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PSC 540.01: Seminar in American Politics

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PS 540
Seminar in American Politics
Fall 2006 LA 344
Tuesday 12:40-3:30

Professor Gregory Koger Office: LA 354 Hours: Mon. 2-4 p.m. & by appt
gregory.koger@umontana.edu

This course surveys political science research on American politics. It is intended to introduce students to classic texts and contemporary debates. I assume that you are familiar with the basic principles and institutions of American politics. Thus the central purpose of this class is to deepen your understanding of the mechanisms of American democracy. In particular, we will focus on the ability of American institutions to represent citizens. We will focus on federal spending as a tangible metric of government responsiveness.

One of the underlying aims of this course is to introduce students to the practice of political science—formulating questions, framing research plans, gathering data, and analyzing. As part of the class, we will analyze federal appropriations bills. These annual spending bills provide an excellent basis for understanding the relationship between public opinion, parties, and institutions. You will learn how to use Excel (hence the two homework assignments) and make a presentation to the class using Powerpoint. This effort culminates in a research paper on federal spending.

In addition, you are responsible for preparing a summary of each week's reading and e-mailing it to me by midnight before class. I will begin each class by asking randomly selected students to summarize the readings.

Grading

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Discussion: | 20% |
| Reading Summaries: | 10% |
| Homework Assignments (2): | 10% |
| Research paper: | 50% Due date: |
| Presentation: | 10% |

Also, students wishing to take the field exam will have a take-home exam at the end of the semester.

Texts:

- James Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, 2004 (at bookstore)
- David Brady and Craig Volden, *Revolving Gridlock*, 2005 (2nd ed) *buy online*
- Richard Fenno, *Congress at the Grassroots*, 2000 *buy online*
- Other articles and papers as noted.

| Week | Topics & Readings |
|---------|-------------------|
| Aug. 29 | Introduction |

| | |
|----------|--|
| Sept. 5 | Federalist Papers 2, 10, 35, 36, 39, 49, 51, 54, 57-8, 62-3, 68, 78. Available online at http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html <i>Paper assignment distributed.</i> |
| Sept. 12 | Public Opinion. Stimson, <i>Tides of Consent</i> , 1-95 |
| Sept. 19 | Public Opinion. Stimson, <i>Tides of Consent</i> , 96-171 <i>Homework 1 distributed.</i> |
| Sept 26 | Budgets and Process. Brady and Volden, <i>Revolving Gridlock</i> , 1-78 |
| Oct 3 | Budgets and Process. Brady and Volden, <i>Revolving Gridlock</i> , 79-200 <i>Homework 1 due. Homework 2 distributed.</i> |
| Oct 10 | Representation. Richard Fenno, <i>Congress at the Grassroots</i> , all. |
| Oct 17 | Money and Inequality - APSA report: "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality" - Open Secrets survey of campaign donors - Larry Bartels, "Income Inequality and Representation" |
| Oct. 24 | Interest Groups Loomis, Godwin & Seldon, Kersh from <i>Interest Group Politics</i> , 185-248 Daniel J. Tichenor and Richard A. Harris, "The Development of Interest Group Politics in America" Ann. Rev. P.S., 2005 |
| Oct. 31 | Parties and Polarization • "The Partisan Divide," <i>CQ Researcher</i> , April 2004 • Abramowitz and Saunders, "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America," <i>Forum</i> , 2005 • Gary Jacobson, "Explaining the Ideological Polarization of the Congressional Parties Since the 1970s." • Richard Skinner, "Do 527's Add Up to a Party? Thinking About • the "Shadows" of Politics" <i>Forum</i> , 2005. |
| Nov. 14 | Appropriations Process Fenno, "The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System," APSR 1962; Aldrich and Rohde, "The Republican Revolution and the HAC," JOP 2000 |
| Nov. 21 | Presidency George Edwards, "Strategic Choices and the Early Bush Legislative Agenda," <i>PS</i> , March 2002 Kernell, <i>Going Public</i> , 1-10, 104-178 Philip Cooper, George W. Bush, Edgar Allan Poe, and the Use and Abuse of Presidential Signing Statements," <i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i> , Sept. 2005 |
| Nov. 28 | Supreme Court O'Brien, <i>Storm Center</i> , selections |
| Dec. 5 | Presentations |
| Dec. 15 | Optional MA exams due by noon |