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PSC 540.01: Seminar in American Politics

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SEMINAR IN AMERICAN POLITICS- PSC 540  
Spring 2009  
Tuesday 12:40 - 3:00, 334 LA

Professor Christopher Muste  
Office: 416 Liberal Arts  
Office Hours: Monday 3:30-5, Tuesday 3-4, and by appointment  
Political Science Department - 350 Liberal Arts; phone 243-5202

Course Description
This course provides a broad overview of research on American politics and government for graduate students, and serves as partial preparation for the MA field exam in American Politics. The course will use both classic and contemporary readings to explore the major topics in American politics research. These readings will explore fundamental themes such as power and representation using a variety of methodological approaches, including institutional, behavioral, and formal. At the end of the course students should be familiar with the major questions and debates in American politics, the main modes of research utilized to address those problems, and the substantive findings of the research.

Readings
The reading load for this course is somewhat heavy. Each week there will be a set of required readings that must be done prior to class, and a set of supplemental readings that are not required but are strongly recommended to broaden your understanding of American politics and to help you prepare for the American politics field exam. Most readings will be available in traditional paper course reserves and on electronic reserves (ERES) at the Mansfield Library, and are listed individually in the “Course Topics and Readings” section below. There may be required books, that will be available at the UM Bookstore prior to the weeks in which they are due. Depending on the progress of course, I may change some of the readings to reflect the interests of students and political events. The ERES password for this course is

Course Requirements and Grades
Students are expected to do all the readings and be prepared to discuss them each week. Being prepared will help you to understand the material, be successful in the course and get the most out of it. Participation in class discussions is worth 15% of the course grade.

For seven of the weeks’ readings, students must write a critical analysis of the readings. This Reading Analysis should briefly describe the main points of the readings you choose, but go beyond description to critically analyze the arguments, evidence, and/or methodologies of the readings; for example, you might analyze how a common theme or problem is addressed by each of the readings and what are the strengths and weaknesses of each reading, or do an intensive comparison of two or more of the readings. Your Reading Analysis should conclude with at least one question for class discussion, based on your analysis. The handout by Johanna Rubba provides some basic ideas for understanding social science research writings. Reading Analyses must be typed, preferably in Word, two pages single-spaced, and e-mailed by 9 a.m. the day of class, to me at christopher.muste@umontana.edu and to the rest of the class. These analyses will provide the basis for our class discussion. Each paper is worth 5% of the course grade, for a total of 35%.

All students must write on the first week’s readings, and at the second class meeting we will allocate the readings to ensure that there will be at least two Reading Analyses for each week.

The other requirement for this course is a 20-25 page research paper. The draft of the paper will be worth 10% of the course grade, and the final paper worth 40%.
GRADES: Grades will be calculated 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

Participation in discussion  15%
Reading Analyses          35%
Paper Draft               10%
Research Paper            40% of course grade

ACADEMIC HONESTY:
All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by
the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University.
All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at
http://life.umt.edu/VPSA/name/StudentConductCode .
The University of Montana Student Conduct Code prohibits plagiarism, which is “representing another
person’s words, ideas, data, or materials as one’s own.” This is a serious academic violation that can result
in penalties up to suspension or expulsion from the University. I take academic honesty very seriously, and
will do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of cheating in this course. See the UM
plagiarism warning at http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academic/policy.htm#plagiarism and the Student Conduct
Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

CLASS COURTESY:
In order to have a pleasant and effective learning environment in class, we need to observe a few basic
courtesies. This is a small campus, so it is possible to get to the classroom on time from all other campus
buildings; arriving late or leaving early disrupts the class and disturbs other students and the instructor. Please
turn off all cell phones before class begins. If you have a question or comment about the material, please raise
your hand so we can all discuss it, instead of talking to your neighbor. We’ll all benefit if we just keep in
mind the reason we’re in the room together.

DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES:
You can drop classes on Cyberbear until February 13. From February 13 until March 9 you can drop using a
drop slip signed by me. After March 9, you must go through the more formal and difficult “late drop” petition
process. I will sign late drop petitions only in exceptional circumstances after March 9.
Incompletes will only be permitted when all the conditions set forth in the official University policy are met –
the Incompletes policy is on page 23 of the University of Montana 2008-2009 Catalog and
http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academic/policy.htm#incomplete .

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. DSS is in Lommasson Center 154.

EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD
In order to access your grades and other important course information, make sure you can sign into the Blackboard website for this course, http://umonline.umt.edu/StudentInfo/welcome.htm
Also check your official UM email account frequently, or go into Cyberbear to have your official UM email forwarded to your preferred email account.
COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

January 27  First Class Meeting - Syllabus and Introduction

February 3  Theories, Designs, and Approaches
Federalist Papers #10, 23, 39, 49, 51, 54, 58, 63, 68 & 70. At: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html

Read at least one of the following:
de Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America. Volume 1, chapters 4, 9, 15, 16 (chapter 17 optional); Vol. 2, Book 2 chapters 1-4 (chapters 5-8 optional).

February 10  Political Parties

Read at least one of the following:
February 17  Congress

Supplemental Reading:

February 24  The Presidency
Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. “Leader or Clerk” and “The Power to Persuade.” Chapters 1 and 3 in Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents, pp. 3-9, 29-49.

March 3  Policy and Bureaucracy

Supplemental Readings:
March 3  Policy and Bureaucracy (continued)
Supplemental Readings:


March 10
The Judiciary
Constitution of the U.S. Article III and Amendments 1-10. At http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html


March 17
Campaigns and Elections

Polsby, Nelson W., and Aaron Wildavsky, with David A Hopkins. 2008. Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics, Chapters 3-5, pp. 51-218. (this is the classic book on elections used in grad courses, which is why I'm having you read so much of it, but it's well written and gives us a strong focus for the discussion)


March 24  Participation & Civic Engagement

MARCH 31  SPRING BREAK - ALAS, NO CLASS

April 7  Electoral Structures, Representation, and Civil Rights

April 14  Political Communication and the News Media

Supplemental Reading:

April 21
Public Opinion

April 28
Interest Groups & Political Economy
review Federalist Paper #10
Democracy. Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, ed., pp. 367-394

Supplemental Reading:

May 5 Federalism and the States