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PSCI 210S.02: Introduction to American Government

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Political Science 210S: Introduction to American Government

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Spring 2012
University of Montana
Location: Liberal Arts 11
Time: MWF 2:10-3:00
Office hours: Wed 10:00-12:00

Course Description

Government and politics affect our everyday lives. From the nutrition facts printed on the box of your breakfast cereal to the stop sign you rolled through on your way to class to the amount of interest you need to pay on your student loans, political decisions are everywhere. This course provides an introductory survey of the American political system. Topics to be addressed include the theory and principles of government, political institutions, parties and organized interests, political behavior and elections, and public policy. Overall, the focus of this course will be on *how* politics happens rather than on *what* politics produces.

Though there are a variety of reasons that students take an introductory political science course, it is my hope that all of you leave this class with (a) a better sense of the kinds of questions that interest political scientists, (b) a strong civic education that will enable you to participate in political decision-making should you so choose, and (c) a level of general knowledge about politics that will allow you to follow and be engaged in the political news and controversies as they happen.

Readings

There are **two books** required for this course:

American Politics Today (2nd ed.) by William T. Bianco and David T. Canon (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010)

Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings (4th ed.) edited by Samuel Kernell and Stephen S. Smith (Washington: CQ Press, 2009)

These books are available in the campus bookstore. All required readings will come from these two texts. It is my expectation that you come to class having read all the assigned material for that week. I reserve the right to add, delete, or alter course readings as needed.

In addition to the assigned readings, I strongly recommend that you stay informed of current events involving American government and politics. One great to-the-point source of American political news online is Taegan Goddard's Political Wire (politicalwire.com). Whether you get your news from this site or another source, knowledge of ongoing political events will be very valuable in your understanding of the course material.

Assignments and Grades

GRADES. Your grade in this course will consist of the following components:

Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	30%
Class Participation	10%

In order to receive a passing grade in the course, you must complete both writing assignments and both exams. Late papers will be accepted with a penalty of one full grade per day late. Extensions and exam reschedulings will be allowed only in extreme cases and will require sufficient notice.

PAPERS. There will be two short (about 5 pages in length) writing assignments for this course. The first is due March 2, and the second on April 23. Details on the assignments will be distributed approximately two weeks before their due dates.

EXAMS. The midterm exam will be held in class on March 23. Due to time constraints, the exam will be fairly short and thus will focus mainly on factual information. The final exam, which will be cumulative, for this class will be substantially longer and is scheduled for Monday, May 7 from 3:20-5:20 PM (in our usual classroom).

PARTICIPATION. Although this is a large lecture course, I will attempt to make it as interactive as possible. As such, it is expected that you attend class regularly, do the assigned readings before coming to class, and be prepared to talk about the material. I strongly prefer not to "cold call" on students but will resort to such a tactic if the discussion seems too inactive. I will not take attendance every class, but two bad things will happen if you frequently skip class: (1) your grade will suffer directly due to your participation score (since you will not be present to participate), and (2) you will not understand the material as well as if you see the lecture material, which will bring down the other components of your grade.

Teaching Assistant

The teaching assistant for this class is Nicole Allen. She will be holding office hours each week on Mondays from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM and on Wednesdays from 12:00 to 1:00 PM in Corbin 347. She can be reached by email at nicole1.allen@umconnect.umt.edu.

Office Hours

My office hours are every Wednesday from 10 AM to 12 PM. If this time is inconvenient for you, I am also available by appointment. Office hours are a great opportunity for us to discuss the material in more depth, to go over assignments or difficult concepts, or to talk about anything else on your mind. Coming to office hours is by no means required, but they do help you get the most out of this course.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will not be tolerated. Information on academic honesty is available here: libguides.lib.umd.edu/plagiarism. Those who commit acts of academic dishonesty will not pass this course. If you are unsure whether or not something counts as academic dishonesty, please come talk to me; I would much rather help you prevent plagiarism beforehand than be forced to punish you for it after the fact.

Disability Services

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations on exams, papers, or other course requirements should contact me as soon as possible, and must contact Disability Services for Students (DSS) in order to arrange for and provide me with a letter of approval for accommodations at least one week prior to the first exam. DSS is in Lommasson Center 154.

Class Schedule

PART I: FOUNDATIONS

Week 1 (Jan. 23, 25, & 27): Politics and Political Science

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 1

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 1

Week 2 (Jan. 30, Feb 1 & 3): The Constitution

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 2; Declaration of Independence, The Constitution of the United States, & Amendments to the Constitution (Appendix)

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 2

Week 3 (Feb. 6, 8, & 10): Federalism

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 3

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 3

Week 4 (Feb. 13, 15, & 17): American Political Culture

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 4

Kernell & Smith: Chapters 4-1, 5-1, 5-2, & 5-3

PART II: INSTITUTIONS

Week 5 (Feb. 22 & 24): Congress

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 10

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 6

Week 6 (Feb. 27, 29, & March 2): The Presidency

Paper #1 due: March 2 (at the beginning of class)

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 11

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 7

Week 7 (March 5, 7, & 9): The Bureaucracy

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 12

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 8

Week 8 (March 12, 14, & 16): The Judiciary

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 13

Kernell & Smith: Chapters 5-4, 9-1, 9-2, 9-3, & 9-4

PART III: INTERMEDIATION

Week 9 (March 19, 21, & 23): Midterm/Political Parties

Exam (covering Parts I & II): March 23 in class

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 7

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 12

Week 10 (March 26, 28 & 30): Interest Groups

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 9

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 13

Week 11 (April 9, & 11): The Media

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 6

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 14

No class on April 13

PART IV: POLITICS & POLICY

Week 12 (April 16, 18, & 20): Public Opinion

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 5

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 10

Week 13 (April 23, 25, & 27): Elections

Paper #2 due: April 23 (at the beginning of class)

Bianco & Canon: Chapter 8

Kernell & Smith: Chapter 11

Week14 (April 30, May 2 & 4):Public Policy

Bianco & Canon: Chapters 15-17