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PSC 100S.50: Introduction to American Government

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PSC 100, S.50 -- AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Spring 2005

The University of Montana

Professor Christopher Muste

Office: 158 Liberal Arts

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(use as last resort; my phone and email are the best ways to reach me)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the study of government and politics in the United States, to enable you to better understand political events and processes as they occur, and to provide you with information you can use to become more involved in the political process. We will focus on several aspects of people in politics: the role of people in national political life, the values and interests of different people, and people's influence on political decisions. By examining the roles people play in politics – as we study the fundamental structure of American government, political processes, and political institutions – we can understand politics in greater depth, better evaluate how well our political system functions, and develop a critical understanding of how the system might be improved.

GENERAL EDUCATION OBJECTIVES:

This course has another purpose as well: to help you learn to think, describe, interpret, and analyze the world, as part of a broad liberal arts education. In the course of learning about American government, you should develop more generally useful skills, including:

- a familiarity with the nature and function of the social sciences
- an appreciation of the methods of critical inquiry used to understand differing subjects
- an understanding of other cultures and other times

TEXT:

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi and Margaret Weir, *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*, 5th shorter edition (in paperback). Available at the University of Montana Bookstore, the publisher at www.wwnorton.com, and online booksellers. Be sure to get the 5th shorter edition - the others are outdated or very expensive.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This is an online course, but in many ways we will have to treat it as a regular classroom course for it to work as a learning environment. Students must "attend" class promptly and regularly, which means that you should logon to the course at least three times a week during weekdays (Monday, Wednesday and Friday are the best) to see if there are any new announcements or other information. Students will have to be self-motivated and self-disciplined in order to learn and do well. I am available to help, but because of the nature of online courses you will have to be organized and focused, and ask for help when you need it.

addition, watching Sunday morning public affairs programs such as "Meet the Press" and "This Week" is a good way to observe how journalists look at politics and how political leaders try to present their views in ways that appeal to the public. If you can, you should keep up with these sources as often as possible, and focus on the national, and to a lesser extent state, news coverage. The Missoulian and other papers statewide do not have enough coverage of national political news to be very useful in this regard, although they may cover local and state news well.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES: Keeping up with the reading, checking the course website at least three times per week, and participating in discussion or asking me questions are essential. The class lecture/discussion notes will cover material not in the course readings, which will be on the exams. Grades will be based on weekly assignments, three exams (including the final exam), and a short research paper that will be due later in the semester (before finals).

Weekly Chapter Assignments: As noted above, there will be an assignment for each chapter, based on the material in the lecture/discussion notes and the chapter. The type of assignment will be different for different chapters. Each will have to be completed by the due date and time each week, or the grade for that assignment will be zero. The maximum score for a well-done Chapter Assignment is eight points, and with fifteen of them there are 120 total points possible.

Exams: There will be three exams, each worth 100 points, for a total of 300 possible points. The exams will be timed, and available only during a limited time frame, usually a single day. Exam availability will be based on the time availability students list in the information sheets. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions, defining and explaining the significance of key terms, and short essay questions.

Makeup exams will be permitted only if I have been notified prior to the missed exam and if I agree that the absence was necessitated by a serious, documented emergency.

Research Paper: There will be a short (5-6) page research paper, worth 80 points, that will require original research using materials available online through the Mansfield Library. This will be a good opportunity to explore an issue of interest to you and develop skills for doing online research.

All three exams and the research paper must be completed in order to pass this course.

GRADING: Scores on the exams, paper, and assignments will be summed, and grades assigned as follows:

	467 - 500 = A	450 - 466 = A-	
434 - 449 = B+	417 - 433 = B	400 - 416 = B-	
384 - 399 = C+	367 - 383 = C	350 - 366 = C-	
334 - 349 = D+	317 - 333 = D	300 - 316 = D-	Below 300 = F