

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

University of Montana Course Syllabi

Open Educational Resources (OER)

Fall 9-1-2009

PSC 210S.01: Introduction to American Government

Robert P. Saldin

University of Montana - Missoula, robert.saldin@umontana.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Saldin, Robert P., "PSC 210S.01: Introduction to American Government" (2009). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 6569.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/6569>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Educational Resources (OER) at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Montana Course Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Introduction to American Government
University of Montana
Political Science 210
MWF 9:10 – 10:00, McGill Hall 210
Fall 2009

Professor Robert Saldin
Office: Liberal Arts 354
Office Hours: MW 10-11 & by appointment
robert.saldin@umontana.edu
(406) 243-4418

Teaching Assistant: Jessica Lawson
Office: Corbin Hall 345
Office Hours: MF 11-12, W 2-3 &
by appointment
jl175022@umontana.edu

Course Description

This course is an introduction to American government and politics and is designed to provide a foundation for understanding and participating in the American political system. We will examine the theoretical ideas that informed the creation and development of America's political system and consider some of the major contemporary challenges to the maintenance of American democracy.

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to: 1) Understand the origins and nature of the constitutional system, federalism, and civil liberties; 2) Appreciate the relationship between and the development of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; 3) Understand basic social science theories concerning political behavior, bureaucracies, interest groups, and political parties; 4) Write critically and effectively; 5) Understand how social scientists explain and understand social and political processes; 6) Finally, students should know the difference between a well-crafted argument substantiated with the effective use of evidence, and a poorly constructed argument based largely upon personal values and opinions.

Required Texts and Other Readings

The following books are available at the University of Montana Bookstore:

- James Q. Wilson, *American Government: Brief Version*, 9th edition (2009).
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (Hackett Edition). It is important that you have this edition so the page numbers listed on this syllabus correspond.

All other readings on the syllabus can be found on the course's Blackboard website.

The instructor reserves the right to add, eliminate, or alter course readings as needed.

Requirements and Grading

Exam 1 (Oct. 9):	25%
Exam 2 (Nov. 9):	25%
Paper (due Nov. 23):	25%
Final Exam (Dec. 14):	25%

Exams: Exams 1 and 2 will be administered in class on Friday, October 9 and Monday, November 9. The Final Exam will be held from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. on Monday, December 14. Exams will include combination of multiple choice, identification, and short answer questions. Makeup exams will only be permitted if I have been notified *prior* to the missed exam and only if I agree that the absence was necessitated by a serious, documented emergency. Check your calendar now to make sure you do not have anything that conflicts with the exams.

Paper: Paper questions will be handed out in class and posted on the class' Blackboard site. Your task will be to answer one of the questions in 3 double-spaced pages with 1-inch margins and 12-point font. Papers are due at the beginning of class on Monday, November 23. Extensions will be available only for illness or serious family circumstance, and then only with *advance* permission. Papers will be marked down half a letter grade for each day they are late.

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	

*** All three exams and the paper must be completed in order to pass the course.***

Academic Honesty

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available online at <http://life.umt.edu/SA/documents/fromWeb/StudentConductCode1.pdf>. I take academic honesty very seriously, and will do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of cheating. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

Social Sciences General Education Requirement

In order for this course to satisfy your University of Montana General Education Distributional Requirement in the Social Sciences, you must take the course for a letter grade and students governed by the 2005-2006 *Catalog* or more recent catalogs must earn a C– or better.

DSS Students

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 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

Week 1, Aug. 31 – Sept. 4: Introduction: A Liberal Arts Education and Political Science

Overview

- A) William Cronon, “‘Only Connect...’ The Goals of a Liberal [Arts] Education,” *The American Scholar*, (Autumn 1998)
- B) Wilson, Chapter 1: What Should We Know About American Government?

Reading Questions:

1. What are the core aspects of a liberal arts education according to Cronin? What does a liberal arts education mean to you and what do you hope to gain through it and this course?
2. What is difference between “representative” and “direct” democracy? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type?
3. How and why is the U.S. government significantly different from other democratic political systems in terms of both politics and policy outcomes?
4. What are the major constitutional components, political processes, and strengths and weaknesses of presidential and parliamentary democratic systems?
5. How do the Constitution and the citizenry’s opinions and values contribute to the distinctiveness of democracy in the United States?
6. If you are like most Americans, you may not have much confidence in what our government does. Why?

Week 2, Sept. 7 – 11: Regimes and Liberal Democracy in America, Part I

- A) Aristotle, *The Politics* (selections) (Blackboard)
- B) Plutarch’s “Life of Lycurgus” (selections) (Blackboard)
- C) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 20-32
- D) Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. “Harrison Bergeron” (Blackboard)

Reading Questions

1. What is a political regime? What are the different types of regimes as outlined by Aristotle?
2. Consider the regimes described by Plutarch, Tocqueville, and Vonnegut. Would you like to live in Lycurgus’s Sparta? The colonial New England Puritan regime described by Tocqueville? In Harrison Bergeron’s 2081? What are the differences between these regimes and the regime of the United States?
3. The Puritan and Spartan regimes placed a great deal of emphasis on virtue. What was meant by virtue? At what price was it achieved? Was it worth the price?
4. How would you describe the American regime? Even though it does not attempt to instill

virtue directly in the way of the Puritan or the Spartan regime, is it indifferent to virtue or citizenship?

Week 3: Sept. 14 – 18: Regimes and Liberal Democracy in America, Part II

- A) Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (selections) (Blackboard)
- B) Declaration of Independence (in appendix of our textbook, see especially the first and last paragraphs)

Reading Questions:

1. What does Locke mean by a state of nature and natural rights?
2. What were the grounds for declaring independence?
3. What does the Declaration mean by a natural right to liberty? By the truth that all men are created equal?
4. To what extent is the Declaration a Lockean document?

Week 4, Sept. 21 – 25: The Constitution

- A) Wilson, Chapter 2: The Constitution
- B) The Constitution of the United States (in appendix of our textbook)
- C) Brutus #1, "Essay Against Consolidation" (Blackboard)
- D) Federalist #10 (in appendix of our textbook)

Reading Questions:

1. What was wrong with the Articles of Confederation?
2. How did the authors of the Constitution view human nature?
3. How were the competing priorities of the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan reconciled in the Great Compromise?
4. How can a government be strong enough to govern without threatening freedom?
5. Why was a bill of rights not originally included in the Constitution and why was it later added?
6. Has the system of separated powers and checks and balances protected liberty?
What is the relationship between liberty and equality?
7. According to Brutus, what is the case for the small republic as the political arrangement most compatible with maintaining a republican form of government?
8. What is the response of The Federalist? What is the case for the large commercial Republic?

Week 5, Sept. 28 – Oct. 2: Federalism

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 68-72
- B) Wilson, Chapter 5: Federalism
- C) Martha Derthick, "Federal Government Mandates: Why the States are Complaining?"

Reading Questions:

1. What is federalism? What is the difference between confederal, federal, and unitary systems of government?

2. How did competing political interests at the Constitutional Convention lead to the adoption of a federal system that was not clearly defined?
3. How have courts interpreted national and state powers?
4. What are federal government mandates? Why are the states complaining?

Week 6, Oct. 5 – 9: Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

*****Exam #1: Friday, October 9*****

This exam will cover everything through (i.e., including) this week's readings.

- A) Wilson, Chapter 3: Civil Liberties, Chapter 4: Civil Rights
- B) *Federalist* 78 (Blackboard)
- C) Brutus, "The Problem of Judicial Review" (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. How does the structure of the federal system affect the application of the Bill of Rights?
2. How has the Supreme Court used the Fourteenth Amendment to expand coverage throughout the federal system?
3. Why does the Supreme Court protect freedom of speech?
4. What are the free exercise clause and establishment clauses?
5. What is the relationship between the Bill of Rights and the concept of majority rule? What kinds of tensions arise between majority rule and minority rights?
6. How have conceptions of the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment changed over time?
7. What is the historic importance of the *Brown* decision in 1954 and the 1964 Civil Rights Act? Contrast the arguments and policies for equality of opportunity and equality of results.
8. How do the standards of strict scrutiny and suspect classification, which are applied to race, compare with the reasonableness standard, which is applied to gender?
9. What civil-rights issues are associated with the draft, sexual harassment, and gay and lesbian rights?
10. What is the case for judicial review according to Hamilton in *Federalist* 78? What is the case against it according to Brutus?

Week 7, Oct. 12 – 16: Political Parties and Interest Groups

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 74-79
- B) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 7: Political Parties and Interest Groups
- C) Nancy Rosenblum, *On the Side of Angels: An Appreciation of Parties* (selections) (Blackboard)
- D) Matthew Yglesias, "The Case for Partisanship," *The Atlantic*, Apr. 2008 (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. What is a "political party"? How do the structures of European and American parties differ?
2. How has the United States party system developed? Why do some experts say that parties have been in decline since the New Deal?
3. How are major parties structured? How do major and minor parties differ?

4. Are there significant differences between the Democratic and Republican parties?
5. Why does the U.S. have so many interest groups?
6. What are the historical conditions under which interest groups are likely to form? What kinds of organizations are Americans most likely to join?
7. Is partisanship good or bad?

Week 8, Oct. 19 – 23: American Liberalism and Conservatism

- A) Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Commonwealth Club Address" 1932 (Blackboard)
- B) Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing" 1964 (Blackboard)
- C) George Packer, "The Fall of Conservatism: Have the Republicans Run Out of Ideas?," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2008 (Blackboard)
- D) George Packer, "The New Liberalism: How the Economic Crisis Can Help Obama Redefine the Democrats," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 17, 2008 (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. What is commonly meant today by the terms "liberalism" and "conservatism"? What elements in the speeches of Roosevelt and Reagan helped to establish the foundation for liberalism and conservatism in the last generation? How have liberalism and conservatism changed recently?
2. Consider the positions of the two major parties today. Are Republicans conservative? Democrats liberal?

Week 9, Oct. 26 – 30: Public Opinion and Political Participation

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 73, 82-4
- B) Wilson, Chapter 6: Public Opinion and the Media, pgs. 90-106
- C) Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," *The American Prospect*, Nov. 30, 2002 (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. What role does public opinion play in our democratic system?
2. What role do social class, race and ethnicity, and geographic region play in explaining political attitudes?
3. What is political ideology and what are the ideological differences between the average public and the political elites?
4. How are polls conducted and how are their results interpreted?
5. What is social capital and why is it important?

Week 10, Nov. 2 – 6: The Mass Media

- A) Tocqueville, 80-82
- B) Wilson, Chapter 6: Public Opinion and the Media, pgs. 107-122
- C) Frank Rich, "The American Press on Suicide Watch," *New York Times*, May 9, 2009 (Blackboard)
- D) "New Media": visit and peruse the following political blogs and websites:
Liberal: Daily Kos, www.dailykos.com; Huffington Post, www.huffingtonpost.com

Conservative: *National Review's* The Corner, <http://corner.nationalreview.com>
Others: Real Clear Politics, www.realclearpolitics.com; Andrew Sullivan's Daily Dish, www.andrewsullivan.com; Drudge Report, www.drudgereport.com; Politico, www.politico.com; The Onion, www.theonion.com

Reading Questions:

1. How have cable and electronic media affected public officials and candidates for national office?
2. What pressures influence the media and what regulations cover broadcast and print media?
3. Why does the president receive more coverage than Congress?
4. What is the impact of the media on public opinion?
5. How do news media professionals and public officials interact to make the news?
6. Is the rise of the "new media" beneficial for American democracy?

Week 11, Nov. 9 & 13: Campaigns and Elections

*****Exam #2: Monday, November 9*****

A) Wilson, Chapter 8: Campaigns and Elections

Reading Questions:

1. Why are elections in the United States both more and less democratic than those of European democracies?
2. Which groups tend to support which parties in America today?
3. How have campaigns changed over the course of American history?
4. What are the processes for electing presidents and for electing members of Congress? What are the major differences between the two types of contests and how do those differences shape who runs and how it affects their campaign strategy?
5. What is a realigning (or critical) election? List the realigning elections of the past. Is there a realignment presently underway?
6. What must Democrats do to put together a successful national coalition to win an election? Republicans?
7. Do elections result in major changes in U.S. public policy?

Week 12, Nov. 16 – 20: Congress and the Judiciary

A) Wilson, Chapter 9: Congress and Chapter 12: The Judiciary

Reading Questions:

1. What is the difference between a congress and a parliament? What role did the Framers expect the United States Congress to play?
2. Describe the characteristics of members of Congress.
3. What is the process for electing members of Congress?
4. What function does party affiliation plays in the organization of Congress?
5. How has committee reform influenced the organization of Congress?

6. How does a bill become a law? What differences exist between House and Senate procedures?
7. Discuss the meaning and character of judicial power. What is the significance of *Marbury v. Madison* and *McCulloch v. Maryland*?
8. Summarize the three historical eras in the evolution of the federal courts.
9. How does federalism affect the jurisdiction of federal and state courts?
10. How do cases reach the Supreme Court?
11. What obstacles (including the financial obstacles) affect policy change through litigation in federal courts?
12. What is the difference between activist and strict constructionist judges?

Week 13, Nov. 23: Paper, Catch-Up, and Thanksgiving

*****Paper due Monday, November 23 by 9:10*****

Week 14, Nov. 30 – Dec. 4: The Presidency and the Bureaucracy

- A) Wilson, Chapter 10: The Presidency and Chapter 11: The Bureaucracy
- B) Peter Baker, "Could Afghanistan Become Obama's Vietnam?" *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 2009 (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. What are the differences between the positions of president and prime minister?
2. What approach did the Founders take in regard to executive power?
3. How has the presidency developed from 1789 to the present?
4. What role does the Electoral College play in presidential elections?
5. How and why does the bureaucracy play a key role in policy making?
6. How has the executive branch bureaucracy developed over U.S. history?
7. How are the roles and missions of the agencies affected by internal and external factors? What oversight and control does Congress have over the bureaucracy?
8. What "pathologies" may affect bureaucracies and why it is so difficult to reform the executive branch bureaucracy?

Week 15, Dec. 7 – 11: Conclusions on Democracy in America

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 1-15, 304-319, 44-62, 102-113, 127-142, 178-186, 201-210, 224-226

Reading Questions:

1. What are the chief threats that Tocqueville identifies to the health of American democracy?
2. What remedies or antidotes does Tocqueville suggest to deal with these threats?
3. Given our study this semester, what, in your opinion, is the state of democracy in America?

FINAL EXAM: 8:00 – 10:00 a.m. on Monday, December 14 in McGill Hall 210.