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:

- two midterm examinations: 20% each
- one final examination: 20%
- nine online lecture/chapter quizzes: 20%
- nine weekly responses for group discussion: 20%

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).

Most 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 due dates for online quizzes for Monroe / Kersh (MK) chapters.

**Wed. Sept 26:** Democracy: What is democracy? American democracy? America's liberal tradition  
**Read:** (on-line & in text) US Constitution  
**READ:** (text) Morone & Kersh Chapter 1 (Intro) & M&K Chapter 2 (Constitution)

**Thurs. Sept 27:** Quiz 1 on MK Chapter 2 posted.

**Fri. Sept 28:** Lecture, then break to Discussion 1  
**Read for Discussion:** Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 1: How is the Constitution amended? Should it be easier to amend the US Constitution?

**Fri. Sept 28:** Quiz 2 on MK Chapter 3 posted

**Sun. Sept 30:** Quiz 1 on MY Chapter 2 due @ 10pm

**Mon. Oct 1:** Madisonian Democracy  
**Read:** Federalist # 39 (find online), Federalist # 51 (find online)

**Wed. Oct 3:** Quiz 2 on MK Chapter 3 due @ 10pm

**Wed. Oct 3:** The Modern State: The Slow Rise of National Supremacy  
**Read:** Morone & Kersh Chapter 3 (Federalism)  
**Read:** McCulloch v. Maryland (find online).

**Thurs. Oct 4:** Quiz 3 on MK Chapter 9 (parties) posted

**Fri. Oct 5:** Discussion 2  
**Read for discussion:** Ellis & Nelson, Chapter 4: Should each state set its drinking age? What level of government should set it?

**Mon. Oct 8**  No class meeting
Wed. Oct 10: Political Parties; Structure and Functions
Read: Morone & Kersh Chapter 9 pt 2 (Parties, 301-323)

Wed. Oct 10. Quiz 3 on MK Chapter 9 (parties) due @ 10pm

Fri. Oct 12. Discussion 3
Read for discussion: 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?

Why only two parties in US?


Fri. Oct 19. Discussion 4
Read for discussion: Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 12: Proportional representation for elections? If the US had PR, what sort of new parties might win some seats.

Mon. Oct 22. The Media
Read: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 7
VIEW: Old Jon Stewart: On Cross-fire, (YouTube); Media Research Center: Current examples of liberal bias.

Mon. Oct 22, Quiz 4 on MK Chpt 7 due @ 10pm


Wed. Oct 24: Interest Groups and Lobbying
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 9 pt 1 (Groups and Interests, 282-301)


Fri. Oct. 26. Quiz 5 on MK Chpt 9 pt 1 due @ 10pm
Fri. Oct 26. Lecture, then break to Discussion 5
Read for discussion: Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 6 What is direct democracy? Should the US adopt a national initiative?
Sun. Oct. 28. Quiz 6 om MK Chpt 6 due @ 10pm

READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 6

Mon Oct 29. Quiz 7 on MK Chpt 8 posted.

Read: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 8

Thurs. Nov. 1 Quiz 7 on MK Chpt 8 due @ 10pm


Fri. Nov 2. Discussion 6
Read for discussion: Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 8: Should the US adopt compulsory voting?

Mon. Nov 5 The Congress:
Powers / Functions
Read: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 10 (Congress)

Tues. Nov 6. Quiz 8 on MK Chpt 10 due @ 10 pm

Wed. Nov 7 Midterm II

Thurs. Nov 8 Quiz 9 on MK Chpt 11 posted.

Fri. Nov. 9 Discussion 7
Read for discussion: Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 14: What is served by having representation by state, not population? Should the US Senate represent people, not states?

Mon. Nov 12. Review midterm election; The Executive Branch
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 11 (The Presidency)

Tues. Nov. 13. Quiz 9 on MK Chpt 11 due @ 10 pm.
Wed. 14  Presidential Powers; Impeachment
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 11 (The Presidency)

Fri Nov 16.  Discussion 8
Read for discussion: Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 16: Should the Electoral College be abolished?


Mon. Nov 19.  The President and War Powers
READ: War Powers Resolution, (find online)

Wed Nov. 21 & Fri. 23 Thanksgiving break

Sun. Nov. 25. Quiz 10 on MK Chpt. 12 due @ 10pm

Mon. Nov 26.  Courts; Right to Privacy
READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 13 (The Judicial Branch)

READ: Morone & Kersh, Chapter 4 & 5 (Civil Liberties & Rights)

Fri. Nov. 30 Discussion 9
Read for discussion: Ellis and Nelson, Chapter 5 Should we have a Democracy Restoration Act to restore the right to vote for people with criminal records?


Fri. Dec. 7 TBA

Tues. Dec. 11 @ 10:30am. Final exam as scheduled by WWU.