

PSCI 210: Introduction to American Government (Section: 800)
Spring 2019 (Online)
Department of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies
Montana State University Billings

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Office Hours: MWF 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m, TuTh 9 a.m. – 10:20 a.m., or by appointment

Course Description

Politics and government, whether at the national, state, or local level, affects each of us on a daily basis. It affects not only how government makes decisions, but also the choices we have in political candidates and what options are available to solve policy problems.

This course provides a broad introduction as to why American government is structured the way it is and how it functions in the present day. A second objective of this course is understanding how federalism, civil liberties, civil rights, and political ideology shape government and how it affects each of us. A third objective is learning how we, as individuals, can understand complex ideas and issues, and the processes in which politicians and other policymakers in government make decisions.

Course Objectives

This course satisfies three credits of the university's Social and History General Education requirement. At the conclusion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify and describe American political values, culture, institutions, and processes;
2. Analyze, compare, and critique what is distinctive and significant about the American political experience and legacy;
3. Demonstrate the ability to participate meaningfully and effectively in the American political system.

Required Text

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Andrea Campbell. 2018. *We The People*. 12th Core Edition. New York: W.W. Norton. ISBN (978-0-393-67963-2).

You can also use the 10th and 11th edition of the textbook in order to save money.

Tips for this class

Since this is an online class, you are expected to spend 9-12 hours on readings to do well. This means that starting the readings on Sunday night is not the best course of action. Start your reading as early in the week as you can and take good notes. D2L tracks how many times you log

into the course and if you access the links I posted. Students who tend to do well spend more time logging in than those who do not.

Grading

Exam: 60% (Three at 20% each)

Discussion forums: 20% (Four at 5% each)

Letters to members of state legislature **or** state capitol reaction paper: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

Final grade scale: A = 93% and above, A- = 90%-93%, B+ = 87%-89%, B = 83%-86%, B- = 80%-82%, C+ = 77%-79%, C = 73%-76%, C- = 70%-72%, D+ = 67%-69%, D = 60%-66%, F = 59% and below (Note: I do not round up final grades if you are just below the cutoff, such as having a 92.8%. I have to define the scale at some point, and some people are always going to fall on the other side of the divide. Do not beg to be bumped up. If you have any concerns about grades for individual assignments, please see me. I do have a 48-hour “cooling off” policy and you have to see me about any grade appeals within a week of me grading an assignment. If you appeal, you need to write a 2-3 paragraph summary of why you think the grade you received does not reflect your work).

Exams (Three at 20% each): Three exams will be administered during the semester. These exams will not be cumulative. The format of the exams will be multiple-choice with a time limit of 90 minutes.

Letters to members of state legislature (10%): Write a one-to-two-page letter to your state representative and state senator regarding issues of your choice. The issues must be one that the Montana State Legislature has power to address. You will need to write each legislator on separate issues. I will provide a template of how the letter should be formatted. You will need to upload a Word document with the name of which lawmaker you will send your letter to and the issue by Sunday, March 17. with this portion counting for 10 percent of the total for the letter assignment. Letters must be uploaded to D2L by Sunday, April 28. **OR**

Trip to state capitol reaction paper (10%): Students are invited to an MSUB Political Science Day at the State Capitol in Helena on Tuesday, March 12. Round-trip bus transportation and a sack lunch will be provided at no cost for that day. We are planning on spending the day meeting with state legislators, lobbyists, and other officials who work in politics, as well as attend legislative sessions and hearings. If you choose to go on this trip, you will need to write a 3-4 page reaction paper on your experience. We will be gone from approximately 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. that day. Reaction papers are due by Sunday, March 24.

Discussion forums (Four at 5% each): During this course, there will be four weeks where you will participate in discussion based on a question I will post. By the end of the day on Wednesday in discussion board weeks, you will write a response (225-250 words) where you will need to use two outside sources (not the textbook or readings on the syllabus). You will need to cite your sources using APA style (in-text citations and reference list). By the end of the day Sunday of that week, you need to respond to three discussion board posts. Responses should be 100-125 words each. Responses that mainly state “I agree” or something along those lines are not acceptable responses. You can disagree with assumptions the others in the group make, as

long as it's civil, and also add additional facts from your research. As discussion board posts are considered participation activities, no late passes may be used.

Quizzes (10%): There will be 14 multiple-choice quizzes that will cover topics from the chapter of the week. You will have 10 minutes to take each quiz. Quizzes can be taken up to three times until the deadline with the average score counting. Once you get 100 percent on a quiz, you cannot take it again. Be forewarned that you will only know what questions you have missed, but will not receive the correct answers until after the quiz deadline has passed.

Grading notes: Proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure will be assessed as part of your exam and paper grades. Developing the ability to write clearly is an important skill for your future careers. You are expected to carefully read, edit, and proofread their written work. If you would like help with your writing skills, there are on-campus resources that are there to help you. The university offers help in various subjects through the Academic Support Center. Assistance is free and is available in the Student Union Building. Drop-in writing help is available from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. Monday-Thursday.

Laptop/Cell Phone Policy

I understand many of you use your computers and tablets to take notes. If you do so, you will need to choose a seat along the walls so your screens will not be distracting to others. I do not allow cell phones in class, so if you need to text, please step out for a moment (but don't make it a habit). I will stop class and wait if I see any texting.

Email etiquette

I try to answer emails the same day they are received, but in some cases, you may have to wait 48 hours for a response. For emails, please use an appropriate subject and appropriate salutations (e.g. Dr. Adkins or Prof. Adkins). Professors do not like it when you start with "Hey!" or "Yo!" Keep emails as short as possible and please do not email about the details of an assignment on the day it is due. I hold five office hours per week and am available by appointment outside of those hours and my other classes if needed.

Assignment and late work policy

All papers should use 12-point Times New Roman font, be double-spaced, and use 1-inch margins. You may use APA or Chicago (parenthetical) Style for your citations. All assignments must be turned in on D2L unless noted. No exceptions will be made. All assignments must be in a Word file (.doc or .docx). Any other file format such as .pdf, .rtf, or Apple Pages will not be accepted and returned with a zero. Google Docs and Pages can export to a Word format. Late work will be accepted. However, life happens. I allow **one** no-questions asked late pass good for a 48-hour extension on the paper assignments. You just need to email me if you need to use one. If you run into issues in completing assignments, visit me during office hours, especially 1-2 weeks before papers are due. Be proactive instead of reactive. I cannot do much to help once due dates have come and gone.

Registration Requirement

University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Please confirm enrollment in MyInfo. Registration errors must be corrected prior to university deadlines. After the deadline for withdrawing for the class without instructor permission, I will only give permission to those who experience a documented emergency such as serious illness or death in the family that occurs after the deadline.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Use of the intellectual property of others without attributing it to them is considered a serious academic offense. I will either give a zero for an assignment or you will fail the course if I detect academic misconduct. It can also lead to a disciplinary hearing where sanctions can suspension or expulsion from the university. I report **all** instances of plagiarism to Student Affairs. The university’s policy on academic misconduct can be found in Section B of the student handbook. I will provide links to how to avoid plagiarism on D2L. I am available to help. However, you are responsible for learning how to properly cite your sources and avoid plagiarism.

Student Accessibility

MSU Billings is committed to providing equal access. If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, please meet with me so that we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. If you determine that disability-related accommodations are necessary, please contact Disability Support Services (657-2283; located in Room 135 in the College of Education). We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations.

Class Schedule

Readings will come from the *We The People* textbook, readings freely available online, and other readings I may post on D2L. Items such as the Articles of Confederation, Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Federalist Papers are in the back of the textbook. At least one question from each reading will appear on a test or exam. I may make changes to the schedule as needed.

Week	Due Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments
1	1/20	Intro/Syllabus	Syllabus Quiz Pew Political Typology Quiz (1% extra credit in course)
2	1/27	Founding	Chapter 2 “Mayflower Compact” “Declaration of Independence” “Articles of Confederation” “Constitution”
3	2/3	Federalism	Chapter 3 Federalist #10 FDR, “Four Freedoms” Jonathan H. Adler, Washington Post, “Will marijuana make federalism go up in

			<p>smoke?"</p> <p>Julia Belluz, Vox, "We visited one of America's sickest counties. We're afraid it's about to get worse."</p> <p>Discussion forum #1</p>
4	2/10	Civil Liberties	<p>Chapter 4</p> <p>Amy Howe, SCOTUS Blog, "Opinion analysis: Court rules (narrowly) for baker in same-sex-wedding-cake case [Updated]"</p> <p>Adam Liptak, NY Times, "Supreme Court Considers a Thorny Question of Free Speech and Police Power"</p> <p>Last Week Tonight video, "Civil Forfeiture"</p>
5	2/17	Civil Rights	<p>Chapter 5</p> <p>Adam Liptak, NY Times, "'Supreme Court Ruling Makes Same-Sex Marriage a Right Nationwide"</p> <p>Malcom X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"</p> <p>Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman"</p> <p>Exam #1</p>
6	2/24	Congress	<p>Chapter 12</p> <p>Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Emily Cochrane, NY Times, "Democrats Try to Box In Trump With Plan to End Government Shutdown Without Wall Funding"</p> <p>Derek Willis, NY Times, "As Pelosi Takes Over, an Attempt to Revive the 'Lost Art' of Legislating"</p> <p>Discussion forum #2</p>
7	3/3	Presidency	<p>Chapter 13</p> <p>Federalist #70</p> <p>Victor Davis Hanson, Chicago Tribune, "Commentary: Obama and the perpetual presidency"</p> <p>Peter Nicholas, Wall Street Journal, "Obama-Era War on Executive Power Foreshadowed Trump's Wall Fight"</p> <p>Politico, "Trump's Twitter Year of Outrage and Braggadocio"</p> <p>SNL YouTube video, "How a Bill Does Not Become a Law"</p>
	Spring Break	3/4 – 3/10	No assignments
8	3/17	Judiciary	<p>Chapter 15</p> <p>Robert Barnes, Washington Post, "Supreme Court denies Trump administration request to immediately enforce new asylum rules"</p>

			<p>PBS Newshour video, “Shields and Brooks on Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation in question”</p> <p>Trip to State Capitol in Helena (Tues., 3/12)</p> <p>Letter to state legislator proposal due</p>
9	3/24	Bureaucracy	<p>Chapter 14</p> <p>Laura McGinley and Joel Achenbach, Washington, Post, “Food inspections by the FDA have been sharply reduced, alarming critics; The shutdown curtails federal health and safety efforts, raising a 'risk of a failure in the system”</p> <p>Lisa Rein and Andrew Ba Tran, Washington Post, “How the Trump era is changing the federal bureaucracy”</p> <p>Exam #2</p>
10	3/31	Public Opinion	<p>Chapter 6</p> <p>Scott Shane and Alan Blinder, NY Times, “Secret Experiment in Alabama Senate Race Imitated Russian Tactics”</p> <p>Matthew Sheffield, The Hill, “Survey: A majority of Americans don't believe polls are accurate”</p> <p>Discussion forum #3</p>
11	4/7	Media	<p>Chapter 7</p> <p>Eli Saslow, Washington Post, “‘Nothing on this page is real’: How lies become truth in online America”</p> <p>Kara Swisher, NY Times, “How You Can Help Fight the Information Wars”</p>
12	4/14	Political Participation	<p>Chapter 8</p> <p>Kate Taylor, NY Times, “Maine Republican Drops Challenge to State’s New Vote System, Conceding House Race”</p> <p>The Daily Show (video), “America’s Voting Machines are F**ked”</p>
13	4/21	Parties/Interest Groups	<p>Chapter 9 & 11</p> <p>Matt Bai, NY Times, “How Much Has Citizens United Changed the Political Game?”</p> <p>CBS (video), “Billionaire Charles Koch on fighting in the political arena”</p>
14	4/28	Campaigns & Elections	<p>Chapter 10</p> <p>Bruce Henderson, Craig Jarvis, and Carli Brosseau, The News & Observer, “9th District chaos: Cooper plans interim elections board, Harris asks to be named</p>

			<p>winner” Michael Shearer, Washington Post, “Wary of repeating 2016 mistakes, Democrats prepare to shake up 2020 presidential debate plan” Discussion forum #4 Letter to state legislator due</p>
15	5/2	Final exam	Final exam due Thursday, 5/2