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PSC 395.01: Montana Politics - The Real Story

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Course description

The course introduces students to recent, significant changes in the foundations of Montana politics and state government, how Montana politics function from a practitioner’s standpoint and opportunities for reform.

Course objectives:

1. To acquire an understanding about how developments outside and within Montana in the early 1960’s changed the political landscape in Montana and continue to influence public policy in 2006.
2. To introduce students to a wide array of public figures, both elected and non-elected public figures who shape electoral politics and public policy in Montana and to allow for a free exchange of ideas during each class.
3. To acquire a substantive knowledge of the structure and functions of state government and how Montana’s political system functions and affects public policy.

Required reading: Electronic and hardcopy reserve. Mansfield Library.

Password: Montana politics

Course requirements:

A. Submit two plans

Each plan should be approximately 15-20 pages in length, double-spaced. Please bear in mind that these are plans, not term papers. They should be concise, tightly written and to the point.
2. Strategic plan to secure the enactment of either of two proposals: a bill establishing a four percent statewide sales tax, or a bill mandating all-day kindergarten in all public schools in Montana. Deadline April 26, 2006.

A portion of each class will be dedicated to a discussion about the components of each plan.

B. Personal journal

1. Keep a personal journal of impressions of Montana politics for the duration of the course.
2. Prior to each class, record ideas and concepts you found most interesting from the required readings. After each class record impressions about the ideas and concepts presented in class.

Grading:

1. 40 percent for each plan
2. 20 percent for the journal

Schedule:

**January 25** Review course outline and course objectives
Overview of recent Montana history

**February 1** Constitutional Reform

Readings:


Guests:

1. Jean Bowman, Member – Montana Constitutional Convention
2. State Senator Dan Harrington, Member – Montana Constitutional Convention

February 8  Party Politics: How the Montana Republican and Democratic Parties Function and Influence Montana Politics

Readings:

5. Montana Republican Party website
6. Montana Democratic Party website

Guests:

1. Carl Ohs, Chairman – Montana Republican Party;
2. Jim Farrell, Executive Director – Montana Democratic Party

February 15  Campaign Plan Development: How to Organize and Conduct a Successful Campaign for the Montana Legislature
Readings:


Guests:

February 22  Montana Legislature: Structure and Processes

Readings:


Guests:

1. David Aronofsky, Chief Legal Counsel, University of Montana
2. Greg Petesch, Chief Legal Counsel – Montana Legislature

March 1  Lobbyists: How the Montana Legislature functions from a lobbyist’s perspective

Readings:

Guests:

1. Eric Feaver, President – Montana Education Association;
2. Webb Brown, President – Montana Chamber of Commerce;
3. Mary Whittinghill, President – Montana Taxpayers Association;
4. Julia Page – formerly lobbyists for Northern Plains Resources Council

March 8  Significant Legislative enactments in recent legislative sessions:
De-Regulation of electricity (1997) and authorization to develop coal-bed methane (2001)
Readings:

2. 

Guests:

1. Fred Thomas, former state senator;
2. State Senator Keith Bales; Commissioner Tom Schneider, Member – Montana Public Service Commission

Note: First paper due: Campaign plan against incumbent

March 15  To be announced

March 22  Executive Reorganization: Structure before and after Reorganization

Readings:


Guest:

Duke Crowley, former Director – Montana Executive Reorganization Commission

March 29  Spring Break

April 5  Money: The Budget and Appropriations Processes
Readings:

Guests:

Clayton Schenck, Director, Legislative Fiscal Division; David Ewer, Director – Office of Budget and Program Planning

**April 12**

Judiciary: Structure and Operation

Readings:


**Guest:**

Chief Justice Carla Gray, Montana Supreme Court

**April 19**

The Initiative and Referenda Processes and their places in the political process

Readings:

5. Federal Court decision overturning two referenda proposing to change the signature gathering process (Constitutional Revision (C 37) and (Statutory Revision C 38) adopted by the 2001 Legislature, referred to the voter and approved by the voters in November 2002.

**Guest:**

Attorney General Mike McGrath
April 26  
Board of Public Education: Autonomy, Powers and Function

Readings:


Guest:

Eddy McClure, Legal Counsel. Montana Legislative Council

Board of Regents: Autonomy, Powers and Functions

Readings:


Guest:

John Mercer, Chairman – State Board of Regents

Note second paper due: Plan to secure enactment of a Bill by the legislature

May 3  
Reinventing the Legislature

May 10  
Final Class