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PSC 100S.03: Introduction to American Government

Meg Corwin

The University Of Montana, meg.corwin@umontana.edu

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Introduction to American Government

PSC 100 Section 3
Spring 2003
MWF 3:10-4:00
MCG 215

Instructor: Dr. Meg Corwin
Office: LA 354
Phone: 243-4418
E-mail: mcorwin@selway.umt.edu
Office Hours: M, W – 2:00-3:00, TR – 3:15-4:15

Assigned Texts: Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. 2002. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics, Brief Edition*.
Stinebrickner, Bruce. 2002. *Annual Editions: American Government 02/03*.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an introductory overview of American government. Criticism of government has become a ritual in America. One common complaint is that it seems to 'take forever' to get anything done. Others grumble that our elected officials often seem distant and unresponsive to the needs and wishes of average Americans. Still others claim that government is unnecessary, and the less we have of it, the better. We will examine the myth and the reality behind these attitudes and beliefs, and much more, during this semester.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are responsible for all course readings and lectures. Exam questions will be drawn from both these sources. Your grade will be based on two exams and a series of pop quizzes, class participation and attendance.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

First midterm exam -----	30%	March 14 (tentative)
Final exam -----	35%	Week of May 12 (tentative)
Pop Quizzes -----	25%	Various
Class participation/attendance -----	10%	

There will be no makeup exams without a doctor's note or other documented emergency, such as a death in the family. Any makeup exams that must be administered will be given during finals week. The makeup exam will consist of several comprehensive essay questions. The regular midterm and final will consist of a variety of short answer, fill-in-the-blank, and multiple-choice.

Pop quizzes will consist of questions that are easily answered if you have completed the day's reading assignment. They will be graded in class. Answers will be graded correct/incorrect. The quizzes are worth a cumulative total of 100 points. The quizzes will also be used to spot-check attendance. If you miss a quiz, you may not make it up. I will deduct 10 points from you final quiz point total for every missed quiz.

COURSE OUTLINE and READING ASSIGNMENTS

I. Introduction and Overview

During these first several weeks, we will examine the reasons government exists, then turn our attention to the theoretical foundations of our Constitution. Finally, we will explore the nature of federalism, to develop an understanding of its meaning in both theory and practice. Enjoy this journey back in time to visit with the people and events that shaped our government. Get to know them well if you wish to understand the logic of the world around you today!

Understanding American Government - Why Bother?

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 1

The Founding and the Constitution: Struggle and Compromise

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 2

Federalist #10 and #51, found in the Appendix of Barbour & Wright, pp. A-13-A-19

Federalism: Theory and Practice

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 3

II. Public Opinion, Political Participation, and the Role of the Media

We now turn our attention to the dynamic elements of political participation in our democracy. This realm of study has spurred much debate among political scientists. In a system of representative democracy, the elected officials are given the task of doing the "peoples' will." Yet, how do ordinary citizens form the opinions and attitudes that constitute the public will? How do they communicate these preferences to their elected officials? And finally, what are the dynamics of participation in American politics? Is it freely open to all, or only a selective few? Scholars differ in their answers to these questions. Some contend that the system of participation is working just fine, as the Founders intended. Others see great flaws in a system of participation that they claim is biased in favor of those with wealth and media access. We will discuss both schools of thought, leaving it for you to consider the evidence and decide for yourself which seems more realistic.

Public Opinion: Ignorant Voters, or Rational Decision-Makers?

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 10

Annual Editions: Article 8 & 18

Political Parties: Umbrella for Mass Participation, or Entrenched Oligarchies?

Barbour & Wright: pp. 299-321

Annual Editions: Article 7 & 38

Interest Groups: Working for Everyone, or Only a Few?

Barbour & Wright: pp. 322-340

Annual Editions: Article 43, 44

Campaigns and Elections: Meaningful Participation, or a Symbolic Exercise?

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 12

Annual Editions: Articles 6, 40, 42, and 41

The Media: Liberal Lapdog, Corporate Mouthpiece, or None of the Above?

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 13
Annual Editions: Articles 46, 47, and 48

III. Institutions in American Government

We now shift gears and turn our attention to the institutions of government. The goal is to develop an understanding of their function, processes, and policy outputs.

Congress

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 6, and Article I of the Constitution, pp. A3-A6
Annual Editions: Articles 24, 27, 28, and 29

The Presidency

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 7 and Article II of the Constitution, pp. A6-A7
Annual Editions: Articles 17, 19, 20, and 21

The Bureaucracy

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 8
Annual Editions: Articles 32, 33 and 34

The Judiciary

Barbour & Wright: Chapter 9, and Article III of the Constitution, p. A7
Annual Editions: Articles 30 and 31

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Barbour: Amendments 1-10 of the Constitution, pp. A8-A9
Annual Editions: Articles 10 and 13