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PSCI 540.01: Seminar in American Politics

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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 major topics in American politics. These readings will explore fundamental themes such as power and representation using a variety of methodological approaches, including institutional, behavioral, and formal. The course explores many of the major questions and debates in American politics, the main modes of research utilized to address those problems, and the substantive findings of research regarding political processes, institutions, and actions.

READINGS
Each week there will be a set of required readings to be completed prior to class, and supplemental readings that are not required but are strongly recommended to broaden your understanding of American politics and to help M.A. students prepare for the American Politics Field Exam. Readings will be available on electronic reserves (ERES) at the Mansfield Library, and are listed in the “Course Topics and Readings” section below. There may be one or two required books, that will be available at the UM Bookstore prior to the weeks in which we discuss them. Depending on your interests, the progress of the course, and political events, I will likely change some of the readings to cover those topics. The ERES password for this course is ________________

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES
Participation: This is a graduate seminar, so all students are expected to do all readings and be prepared to discuss them each week; careful reading is essential to understanding the material. Intelligent and insightful participation in class discussion is worth 25% of the course grade (see below).

Reading Analyses: For five of the weeks’ readings, students will write a critical analysis of the readings. This Reading Analysis should briefly describe the main points of the readings you choose, but go beyond this 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 several readings and synthesize them, or do a more focused comparison of 2-3 readings and their differences, strengths and weaknesses. Your Reading Analysis should conclude with at least one question for class discussion. Based on your analysis. The handouts by Johanna Rubba and by me provide guidelines for understanding social science research writings. Reading Analyses must be typed, 3-4 pages double-spaced, and e-mailed by 12:30 p.m. the day of class, to me at christopher.muste@umontana.edu. These analyses will help set the agenda for our class discussions. Each paper is worth 7% of the course grade, a total of 35%.

All students must write on the readings for February 5th, and at that class meeting we will allocate the remaining weeks of readings to ensure that there will be at least two Reading Analyses for each week.

Discussion Leader: As part of the participation grade, for two of the five weeks you’ve written a Reading Analysis, you will take a lead role in class discussion. I’ll meet with you on the day of class before class to go over the readings and plan the discussion - details on this next week.

Research Paper: There will be a 20-25 page research paper, focused on a topic in American politics, combining a literature review structured around a research question with original research. The draft of the paper will be due in mid-late April (date TBA). The final paper is due May 7 at 4:00 pm. and is worth 40% of the course grade.
GRADES: Grades will be calculated according to the following percentages:

- **A** = 93-100
- **A-** = 90-92.9
- **B+** = 87-89.9
- **B** = 83-86.9
- **B-** = 80-82.9
- **C+** = 77-79.9
- **C** = 73-76.9
- **C-** = 70-72.9
- **D+** = 67-69.9
- **D** = 63-66.9
- **D-** = 60-62.9
- below 60 = **F**

Participation in discussion: 25%
Reading Analyses: 35%
Research Paper: 40% of course grade

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM:
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/student_conduct.php](http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php).

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/acad/acadpolicy/default.html](http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html) and the Student Conduct Code at [http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php](http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php).

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. Please arrive on time to class; arriving late or leaving early disrupts the class and disturbs us all. Please turn off all cell phones and electronica before class begins, and don’t read a newspaper or other non-course material, use text messaging, web browsers, or similar electronic communications. If you have a question or comment about the material, please raise your hand so we can all discuss it. We’ll all benefit if we keep in mind the reason we’re in the room together.

DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES:
You can drop classes on Cyberbear until February 15 at 5 pm. From February 16 until April 8 you can drop using a drop slip signed by me and receive a “W” grade. After April 8, you must go through the more formal and difficult “late drop” petition process, requiring signatures from me, your advisor, and the Dean, and are granted only in the circumstances stated at [http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html](http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html) under “Beginning the forty-sixth...”; students will receive a “WP” or “WF” grade.

Incompletes will only be permitted when all the conditions set forth in the official University policy are met – the policy is at [http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html](http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html) under “Incomplete Grade Policy”.

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.

E-MAIL AND MOODLE:
Moodle has replaced Blackboard on the UM campus. In order to do some of the assignments for the course and to access your grades and other course information, you will need to sign into the Moodle website that has been created for this course. Information on how to access your account is at: [http://umonline.umt.edu/Moodle](http://umonline.umt.edu/Moodle). Moodle and Cyberbear both send my e-mails to your official UM e-mail account, so you should check it frequently. If you use another e-mail account, go into CyberBear to have your official UM e-mail forwarded to your preferred e-mail account, and check that account frequently.
COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

January 29  First Class Meeting - Syllabus and Introduction

February 5  Theories, Designs, and Approaches
On reading in the social sciences:
Muste, “Reading and Analyzing Social Science Research,” 1-page guide
Rubba, Joanna, “How to Read Research Articles” 3-page guide.

Substantive Readings:
Federalist Papers #10, 23, 39, 49, 51, 54, 58, 63, 68 & 70. At: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fcdpapers.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 12  Political Parties
Sundquist, James L. 1983. Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States, chapters 1-3 (chapter 18 recommended)

Read at least one of the following:
February 19  Congress

Supplemental Reading:

February 26  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 5  Policy and Bureaucracy

Supplemental Readings:
March 5

Policy and Bureaucracy (continued)

Supplemental Readings:


March 12

The Judiciary

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


March 19

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 26 Participation & Civic Engagement


“Thinking About Social Change” (Chapter 1), pp. 15-28;
“Political Participation” (chap. 2), pp. 31-47;
“What Killed Civic Engagement” (chap. 15), pp. 277-284;
“Introduction” to Section 4 (chap. 16), pp. 287-295;
“Democracy” (chap. 21), pp. 336-349; and


APRIL 2 SPRING BREAK - ALAS, NO CLASS

April 9 Electoral Structures, Representation, and Civil Rights


Review:


April 16  

Political Communication and the News Media


Supplemental Reading:

April 23  

Public Opinion


April 30 Interest Groups & Political Economy
review Federalist Paper #10

Supplemental Reading:

May 7 Federalism and the States

May 14 Final Papers Due at 5:00 pm