

PSCI 210: Introduction to American Government (Section: 800)
Spring 2020 (Online)
Department of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies
Montana State University Billings

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Office Hours: MW 9:20 a.m. – 10:20 a.m., TTh 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

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 Sciences 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.

General education statement

General education at MSU Billings is designed to initiate students as participants in the ongoing accumulation of human knowledge and understanding. General education courses promote the development of respect for diversity, along with skills in problem solving, critical thinking, and communication necessary for students to become productive and responsible members of their communities.

General education course outcomes

1. Analyze historical and cultural significance in human behavior, ideas, and institutions.

2. Synthesize multiple perspectives to understand human behavior.
3. Contextualize information from multiple points in time and place to understand society.

Required Text

Krutz, Glen, and Sylvie Waskiewicz. 2019. American Government (2nd ed.). Houston, Texas: Rice University. (OpenStax)

The textbook is available on the OpenStax website for free at <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-2e>. The PDF is free and is on the course D2L page, while a printed copy is available though Amazon for around \$40.

Online Course Requirement

It is assumed you have access to a computer with a reliable Internet connection to take this course. Please visit <https://www.msubillings.edu/elearning/students/students.htm> to guidelines for online courses and for info regarding help for technical issues. Make sure you have plans in place in case you run into computer and/or Internet issues.

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: 10%

Local government meeting reaction paper: 10%

Letters to members of state legislature: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

Final grade scale: A = 93% and above, A- = 90%-92%, B+ = 87%-89%, B = 83%-86%, B- = 80%-82%, C+ = 77%-79%, C = 73%-76%, C- = 70%-72%, D+ = 67%-69%, D = 63%-66%, D- = 60%-63%, 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 wish to appeal grades on individual assignments, please write a short summary of why you think the grade does not reflect your work based on the rubric for each assignment).

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 multiple-choice and you will have 60 minutes to complete each exam.

Local government meeting reaction paper (10%): Write a two-to-three-page reaction paper based on your experience attending a local government meeting such as a city council meeting, county commission meeting, or school board meeting. These government bodies meet regularly, and meeting times are located on their respective websites. As part of this assignment, you will need to submit the agenda for the meeting you attend. Paper will be due Sunday, April 26.

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, February 9. with this portion counting for 10 percent of the total for the letter assignment. Letters must be uploaded to D2L by Sunday, March 15.

Discussion forums (Four at 2.5% each): During this course, there will be four weeks where you will participate in discussion based on a question I will post. You will each serve a turn as a discussion board leader where you will be randomly assigned as leader to one of four groups representing the respective forums. For weeks when you serve as a discussion board leader, your post is due by 11:59 p.m. Thursday. For your post, you will need to answer the question (225-250 words) and cite two outside sources such as news sources (not the textbook, readings on the syllabus, or blogs). Cite your sources using APA style (in-text citations and reference list). If you are not discussion board leader that week, you will need to respond to three of the posts by 11:59 p.m. Sunday of that week. Responses should be 100-125 words each and contain at least one citation (not the textbook, readings on the syllabus, or blogs, and each reply must have an original citation). 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 15 minutes to take each quiz. Quizzes can be taken up to three times until the deadline with the average score counting. You will only know what questions you have missed, but will not receive the correct answers until you have taken the quiz three times. The lowest two quiz scores will be dropped.

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 and tutoring for this course is available from 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 8 a.m. – 5

p.m. Friday. Appointments are also available for writing help.

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 **not** 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. As two of the lowest quiz scores are dropped, extensions for quizzes are not available.

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

This is a simplified schedule listing quizzes, discussion board forums, exams, government meeting paper, and letter to state legislator assignment due dates by week. Detailed schedule including reading, videos, quizzes, exams and assignments is listed in D2L. Items such as the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. I may make changes to the schedule as needed.

Week	Due Date	Topic	Assignments
1	1/19	Intro/Syllabus American Democracy	Quiz #1
2	1/26	Constitution and Its Origins	Quiz #2
3	2/2	Federalism	Discussion forum #1 Quiz #3
4	2/9	Civil Liberties	Quiz #4 Letter to state legislator proposal due
5	2/16	Civil Rights	Quiz #5 Exam #1
6	2/23	Congress	Discussion forum #2 Quiz #6
7	3/1	Presidency	Quiz #7
Spring Break – No assignments from 3/2 – 3/9			
8	3/15	Judiciary	Quiz #8
9	3/23	Bureaucracy	Quiz #9 Exam #2
10	3/30	Public Opinion	Discussion forum #3 Quiz #10
11	4/6	Voting and Elections	Quiz #11
12	4/13	Media	Quiz #12
13	4/20	Political Parties	Quiz #15
14	4/26	Interest Groups	Discussion forum #4 Quiz #14 Government meeting reaction paper due
15	4/30	Final exam	Exam #3