

Fall 9-1-2008

PSC 100S.01: Introduction to American Government

Robert P. Saldin

University of Montana, robert.saldin@umontana.edu

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Saldin, Robert P., "PSC 100S.01: Introduction to American Government" (2008). *Syllabi*. 6740.
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Introduction to American Government

University of Montana
Political Science 100
MWF 9:10 – 10:00, LA 11
Fall 2008

Professor Robert Saldin
Office: Liberal Arts 354
Office Hours: MW, 12:00-1:00
robert.saldin@umontana.edu
(406) 243-4418

Teaching Assistant: Dylan Laslovich
Office: Corbin 345
Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00
dlaslovich@hotmail.com

Course Description

This course is an introduction to American government and politics and is designed to provide a foundation for studying 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.

Required Text and Other Readings

The following book is available at the University of Montana Bookstore:

- James Q. Wilson and John J. DiIulio, Jr., *American Government: The Essentials*, 11th Edition (2008).
- 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, delete, or alter course readings as needed.

Requirements and Grading

Exam 1 (Sept. 26):	25%
Exam 2 (Nov. 10):	25%
Paper:	25%
Final Exam:	25%

Exams: Exams 1 and 2 will be administered in class on Friday, September 26 and Monday, November 10. The Final Exam will be held from 8:00 – 10:00 on Wednesday, December 10. 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 on Friday, December 5 at 5:00. 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 freshmen, sophomores, and other 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. 25 – 27: Introduction

Professor Saldin will be at the Democratic National Convention mentoring college students earning credit for internships through the Washington, D.C.-based Washington Center. However, class will meet as scheduled Monday and Wednesday. The chair of the Political Science Department, Dr. Lopach, will administer an assessment questionnaire during Monday's class and our teaching assistant, Dylan Laslovich, will lead Wednesday's session. Friday's class is cancelled. Students are responsible for reading/viewing the following:

- A) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 1: The Study of American Government
- B) watch Barack Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention on Thursday night, August 28. All major networks and cable news channels will have live coverage.

Reading Questions:

1. What two basic questions should be asked about government in the United States (or any other nation) and how are they distinct questions?
2. What is meant by power, and by political power in particular? How is political power related to authority, legitimacy, and democracy?
3. What distinguishes the two concepts of democracy mentioned in the chapter? In what sense is the United States government democratic?
4. What is the difference between majoritarian politics and elitist politics and what are the four major theories of the latter?
5. How does political change tend to make political scientists cautious in stating how politics works or what values dominate it?

Week 2, Sept. 3 – 5: Regimes and Liberal Democracy in America

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 20-32
- B) selection from Plutarch's "Life of Lycurgus" (on Blackboard)
- C) Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. "Harrison Bergeron" (on Blackboard)
- D) Declaration of Independence (in appendix of Wilson and DiIulio, especially first and last paragraphs)
- D) watch John McCain's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention on Thursday night, September 4. All major networks and cable news channels will have live coverage.

Reading Questions:

1. Would you like to live in the colonial New England puritan regime described by Tocqueville? In Lycurgus's Sparta? What are the differences between these regimes and the regime of the United States?
2. 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?

3. 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? Can it afford to be?
4. Do you favor or oppose the American political system of 2081 as presented by Kurt Vonnegut in his short story "Harrison Bergeron"?

Week 3, Sept. 8 – 12: The Constitution

- A) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 2: The Constitution
- B) Brutus #1, "Essay Against Consolidation" (Blackboard)
- C) Federalist #10 (in appendix of Wilson and DiIulio)
- D) Federalist #51 (in appendix of Wilson and DiIulio)

Reading Questions:

1. What were the shortcomings of government under the Articles of Confederation?
2. Explain why separation of powers and federalism became key parts of the Constitution.
3. Why wasn't a bill of rights initially included in the Constitution and why was it added?
4. According to Brutus, what is the case for the small republic as the political arrangement most compatible with maintaining a republican form of government?
5. What is the response of The Federalist? What is the case for the large commercial Republic?

Week 4, Sept. 22 – 26: Federalism; American Political Culture

*****Exam #1: Friday, September 26*****

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

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 68-72
- B) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 3: Federalism and Chapter 4: American Political Culture
- C) Will Marshall, "Polar Opposites," *Blueprint Magazine* (Feb. 9, 2006) (Blackboard)
- D) Morris Fiorina, "What Culture Wars?" *Wall Street Journal* (July 14, 2004) (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. What is federalism? What is the difference between federal and centralized forms of government?
2. How have courts interpreted national and state powers?
3. Why is political tolerance a necessary component of a democratic system?
4. Is there a "culture war" between orthodox and progressive Americans? If so, how has it shaped the debate over controversial policy issue?

Week 5, Sept. 29 – Oct. 3: The Judiciary, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

- A) *Federalist* 78 (Blackboard)

- B) Brutus, "The Problem of Judicial Review" (Blackboard)
- C) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 16: The Judiciary, Chapter 5: Civil Liberties, and Chapter 6: Civil Rights

Reading Questions:

1. What is the case for judicial review according to Hamilton? What is the case against it according to Brutus?
2. What is judicial review and what are its origins?
3. What are the dimensions of power exercised today by the Supreme Court? What are central arguments for and against an activist Supreme Court? How do you think judges should interpret the U.S. Constitution: according to the original intent of those who wrote and ratified its provisions, or the spirit of the times?
4. 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?
5. How has the Supreme Court used the Fourteenth Amendment to expand coverage in the federal system? How have conceptions of the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment changed over time? What standards have been used by the courts in interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment and how have those standards differed depending on whether African Americans or women were involved?
6. What is meant by "affirmative action"? How do the ideals of equality of opportunity and equality of result play roles in the debate surrounding affirmative action?

Week 6, Oct. 6 – Oct. 10: Public Opinion and Political Participation

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 73, 82-4
- B) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 7: Public Opinion and Chapter 8: Political Participation

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. Explain both sides of the debate over whether voter turnout has declined over the past century, and describe those factors that tend to hold down voter turnout in the United States. Why do the authors believe that the description, the analysis, and many of the proposed remedies for low voter turnout rates in the United States are generally off base? Do you agree or disagree?

Week 7, Oct. 13 – Oct. 17: Political Parties

- A) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pgs. 74-79
- B) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 9: Political Parties
- C) 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. Is partisanship good or bad?

Week 8, Oct. 20 – Oct. 24: American Liberalism and Conservatism

- A) Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The Commonwealth Club Address" 1932 (Blackboard)
- B) Students for a Democratic Society, "Port Huron Statement" 1962 (Blackboard)
- C) Lyndon Johnson, "Great Society Speech" Univ. of Michigan, 1964 (Blackboard)
- D) Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing" 1964 (Blackboard)
- E) George W. Bush, "Second Inaugural" 2005 (Blackboard)
- F) George Packer, "The Fall of Conservatism: Have the Republicans Run Out of Ideas?," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 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 parties and candidates today. Are Republicans conservative? Democrats liberal?

Week 9, Oct. 27 – Oct. 31: Elections and Campaigns

- A) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 10: Elections and Campaigns
- B) David Brooks, "Red and Blue America," *The Atlantic*, Dec. 2001, (Blackboard)
- C) Michael Robinson and Susan Ellis, "Purple America" (Blackboard)

Reading Questions:

1. Which groups tend to support which parties in America today?
2. How have campaigns changed over the course of American history?
3. 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?
4. What must Democrats do to put together a successful national coalition to win an election? Republicans?
5. Do elections result in major changes in U.S. public policy?

Week 10, Nov. 3 – Nov. 7: The Mass Media

- A) Tocqueville, 80-82

- B) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 12: The Media
- C) “New Media”: visit several political blogs and websites; recommended sites:
Liberal: Daily Kos, www.dailykos.com; MYDD, www.mydd.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; New West, www.newwest.net; The Onion, www.theonion.com

Reading Questions:

1. How has journalism evolved in the United States? What are the differences between the party press and the mass media of today?
7. How has the electronic media affected the actions of public officials and candidates for national office?
3. What is the impact of the pattern of ownership and control of the media on the dissemination of news? How have wire services and TV networks affected national news coverage?
8. What is media bias and how might it manifest itself? What is the impact of such bias on the electorate?
5. How does the media influence public opinion and the functioning of our government institutions? Why is a free press a critical component of our democratic system of government? Is the rise of the “new media” beneficial for American democracy?

Week 11, Nov. 10 – Nov. 14: Congress

*****Exam #2: Monday, November 10*****

This midterm exam will cover everything from the last midterm through last week’s reading—Chapter 13 will not be covered on this exam.

- A) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 13: Congress

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. How has Congress developed over the course of American history?
39. What role does party affiliation play in the organization of Congress?
4. How does a bill become a law?
5. What factors help to explain why members of Congress vote the way they do?

Week 12, Nov. 17 – Nov. 21: The Presidency and the Bureaucracy

- A) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 14: The Presidency and Chapter 15: The Bureaucracy

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?

310. How has the presidency developed from 1789 to the present?
4. How does the British model of bureaucracy compare to that of the United States?
 5. How has the executive branch bureaucracy developed over U.S. history?
 6. 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?
 7. What “pathologies” may affect bureaucracies and why it is so difficult to reform the executive branch bureaucracy?

Week 13, Nov. 24: Foreign and Domestic Policy

A) Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 17: Politics and Public Policy

Reading Questions:

1. How are certain issues at certain times placed on the political agenda for action?
 2. How does the concept of legitimacy affect the scope of government activity and the extension of benefits to one or more groups of people?
311. What role do people’s perceptions, beliefs, interests, and values play in the process of public policy formation?

Week 14, Dec. 1 – Dec. 5: Conclusions on Democracy in America

*****Paper due Friday, December 5 by 5:00*****

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 on Wednesday, December 10.