Introduction to American Politics  
Fall 2017, Donovan  
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Political Science 250 serves as an introduction to American (national) politics, and to the study of politics more generally. The first half of the course consists of an examination of political institutions in the U.S. We begin with a critical analysis of the U.S. Constitution, then proceed to a discussion of the distribution of power among major political institutions, with a focus on who has the power to declare war. Following this, the latter portion of the class focuses more directly on issues related to the political activity of individual citizens and groups. We conclude with a discussion of civil rights and liberties. In several of our discussions sections, we will focus on key institutions to assess how (or if) various processes should be made 'more' democratic.  

This is an introductory course. We are concerned with a number of broad themes and questions. What, for example, are the consequences of having a political system built around a document that was written over 200 years ago? Can we still look to it for guidance when declaring a war? Does it serve as an adequate source of contemporary rights and liberties? Should we be concerned about the fact that nearly half of all Americans fail to vote, and that election results fail to reflect the preferences of most of those who do bother to vote? Have our elected officials been corrupted by the pursuit of campaign money? What implications do the answers to these questions have for the prospects of contemporary democratic practices in the U.S.?

COURSE TEXTS & MATERIALS:  


Additional readings on-line, and provided.

COURSE MATERIAL ONLINE:  
Look to Canvas quizzes and announcements, and for external links to exam review questions, occasional lecture notes, supplementary exercises, and other materials http://faculty.wwu.edu/~donovat
LEARNING OUTCOMES:

This course should aid students in developing substantive knowledge of American politics and developing critical, independent thinking about politics and public life. It also aims to help students recognize the rights, responsibilities and privileges of participating in, and contributing as a citizen in, a diverse society.

COURSE TASKS:

Your evaluation (grade) will be based upon your performance on two mid-term examinations, a non-comprehensive final examination, written responses to weekly discussion prompts, and participation in your discussion groups. Exams will be based on essay questions drawn from the lecture and multiple choice questions drawn from the reading material.

GRADING CRITERIA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two midterm examinations</td>
<td>20% each</td>
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<tr>
<td>One final examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nine online lecture/chapter quizzes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nine weekly responses for group discussion</td>
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CLASS SCHEDULE: Our schedule will be a mix of lecture and discussions.

Mondays and Wednesdays are mostly lecture, with some discussion (yes I will ask you questions - might even shout out questions to you from the class enrollment list).

Fridays - Everyone will be assigned to a discussion group for Friday meetings. Several Fridays will begin with lectures, after which we break into smaller groups in assigned rooms to discuss topics from the *Debating Reform* book. Alternate Fridays, as detailed below, will begin in the assigned groups rooms for discussing the *Debating Reform* topics.

Reading assignments, topics, and writing prompts for the breakout group discussions are listed below.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR FRIDAY DISCUSSIONS: Be there, read the material, and arrive with a typed, written paragraph (or 2) about what you think was interesting / important / flawed / or worth discussing about the assigned reading.
COURSE SCHEDULE (note that for online quiz for Monroe / Kersh (MK) chapters, the "post" dates are earliest possible day quiz will be posted).

Sept. 27 (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chapter 2 post no earlier than 9/27, due 10/1
Democracy
What is democracy? American democracy? America's liberal tradition
READ: (on-line & in text) US Constitution READ: (text) Morone & Kersh
Chapter 1 (Intro) & Chapter 2 (Constitution)

Sept. 29 (MH 235, then break to discussion sections)
Constitutional Foundations of U.S. Government:
Federalists, Anti-Federalists, and the new republic
READ: Antifederalist #9 and Antifederalist #84 and Articles of Confederation

Sept. 29 (Discussion 1)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 1: How is the Constitution amended? Should it be easier to amend the US Constitution?

Oct. 2 - 4 (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chapter 3 post no earlier than 10/1, due 10/4
Madisonian Democracy
READ: Federalist # 39 (scroll down, on-line), Federalist # 51 (same)
The Modern State: The Slow Rise of National Supremacy
READ: Morone & Kersh Chapter 3 (Federalism)
READ: McCulloch v. Maryland (on-line).

Oct. 6th (Discussion 2)
Ellis & Nelson, Chapter 4: Should each state set its drinking age? What level of government should set it?

Oct. 9th (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chapter 9 post no earlier than 10/4, due 10/10
Contemporary Institutions:
Political Parties; Structure and Functions
READ: Morone & Kersh Chapter 9 pt 2 (Parties, 301-323)

MIDTERM EXAM I Oct 11th (Wed.)
Oct. 13th (Discussion 3)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 10: Should parties nominate candidates for
president in a national primary? Who is 'in charge' of how parties pick their
candidates?

Oct. 16th - 18th (MH 235)
Party Systems and System Change
Why only two parties in US?

Oct. 20th (MH 235 then break to Discussion 4)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 12: Proportional representation for elections? If
the US had PR, what sort of new parties might win some seats.

Oct. 23th (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chpt 7 post no earlier than 10/22, due 10/25
The Media
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 7
VIEW: Old Jon Stewart: On Cross-fire, (YouTube); Media Research Center:
Current examples of liberal bias.
HEAR McChesney; Rich Media Poor Democracy, (YouTube).

Oct. 25th (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chpt 9 post no earlier than 10/22, due 10/27
Interest Groups and Lobbying
READ: Morone & Kersh , Chapter 9 pt 1 (Groups and Interests, 282-301)

Oct. 27th (MH 235, then break to Discussion 5)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 6 What is direct democracy? Should the US
adopt a national initiative?

Oct. 30th (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chp 6 post no earlier than 10/29, due 10/2
Public Opinion, Voter Turnout
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 6

Nov. 1st (MH 235) - Quiz MK Chpt 8 post no earlier than 10/29, due 10/5
Voter Turnout, Campaigns and Elections
Midterm Elections. Why Iowa & NH?
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 8
Nov. 3rd (Discussion 6)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 8: Should the US adopt compulsory voting?
Nov. 6th (MH 235) - TBA (exam review, etc.)

Midterm II: Nov. 8th (Wednesday)

Nov. 10th Veterans Day, no class

Nov. 13-15 (MH 235) Quiz on MK Chpt 10 no earlier than 10/10, due 10/15
The Congress:
Powers / Functions
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 10 (Congress)

Nov. 17th (Discussion 7)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 14: What is served by having representation by state, not population? Should the US Senate represent people, not states?

Nov. 20th (MH 235) - Quiz on MK Chpt 11 no earlier than 10/17, due 10/21
The Executive Branch:
Presidential Powers: Imperial or Imperiled?
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 11 (The Presidency)

Nov. 22nd & 24th Thanksgiving Break (no class)

Nov. 27th - 29th
The President and War
READ: War Powers Resolution, on line

Dec. 1st (Discussion 8)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 16: Should the Electoral College be abolished?

Dec. 4th (MH 235) Quiz on MK Chpt 13 no earlier than 12/1, due 12/5
Courts, Rights and Liberties
Right to Privacy
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 13 (The Judicial Branch)

Dec. 6th (MH 235)
Selective Incorporation/Nationalization of the Bill of Rights.
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 4 & 5 (Civil Liberties & Rights)

Dec. 8th (Lecture, the break to Discussion 9)
Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 5 Should we have a Democracy Restoration Act to restore the right to vote for people with criminal records?

Final exam Dec 12th, 10:30 am, MH 235