

**AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION - PSCI 444**  
**Spring 2020**  
**Tu-Th 11:00 – 12:20, LA 337**  
**Draft Syllabus – Subject to Change**

Professor Christopher Muste

Office: LA 416 (Liberal Arts Building 416)

e-mail: [christopher.muste@umontana.edu](mailto:christopher.muste@umontana.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:00 & Thursday 12:30-1:30, and by appointment

Phone: 406-243-4829

Political Science Department: 301 Liberal Arts; phone 406-243-5202

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course examines the many ways people participate (and often don't participate) in the American political system. Political participation is crucial in any democracy, providing a key connection between the public and leaders. We will examine the individual-level factors that influence how much and what kinds of political activities people participate in, how people make decisions about political participation, and the system-level policies and institutions that inhibit, encourage, and channel individuals' participation.

In this course we first focus on voting as the primary political act in a representative democratic system, but we also examine many other forms of participation. Political participation is one of the most studied topics in political science, so we will only scratch the surface of a rich body of research. But by exploring this research we will gain a better understanding of the political system, how it operates, and how power is distributed, and also learn ways to become more politically engaged and effective ourselves.

The course is divided into three sections. In the first section we will focus on who votes, one of the most fundamental political acts a citizen can engage in, and who doesn't, and why. In the shorter second section we will explore how people decide who and what to vote for in a variety of electoral contexts, focusing on the 2016 presidential election and the 2018 congressional elections. In the third section we will examine forms of participation beyond voting, such as contacting government officials and the news media, campaigning in elections, contributing money, participating in interest groups, engaging in protest and grassroots movements, deliberating about policy, and other less visible but nonetheless important forms of political participation.

Throughout the course we will examine theories and concepts about political participation in a democratic society, as well as the empirical evidence used by social scientists to evaluate those theories and concepts. By the end of the course students should understand the theories and concepts, understand how evidence relates to those theories, and be able to apply the theories and concepts to their own political participation.

To broaden your understanding and experience of participation, there will be a research paper that will involve engaging in and/or analyzing one or more forms of participation, or observing and analyzing others' participation in political activities. Details on the paper will be provided later in the semester, but one of the main goals of the paper is to enhance awareness of our own capacity for participation, our potential impact on politics, and how the experience of participation provides insight into the American political system.

**READINGS:**

The readings for the course will be on Moodle and are listed in the "Course Topics and Readings" section below.

There may be one book for this course; I will announce this in class as soon as I know the status of the book.

## GRADES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Some of the readings about participation are complex or technical, and the reading load is generally heavy. Keeping up with the reading, daily attendance, and participation in discussion are therefore essential. The class lectures and discussions will cover material not in the course readings, and all material may be on the exams. To participate effectively in discussion and do well in the course, you will need to keep up with the assigned readings. To encourage you to do so, there will be several days during the semester when I ask you to write your reflections about and recall of the readings. These pop “reading responses” cannot be made up, so it benefits you to attend class regularly and keep up with the readings. They will be worth a total of 5% of the course grade. Participating frequently and intelligently in class discussions is an important part of learning, so discussion participation is worth an additional 5% of the course grade. One of the most important forms of class participation is asking questions, so when the readings, lectures, or discussions seem baffling, unclear, or interesting to you, ask questions about them!

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. The final will be comprehensive but weighted toward the material in the second half of the course. Both exams will have material from both the lectures and readings.

The research paper will be 6-8 pages in length. It will give you an opportunity to do an original research project focusing on one or more aspects of political participation, and will involve your own participation in political activity or observing others’ political participation, a research method known as *participant observation* and used in the social sciences. The specific paper options and requirements will be provided later in the semester.

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

A = 93-100	B+ = 87-89.9	C+ = 77-79.9	D+ = 67-69.9	below 60=F
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	

Reading Responses	5% of grade
Participation	5% of grade
Midterm exam	30% of grade
Research paper (6-8 pages)	30% of grade
Final exam	30% of grade

## PSCI 400:

Undergraduate students taking the 1-credit PSC 400 Advanced Writing course will write a two-page research proposal and complete a draft of the research paper, both of which I will provide comments on. Based on the draft comments on the paper draft, students will revise the paper into final form. The final version of the paper will be 9-10 pages instead of 6-8, and graded on writing clarity and organization, as well as content. The first draft of the PSCI 400 paper will be due one week before the final paper is due for the rest of the class. The final PSCI 400 paper will be due one week after I provide comments and suggestions on the draft.

## THE NEWS

Political participation and the laws governing participation are controversial in the U.S., so there is a lot of discussion and debate about political participation. You should be a regular and critically aware consumer of media coverage relating to participation, which means you should follow the news coverage in a major newspaper or other rich sources on a daily basis. The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are two of the best in news coverage. The *Wall Street Journal* has less political news coverage but it is also very good, but is expensive and is only available free on Factiva, through the Mansfield Library website. Other news sources can provide a useful contrast with and supplement to newspaper reading, although most television and radio sources, for example CNN and Fox News generally provide uneven and superficial coverage at best of issues related to political participation.

### **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 <https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/default.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” and other forms of academic misconduct. These are serious academic violations that can result in penalties up to suspension or expulsion from the University.

**I take academic honesty very seriously, and do my utmost to prevent, uncover, and penalize any form of dishonesty.** Read Section V, “Academic Conduct” on pp. 5-6 of the Student Conduct Code above. Please contact me with any questions or concerns about academic honesty.

### **CLASS COURTESY:**

In order to enjoy class and have a pleasant and effective learning environment, we need to observe a few basic courtesies. This is a small campus, so it is possible to get to the classroom on time from all other campus buildings; arriving late or leaving early disrupts the class and disturbs other students and the instructor. **Please turn off all cell phones and all other electronic devices before class begins.** Please do not read a newspaper or other non-course material, eat during class, or use text messaging, web browsers, or similar communications. You may take class notes using a computer but do not use it for other purposes. If you have a question or comment about the material, please raise your hand instead of discussing it with your neighbor. We’ll all benefit if we remember we’re in the room together to learn.

### **DROP POLICY AND INCOMPLETES:**

You can drop on Cyberbear through February 3<sup>rd</sup>; then from February 4<sup>th</sup> - March 24<sup>th</sup> requires a form or e-request approved by me. Starting March 25, you must go through the more formal, difficult “late drop” petition process. I will sign late drop petitions through April 26<sup>th</sup>, and after that only if necessitated by accident, illness, or family/personal emergency as is UM policy: <https://www.umt.edu/registrar/students/dropadd.php> - NOTE that the last day to drop or change the credit option is 5 pm the last day of classes, May 1st.

Incompletes will only be permitted when all the conditions set forth in the official University policy are met – this policy and other formal policies are at <http://catalog.umt.edu/academics/policies-procedures/>

### **DSS STUDENTS:**

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations on exams, papers, notes or other course requirements should contact me as soon as possible, and must contact the DSS office to arrange for, and provide me with a copy of, your DSS letter of accommodations as soon as you can. The DSS office is in Lommasson Center 154.

### **E-MAIL AND MOODLE:**

Every registered UM student has an official UM e-mail account, and students registered for this course have a Moodle course account. I may use your official UM e-mail to send you important announcements, and I will post course readings, exam and paper grades on Moodle. At <https://umt.teamdynamix.com/TDClient/Home/> there are instructions on how to access your UM e-mail and Moodle accounts.

**GRADUATE STUDENTS** - Graduate students taking this course must complete supplemental graduate-level readings for each course topic as specified by the instructor, six reading analyses, and complete a 20-25 page research paper consisting of a research design with a well-defined research question, theory, hypothesis, literature review, data collection and analysis, and an analysis that synthesizes the five components. If you are a grad student, please contact me during the first week of class so we can discuss course requirements and options.

## **COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS**

- January 14 – 21**                    **Introduction: Political Participation and Democracy**
- January 23 - 30**            **The Basics of Electoral Participation: Who Votes? Who Doesn't? What's the Problem?**
- February 4 - 6**                **Turnout Trends & Dynamics: What Decline? Who's Not Voting & Why?**
- February 11 - 13**            **Turnout Helps and Hindrances: Parties, Media, and Campaigns**
- February 18 - 20**            **Maladies and Remedies: Vote Fraud? Vote Suppression? Utopian Elections?**
- February 25 - 27**                **Mobilizing Voters: What Works?**

**March 3, TUESDAY:**            **MIDTERM EXAM (TENTATIVE DATE)**

- March 5 - 12**    **Elections 2016 & 2014: What Happened? What Influenced Voters' Decisions? What Role for the Electoral College?**
- March 16 - 20**                    **Spring Break – No Classes**
- March 24 – 26**                **Information and Choice in Voting Decisions: How Do Voters Decide?**
- March 31 - April 2**                **Beyond Voting: Other Forms of Participation**
- April 7 - 14**                    **Non-electoral Participation: Social Capital and... Bowling?**
- April 16 - 21**                    **Interest Groups and Grassroots Activism**

**RESEARCH PAPER: DUE TUESDAY, APRIL 21<sup>ST</sup> IN CLASS.**

- April 28 – 30**                **Unconventional Participation, Political Movements and Protest**
- April 30?**                    **Good News, Bad News: Final Thoughts on Participation**

**FINAL EXAM: MONDAY, MAY 4<sup>TH</sup>, 8:00 – 10:00 AM**