

**The American Political System**  
University of Montana  
Political Science 345  
Tu/Th 11:00 – 12:20; GBB L04  
Fall 2019

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Office: Liberal Arts 354  
Office Hours: Tu/Th 1:00-  
2:00, 3:30-4:00 & by  
appointment

**Course Description**

This course explores the theoretical ideas that informed the founding of the American political system, how that system developed over time, and the contemporary challenges facing American democracy and its national institutions. We will focus our attention on federalism, Congress, the Presidency, the Judiciary, and political parties.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to: 1) explain the theoretical ideas that informed the founding of the American political system; 2) explain how the American political system developed over time; 3) understand the unique features of and relationship between Congress, the Presidency, the Judiciary, and political parties; and 4) explain the contemporary challenges facing American democracy and its national institutions.

**Readings**

One book is required:

- Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson (eds.), *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Washington: CQ Press, 2016).

All other readings can be accessed on the course's Moodle website.

The instructor reserves the right to add, delete, or alter course readings.

It is assumed that students in this course have taken PSCI 210: Introduction to American Government and that they are familiar with the basic elements of U.S. government and politics. Students wishing to review this material may wish to consult an introductory textbook such as James Morone and Rogan Kersh, *By the People: Debating American Government*.

## **Requirements and Grading**

Midterm Exam 1 (Oct. 24):	25%
Paper (due Nov. 26):	30%
Final Exam (Dec. 13):	30%
Participation (including debate):	15%

*Exams:* The Midterm Exam will be administered in class on Thursday, October 24. The Final Exam will be held on Friday, December 13 from 10:10 – 12:10. Exams may include a combination of multiple choice, identification, short answer, and essay questions. Makeup exams will only be permitted if I have been notified *prior* to the missed exam and only if I agree that the absence was necessitated by a serious, documented emergency. Add these dates to your calendar now to avoid scheduling anything that conflicts with the exams.

*Paper:* Students will write a 5-7 page double-spaced paper with 1-inch margins and standard 12 point font. More information about the paper will be provided in class. Papers are due via Moodle at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, November 26. Extensions will only be granted if I have been notified *prior* to the due date and only if I agree that an extension is warranted due to a serious, documented emergency. Papers will be marked down half a letter grade for each day they are late.

*Participation:* Much of our class time will be spent discussing course material. Consequently, both quantity and quality of class participation will be very important. Students are expected to do all of the assigned readings before each class meeting and come to class prepared to discuss the material. Daily attendance will be taken and factored into participation grades. *Students missing more than 1/4 of our class meetings will not pass the course.*

- *Debate:* Each student will participate in a formal group-based, cross-examination policy debate. We will discuss the debates in more detail in class.

*Grades:* Grades will be assigned according to the following percentages:

A 93-100	B+ 87-89.9	C+ 77-79.9	D+ 67-69.9	F 0-59.9
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	

**\*\*\*Students must complete both exams and the paper to pass the course.\*\*\***

## **PSCI 400 Writing Project**

All Political Science majors are required to take PSCI 400, Advanced Writing in Political Science (1 credit) in conjunction with an upper-level PSCI course prior to graduation. Students may choose to do so as part of this course. *This opportunity is strictly optional and has absolutely no influence on your performance in, or grade for, the larger course.* Students wishing to enroll in this co-requisite option must meet with the instructor prior to starting their

project to discuss its aim, scope, sources, and style. Such a meeting should occur in the first few weeks of the semester.

### **Graduate Increment**

Graduate students will meet with the instructor early in the semester to discuss the course's graduate increment. Graduate students are required to develop and carry out an independent research project under the guidance of the instructor that yields a 10-15 page paper.

### **Academic Honesty**

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct will be subject to an academic penalty including failing the course and a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#). I take academic honesty very seriously and will do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of cheating. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

### **Accessibility**

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). The University does not permit fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications, however, if you have a disability that adversely affects your academic performance and you wish to request accommodations for this course, please register with DSS by contacting them in Lommasson Center 154 or at (406) 243-2243. Students requesting accommodations on exams, papers, or other course requirements must contact DSS in order to arrange for and provide the instructor with a letter of approval for accommodations at least one week prior to the necessary accommodation (e.g., one week prior to the Midterm Exam).

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1, Aug. 27 & 29: Introduction**

**Week 2, Sept 3 & 5: The Idea of a Political Regime**

**Week 3, Sept. 10 & 12: Democratic Regimes**

**Week 4, Sept. 17 & 19: The American Experiment**

**Week 5, Sept. 24 & 26: Federalism**

**Week 6, Oct. 1&3: Theory and Development of Congress**

**Week 7, Oct. 8 & 10: The Contemporary Congress**

**Week 8, Oct. 15 & 17: Theory and Development of the Presidency**

**Week 9, Oct. 22 & 24: The Contemporary Presidency**

**Week 10, Oct. 29 & 31: Theory and Development of the Judiciary**

**Week 11, Nov. 5 & 7: The Contemporary Judiciary**

**Week 12, Nov. 12 & 14: Theory and Development of the Political Party System**

**Week 13, Nov. 19 & 21: The Contemporary Party System**

**Week 14, Nov. 26: Paper Due and Thanksgiving**

**Week 15, Dec. 3 & 5: Conclusion**

**\*\*\*\*Final Exam: Friday, Dec. 13, 10:10 – 12:10 AM\*\*\*\***