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PSCI 210S.01: Introduction to American Government

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University of Montana
Department of Political Science

PSCI 210
Introduction to American Government
Spring 2015

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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 it 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: 2015)
2. Thomas Lindsay and Gary Glenn, eds. *Investigating American Democracy* (Oxford: 2013)
3. 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., 27)
- *#2 One-Page Paper (March 25)
- *#3 One-Page Paper (May 8)

Three Exams (45%):

- *#1 Exam (Feb., 20; ch. 1-4)
- *#2 Exam (March 20; ch. 5-8)
- *#3 Exam (April 24; ch. 9-13)

Final Exam (20%; May 13)

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.

Exams:

The course requires 3 exams and a final exam.

- Three exams will be given throughout the term, covering approximately 4 chapters of material at a time. These exams will consist in multiple choice questions, plus short answer questions. These exams will be closed book and closed note.

- The final examination also will consist in multiple choice questions and short answer questions. The exam will be closed book and closed note; it will take place on May 13 from 10:10 – 12:10.

Essays:

The course requires 3 out of class writing assignments, which will address the Guiding Question introduced at the beginning of each thematic section for the course.

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. 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 “core questions” listed in Lindsay and Glenn’s *Investigating American Democracy*. The book review or analysis is to be 3 pages double-spaced and is due April 29th. 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/VP/SA/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 in group discussions. As mentioned above, the course is broken up into three large thematic sections, each with a “Guiding Question.”

The thematic sections of the course are:

Part I: Foundations: Ideas, Rights & Structure (Week 1-5)

Part II: Political Institutions (Weeks 6-9)

Part III: Democratic Politics (Weeks 11-15)

Each Friday, students will be asked to discuss a sub-question related to the larger “Guiding Question,” which is listed in the syllabus. At the end of each thematic section to the course students will present their conclusions - based on their work on each sub-question – regarding the Guiding Question framing that thematic section.

To facilitate this activity, students will be assigned to a different group of 5 persons every thematic section of the course (approximately every 5 weeks) who they will work with during the entirety of that thematic section – so, plan to work with three different groups of 5 people throughout the term.

The groups for each thematic section will be listed on Moodle.

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. 26: Making Sense of Government & Politics; Is Change In The Air?

Ch. 1, pp. 1-25

2. Wed., Jan. 28: The Origins of Government; the Ideas that Shape America

Ch. 2, pp. 27-63

3. Fri., Jan. 30: The Principles of Politics; Discussion

Discussion: *Was America founded as a democracy or a republic? Does pluralism, elite*

theory, or social-movement theory best explain American government?

Investigating Democracy, pp. 6, 8-28:

- *James Madison, Federalist #10 (1787)
- *James Madison, Federalist # 39 (1788)
- *Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address (1801)
- *Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1833)

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

1. Mon., Feb. 2: The First and Second Founding

Ch. 3, pp. 65-92

2. Wed., Feb. 4: Consent and the Constitution

Ch. 3, pp. 92-109

3. Fri., Feb. 6: #1 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Critiquing the Founders Vision? Does genuine political democracy require “economic democracy?”*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 44-58:

- *Theodore Roosevelt, “Two Noteworthy Books on Democracy” (1914)
- *Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Commonwealth Club Campaign Speech” (1932)
- *Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Message on the State of the Union” (1944)
- *Lyndon B. Johnson, “The Great Society” (1964)

Week Three: Federalism and the Separation of Powers

1. Mon., Feb. 9: Who Does What? Federalism

Ch. 4, pp. 111-33

2. Wed., Feb. 11: Collective Action or Stalemate? The Separation of Powers

Ch. 4, pp. 133-41

3. Fri., Feb. 13: #2 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *What is the optimal relationship between the national and state governments with a view to enhancing both liberty and equality?*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 107-15:

- *Ronald Reagan, “State of the Union” (1982)
- *Garcia v. San Antonio (1985)

Week Four: Civil Liberties

1. Mon., Feb. 16: NO CLASSES: PRESIDENT’S DAY

2. Wed., Feb. 18: Origins; Nationalizing the Bill of Rights; the Bill of Rights Today

Ch. 5, 143-81 (Possible Guest Lecture)

3. Fri., Feb. 20: Exam 1 (will cover material from Weeks 1-4)

Week Five: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

1. Mon., Feb. 23: What are Civil Rights? The Struggle for Civil Rights

Ch. 6, pp. 183-207

2. Tues., Feb. 25: The Politics of Rights; Affirmative Action

Ch. 6, pp. 207-27

3. Fri., Feb. 27: #1 One-Page Paper Due, Discussion, and Conclusions Presented

Paper #1 Prompt: *Who governs? Do the people rule? If not, then who is in charge? Is change in the air?*

Discussion: *Should the courts or the democratic branches of government be the key means for protecting civil rights?*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 58-60; 65-72

*Justice Robert Jackson, *West Virginia State Board of Ed. v. Barnette* (1943)

*Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream" (1963)

**Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003)

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., Mar. 2: Representation; the Organization of Congress

Ch. 13, pp. 421-32

2. Wed., Mar. 4: How a Bill Becomes a Law; How Congress Decides

Ch. 13, pp. 432-59

3. Fri., Mar. 6: #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? Is Congress the "broken branch?"

This Town, pp. 157-71

Week Seven: The Presidency as an Institution

1. Mon., Mar. 9: Constitutional Origins; the Rise of Presidential Government;

Ch. 14, pp. 461-69

2. Wed., Mar. 11: Presidential Government; Myths and Realities

Ch. 14, pp. 469-503

3. Fri., Mar. 13: # 4 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Does the separation of powers aim to make possible an "energetic" president who is "independent" of the legislature?*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 212-25:

- *James Madison, Federalists #37 (1788)
- *Alexander Hamilton, Federalist #70 (1788)
- *Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Interview by Arthur Krock" (1937)
- *Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835)

Week Eight: The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy

1. Mon., Mar.16: Why Bureaucracy? How is the Executive Branch Organized?

Ch. 15, pp. 505-28

2. Wed., Mar. 18: The Problem of Bureaucratic Control; Reforming Bureaucracy

Ch. 15, pp. 528-39

3. Fri., Mar. 20: Exam 2 (will cover material from Weeks 5-8)

Week Nine: The Judicial Branch

1. Mon., Mar. 23: Organization, Courts as Political Institutions, the Power of Judicial Review, & the Expanding Power of the Judiciary

Ch. 16. 541-81

2. Wed., Mar. 25: #2 One Page Paper Due, Discussion, & Conclusions Presented

Paper #2 Prompt: *What does government do? Is government the problem or the solution?*

Discussion: *Is the judiciary "the least dangerous branch" of government? Or do we have an imperial judiciary? How and why, that is, does the separation of powers aim to make possible an independent judiciary?*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 225-238:

- *Alexander Hamilton, Federalist #70 (1788)
- *Thomas Jefferson, "Against Judicial Supremacy in Constitutional Interpretation" (1815)
- *Theodore Roosevelt, "The Recall of Judicial Decisions" (1912)

3. Fri., Mar. 28: No Class

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 30 THROUGH APRIL 3

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 Eleven: Political Participation & the Media

1. Mon., Apr. 6: Political Participation

Ch. 7, pp. 229-55

2. Wed., Apr. 8: The Media

Ch. 9, pp. 283-315

3. Fri., Apr. 10: #5 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Does the world of the modern media and influence (the “entourage” as Leibovch calls it) undermine political participation? Does it cause **you** to be not just skeptical about politics and politicians, but cynical about democratic politics? And if so, can democratic politics and American government work if everyone is cynical?*

This Town, pp. 1-68 (skim as you see fit); read 70-112 (especially 99-112)

Week Twelve: Elections & Campaigns

1. Mon., Apr. 13: Elections and How Voters Decide

Ch. 10, pp. 317-27

2. Wed., Apr. 15: Campaigns: Money, Media, and Grass Roots

Ch. 10, pp. 327-53

3. Fri., Apr. 17: #6 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Do you think the American system of elections today is democratic? 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?*

This Town, pp. 324-48

Week Thirteen: Political Parties

1. Mon., Apr. 20: Why Do Political Parties Form?

Ch. 11, pp. 355-72

2. Tues., Apr. 22: Parties in Government, the Electorate, and as Institutions

Ch. 11, pp. 372-87

3. Fri., Apr. 24: Exam 3 (will cover material from Weeks 9-13)

Week Fourteen: Groups and Interests

1. Mon., Apr. 27: What are the Characteristics of Interest Groups and Why Do They Form?

Ch. 12, pp. 389-99

2. Wed., Apr. 29: How Do Interest Groups Influence Policy?

Ch. 12, pp. 399-419

**Extra-Credit Book Report or Analysis Due*

3. Fri. May 1: #7 Short Quiz & Discussion

Discussion: *Should representation take account of individuals or groups, or both?*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 179-90:

*Justice Thurgood Marshall, "Remarks at the Annual Seminar of the San Francisco Patent and Trademark Law Association" (1987)

*Robert Godwin, "Why Blacks, Women, and Jews Are Not Mentioned In the Constitution" (1987)

Week Fifteen: Domestic and Foreign Policy; Conclusion

1. Mon., May 4: 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 6: Foreign Policy: Goals, Instruments, and America's Role in the World Today

Ch. 18, pp. 621-55

3. Fri., May 8: Conclusion - *Who are We?* # 3 One Page Paper Due, Discussion & Conclusions Presented

Paper # 3 Prompt: *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?*

Discussion: *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?*

Investigating Democracy, pp. 195-98; 308-14:

*Barack Obama, "More Perfect Union" (2008)

*Czech President Vaclav Havel, "Address to Joint Session of the US Congress" (1990)

This Town, pp. 173-85

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 to 12:10, Wednesday, May 13.

The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments to this class schedule.

If any changes are made, students will be notified promptly.