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PSC 341.01: Political Parties and Elections

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The University Of Montana

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PSC 341 - Political Parties and Elections
Fall 2002, LA 337
3:10-4:00 MWF

Instructor:	Meg Corwin	Office: LA354
Office Hours:	MW, 11:15-12:30, 4:15-5:00, or by appointment	Phone: 243-4418 Email: mcorwin@selway.umt.edu

Course Description and Objectives

Political parties provide structure and organization for the on-going discussion between citizens and their government. This conversation is conducted via elections, where citizen voters convey their policy preferences by choosing candidates to represent them in government decision-making. This is the essence of representative democracy.

In the 'ideal' representative democracy, all citizens can participate equally, have access to full information regarding their policy choices, and be able to choose between candidates who clearly articulate their differing issue positions. Once in office, these representatives will pursue government policy that reflects the citizens' preference.

Of course, in reality, no representative democracy is 'ideal', and America is no exception. Critics contend that substantive information on major public policy issues is often difficult for voters to find. Others point to the "winner-take-all" structure of the electoral process that allows simple majorities to rule. Finally, some argue that not all citizens are able to participate equally in public policy decision making due to formal and informal barriers to access.

The objectives of this course are two-fold: 1) To develop an understanding of the history, structure and organization of political parties and their role in facilitating participation and shaping policy outputs in the American system; and 2) To compare the reality of participation in America with the ideal in order to answer the question, "How democratic is participation in America today?"

Required Texts

Eldersveld, Samuel and Hanes Walton. 2000. *Political Parties in American Society*, 2nd ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's

Hollihan, Thomas. 2001. *Uncivil Wars: Political Campaigns in a Media Age*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Nelson, Michael, ed. 2001. *The Elections of 2000*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Required Readings on Reserve in Mansfield Library:

Bibby, John F. and L. Sandy Maisel. 1998. *Two Parties or More? The American Party System*. Boulder: Westview Press (Chapters 2 & 3).

Longley, Lawrence and Neal Peirce. 1999. *The Electoral College Primer 2000*. New Haven: Yale University Press (Chapters 2 & 4).

Hudson, William E. 2001. *American Democracy in Peril: Seven Challenges to America's Future*, 3rd ed. New York: Chatham House (Chapter 4).

Evaluation of Student Performance

Your grade in this class will be based on the following:

Two short (5-7 page) take-home midterm exams	20% each
12-15 page research paper	25%
Notebook of reading summaries	15%
Take-home final exam (5-7 pages)	20%

Attendance can affect your final grade. You will be allowed 3 unexcused absences. After that, each unexcused absence will result in the lowering of your final letter grade by 10 points. On the other hand, if your final grade is on the borderline between two grades, regular attendance will be weighted in your favor.

The class will be organized around lectures, discussions, and group activities. This is a participatory course. You are required to keep up with the assigned readings and attend class each day.

I will not accept late assignments. You will have ample notice of due dates. Plan ahead. If your hard drive dies at midnight the day before the assignment is due, that is no excuse. Do your assignments far enough in advance to give yourself room to maneuver.

Grades will be assigned according to the standard +/- grading system.

Important Dates to Remember:

9/18 – Paper proposals due, end of class period.

10/4 - First take home midterm distributed – due by noon, 10/9.

11/8 - Second midterm exam distributed – due by noon, 11/13.

11/11 – Veterans' Day – No Class.

11/27-29 – Thanksgiving Holiday – No Classes.

12/6 – Research papers due.

12/13 - Final exam distributed – due by noon, 12/20.

Topical Outline and Assigned Readings

I. History, Role and Organization of Parties in America (9/4-9/25)

History and Evolution of Political Parties

Assigned: E&W: 1, 3
Bibby and Maisel: 2 (on reserve)

Third Parties in American Politics

Assigned: E&W: 4
Bibby & Maisel: 3 (on reserve)

Organization of American Political Parties – National Party Dynamics

Assigned: E&W: 6

Organization of American Political Parties – State Party Functions

Assigned: E&W: 7, 8

II. Parties and the Electorate- Attitudes and Voting Behavior (9/27-10/11)

Individuals and Political Socialization

Assigned: Hollihan: 3, 4

Social Groups and Voting Patterns

Assigned: E&W: 13

Case Study: The 2000 Elections Nelson: 4 – “Voting Behavior: The Balance of Power in American Politics,” Daniel Wirls.

Partisanship and Party Loyalty among the Electorate

Assigned: E&W: 5

III. Elections: Structure and Context (10/14-11/22)

Rules of the Game: The Electoral College

Assigned: L&P: 2 & 4 (on reserve)

Tools of the Game, Part I: The Role of Money

Assigned: E&W: 12
Hollihan: 11

Tools of the Game, Part II: The Role of the Media – Theory and Practice

Assigned: Hollihan: 5

Case Study: The 2000 Elections Nelson: 5 – “The Media: Old Frames in a Time of Transition,” Matthew Kerbel.

Candidate-Centered Politics: Pollsters, Consultants, and Advertising

Assigned: Hollihan: 1-2, and 6-9

The Nomination Process

Assigned: E&W: 9, 10

Case Study: The 2000 Elections Nelson: 2 – “The Nominations: The Return of the Party Leaders,” Harold Stanley.

After the Nominations: General Election Strategies

Assigned: E&W: 11

Case Study: The 2000 Elections Nelson: 3 – “The Election: Ordinary Politics, Extraordinary Outcome,” Michael Nelson.

IV. Parties, Elections, and Participation in American Democracy: Where Do We Go From Here? (11/25-12/13)

The Changing American Party System

Assigned: E&W: 17, 14.

Participation In America – How Democratic Is It?

Assigned: Hollihan: 10

Hudson: 4 (on reserve)

Case Study: The 2000 Elections Nelson: 9 – “The Postelection Election: Politics by Other Means,” Michael Nelson.

Closing Thoughts

Assigned: Hollihan: Epilogue