choose any one of the below discussion questions*

Discussion: *How do groups “win” civil rights? In what way did Brown matter, according to Sunstein? Are there lessons to be learned about civil rights by reflecting on the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans and the Korematsu case? While many agree the immigration system is broken, few agree on a solution. What are some of the reasons it is difficult to reach agreement on immigration policy reform? What are some of the reasons cited in Ludden’s article for the pay disparity between men and women? Which reasons seem the most likely to you? And should government have a role in trying to reduce this pay disparity?*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 84-90, 95-96, 97-107:

*Cass Sunstein, “Did Brown Matter” (2004)

*Richard Goldstein, “Fred Korematsu, 86, Dies” (2005)

*Jose Antonio Vargas, “Not Legal, Not Leaving” (2012)

*Jennifer Ludden, “Despite New Law, Gender Salary Gap Persists” (2010)

Part II: Political Institutions

Guiding Question:

What does government do? Is government the problem or the solution?

Week Six: Congress: The First Branch

1. Mon., Feb. 29: Representation; the Organization of Congress

Ch. 13, pp. 421-32

2. Wed., Mar. 2: How a Bill Becomes a Law; How Congress Decides

Ch. 13, pp. 432-59

3. Fri., Mar. 4: #3 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Does the modern world of instantaneous communication, the ability to form coalitions around causes, and to raise infinite sums of money, make the representative branch fundamentally problematic? Why does the reelection rate for members of Congress remain so high when the public’s opinion of Congress is so low? What reforms, if any, should be made to Congress’s representative structure? Does, for instance, the Senate still perform the function the Framers intended? Is Congress the “broken branch?”*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 232-249:

*Adam Liptak, “Smaller States Find Outsized Clout Growing in Senate” (2013)

*Chris Cillizza, "People Hate Congress, but Most Incumbents Get Re-Elected. What Gives?" (2013)

Week Seven: The Presidency as an Institution

1. Mon., Mar. 7: Constitutional Origins; the Rise of Presidential Government

Ch. 14, pp. 461-69

2. Wed., Mar. 9: Presidential Government; Myths and Realities

Ch. 14, pp. 469-503

3. Fri., Mar. 11: # 4 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *What powers does the presidency now have that are not explicitly expressed in the Constitution? What conditions have allowed a president to be powerful? What is the proper role of the presidency in a democracy? How does the future Supreme Court Justice, Elena Kagan, describe the current state of presidential power?*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 250-258:

*George Will, "Congress's Unused War Powers" (2007)

*Anita Kumar, "Obama Turning to Executive Power to Get What He Wants" (2013)

Elena Kagan, "Presidential Administration" *Harvard Law Review* (2001) [M]

Week Eight: The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy

1. Mon., Mar.14: Why Bureaucracy? How is the Executive Branch Organized?

Ch. 15, pp. 505-28

2. Wed., Mar. 16: The Problem of Bureaucratic Control; Reforming Bureaucracy

Ch. 15, pp. 528-39

Discussion: *Is "nudging" the future of government? Are there concerns or worries we should have about nudging? And what might some of the advantages be of nudging? Based on the excerpts from Reich's book, what concerns do you have about how the U.S. bureaucracy functions? Does bureaucracy challenge representative government? In what ways does it support representative government?*

Current Debates in American Government, pp. 111-117; 276-282:

*Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, *Nudge* (2009)

*Robert Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (1997)

3. Fri., Mar. 18: Exam 2 (will cover ch. 5, 6, 13, 14; lectures wk. 4-8)

Week Nine: The Judicial Branch

1. Mon., Mar. 21: Organization, Courts as Political Institutions,

Ch. 16, pp. 541-64

2. Wed., Mar. 23: The Power of Judicial Review, & the Expanding Power of the Judiciary

Ch. 16, pp. 564-81

3. Fri., Mar. 25: #2 One Page Paper Due & Discussion

Paper #2 Prompt: Choose any one of the below discussion questions

Discussion: *Is the judiciary “the least dangerous branch” of government, as Alexander Hamilton said? Or do we have an imperial judiciary? Do the federal courts serve as a necessary check on “We the People?” Or do they, ideally, help to empower “We the People?” What, that is, is the proper role of unelected judges in a democracy? Finally, how do you think we should interpret the Constitution? Should we just look at the text? The original meaning of the words in the 18th century when the document was ratified? Our ideas of justice and fairness today? The consequences of our decisions about the meaning of the Constitution? What say you?*

Current Debates in American Government pp. 283-291; 295-305:

*Louis Fisher, *On the Supreme Court: Without Illusion and Idolatry* (2014)

*Donald Kettl, “Why States and Localities Are Watching the Lower Federal Courts” (2010)

*Jennifer Senior, “In Conversation: Antonin Scalia” (2013)

Part III: Democratic Politics

Guiding Question:

*How does American politics work? Should we embrace politics or shun it?
Is it an evil to be minimized or an art to be cultivated?*

Week Ten: The Media & Political Participation

1. Mon., Mar. 28: The Media

Ch. 9, pp. 283-315

Discussion: *Despite the wide-ranging sources of news and information today, does this enhance self-government or are there dangers? Does narrowing our sources of information cause us to reinforce our worldviews and does this contribute to political polarization?*

Current Debates in American Government pp. 159-168:

*Cass Sunstein, *Republic 2.0* (2007)

2. Wed., Mar. 30: #5 Short Quiz/ Lecture on Political Participation

Ch. 7, pp. 229-55

Discussion: *When, if ever is civil disobedience a legitimate means of participation? When is it not?*

Current Debates in American Government pp. 117-122:

*Howard Zinn, “The Problem Is Civil Obedience” (1971)

3. Fri., Apr. 1: NO CLASS

SPRING BREAK: APRIL 4- 8TH

Week Twelve: Elections & Campaigns

1. Mon., Apr. 11: Elections and How Voters Decide

Ch. 10, pp. 317-27

2. Wed., Apr. 13 Campaigns: Money, Media, and Grass Roots

Ch. 10, pp. 327-53

3. Fri., Apr. 15: #6 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Do you think the American system of elections today is democratic? Do voter ID laws guarantee the integrity of elections or suppress voter turnout? Does the amount of money in elections make it more or less democratic? And given advances in technology, could we make it more democratic? Or does technology have the ability to make it less democratic?*

Current Debates in American Government pp. 190-192; 199-201; 137-141:

*Charlie Savage, "Justice Department Blocks Texas on Photo ID for Voting" (2012)

*Peter Baker and Eric Lipton, "In a Tight Race, Obama Draws on the Levers of His Power" (2012)

*Ben Ginsberg, "The Perils of Polling" (2008)

Week Thirteen: Political Parties

1. Mon., Apr. 18: Why Do Political Parties Form?

Ch. 11, pp. 355-72

2. Wed., Apr. 20: Parties in Government, the Electorate, and as Institutions

Ch. 11, pp. 372-87

3. Fri., Apr. 22: Exam 3 (will cover ch. 15, 16, 7, 9, 10; lectures wk. 9-12)

Week Fourteen: Groups and Interests

1. Mon., Apr. 25: What are the Characteristics of Interest Groups and Why Do They Form?

Ch. 12, pp. 389-99

2. Wed., Apr. 27: How Do Interest Groups Influence Policy?

Ch. 12, pp. 399-419

***Extra-Credit Book Report or Analysis Due**

3. Fri. Apr. 29: #7 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *What interest groups do you, your friends, and your family members belong to or support? Why do people form interest groups? What important role do interest groups play in a democracy? How might they hinder democracy? What segments of society are the most likely to form and benefit from interest groups? In what ways do you think pluralist and power elite theory most accurately describe the role of interest groups in U.S. politics?*

Current Debates in American Government pp. 215-231:

*Dara Strolovitch, *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics* (2007)

- *Jonathan Salant and Lizzie O’Leary, “Six Lobbyist per Lawmakers Work on Health Overhaul” (2009)
- *Matea Gold, “Ready for a Surprise? Money Does Equal Access in Washington” (2014)
- *Jodi Rudorwn and Aron Pilhofer, “Hiring Federal Lobbyists, Towns Learn Money Talks” (2006)

Week Fifteen: Domestic and Foreign Policy; Conclusion

1. Mon., May 2: Domestic Policy (Economic & Social Policy): How Does Government Make a Market Economy Possible? Can Government Create Opportunity?

Ch. 17, pp. 583-619

2. Wed., May 4: Foreign Policy: Goals, Instruments, and America’s Role in the World Today

Ch. 18, pp. 621-55

3. Fri., May 6: Conclusion - *Who are We?* # 3 One Page Paper Due & Discussion

Paper # 3 Prompt: *Choose any one of the below discussion questions*

*Discussion: What makes one an American? The Preamble of the Constitution says, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of American.” But who are **We**? Must one embrace politics to realize who we are? Or is avoiding politics as much as possible the key to realizing who we are? Finally, what is the attitude Hughes adopts toward America? Is he critical or hopeful regarding its values and history?*

*Langston Hughes, “Let America Be America Again” (1936) [M]

Final Exam:

The final exam is comprehensive and will cover material from the entire course. However, it will be weighted toward the material since Exam #3 (i.e. Weeks 14-15). It will take place from 10:10-12:10 pm Tuesday, May 10.

*The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments to this class schedule.
If any changes are made, students will be notified promptly.*