Introduction

This course is designed to acquaint you with the American political system. But you will do more than just memorize the branches of government or how a bill becomes a law; rather, my focus will be on helping you understand how citizens working through extra-governmental actors (political parties, the news media, interest groups) interact with the institutions of government (Congress, the judiciary, the president, the bureaucracy) in the pursuit of their goals. In other words, this is a course more about politics than government.

There are two books available for purchase and from which all course readings are taken:


The Janda book offers a short “just the facts, ma’am” treatment of American government and politics, while the Canon reader offers the perspectives of several different authors on important debates in American politics—both contemporary and historical.

Your final grade in this course will depend on your success on three short assignments (5 percent each), two midterm examinations (25 percent each) and a final examination (35 percent). On each exam I will ask you to answer several multiple choice questions and identify key terms discussed in class. I will describe the short assignments below.

I intend to use a standard grading scale (90 percent and above (A), 80 to 89 percent (B), 70 to 79 percent (C), and so on), though I may lower these thresholds (e.g., 87 percent (A), 77 percent (B), and so on) to achieve a better distribution of grades.

If there are ideas I talk about in lecture that you do not understand, do not hesitate to visit with the teaching assistant or me about them. We are here to help you learn the course material. And if there are other matters that you think should be brought to my attention, let me know.
Please feel free to ask questions during lecture. Although large lectures like this one are not as conducive to discussion as smaller seminars are, it is my hope that we can engage in some back and forth. I do not want to lecture for 50 minutes straight without interruption!

**Short Assignments** Please choose three of the following assignments to complete. Write up the answers to the questions in 1-2 pages.

1. Visit [www.politicalcompass.org](http://www.politicalcompass.org), where you will find a test designed to measure your political ideology. Take the test. In which category did you place (e.g., left-authoritarian, right-libertarian)? Read the descriptions of each of the categories. Are you surprised by where the quiz placed you? Do you think this quiz result correctly describes your political thinking? Why or why not? Due January 16.

2. Walk around your neighborhood (or your dorm’s parking lot) and look for bumper stickers on the parked cars. Copy down what at least 10 of them say. Are you able to find a political meaning in each message or are some completely non-political? (Think hard about how a bumper sticker saying, for instance, “Visit Glacier National Park” might be political.) What broader conclusions, if any, can you draw about the political thinking of people living in your neighborhood? Due February 23.

3. Visit the website [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), which tracks all campaign contributions to federal candidates. Spend some time familiarizing yourself with the website. Look up the U.S. House representative from your home town (or Pullman’s current representative George Nethercutt) and examine the contributions that person received in the 2002 campaign. Where does most of his or her money come from, individual contributors, political action committees (PACs), political parties or self-financing? Now click on the “Who Gives” tab and the “donor look-up” link. Type in the zip code of your home town or some other interesting place (i.e., Beverly Hills 90210). Look to see who in that zip code gave money. Which candidate, party or interest group received the most money? Do you know any of the donors? Are your findings consistent with your beliefs about the political leanings of this zip code? Why or why not? Due March 3.

4. Look up your U.S. House representative (or Pullman’s representative George Nethercutt) at Project Vote Smart ([www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)). Once your find your representative, examine how some interest groups rated your member of Congress on the issues they are concerned about. What groups, if any, agreed with your representative’s voting history 100 percent of the time? Which groups, if any, disagreed with him or her 100 percent of the time? Do these ratings surprise you? Overall, do you think these interest group ratings are helpful in evaluating the record of a member of Congress? Why? Does what you learned from this exercise make you any more or any less likely to vote for this person in the future? Why? Due March 26.

**Make-up Exams** I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. In all instances, I will ask for documentation.

**Extra-Credit** I do not give extra-credit assignments, though in rare circumstances I may
offer extra credit for participation in special events (such as taking part in an out-of-class experiment).

**Academic Etiquette** Turn off your cellular phones during class. Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I reserve the right to ask you to leave the room if you are disturbing others.

**Academic Misconduct** I do not tolerate plagiarizing or cheating of any kind. Such behavior will result in failing the course and other disciplinary action. Please see the Student Handbook at the Division of Student Affairs website at www.studentaffairs.wsu.edu for a full description of the types of academic misconduct. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, see me immediately.

**Disability Accommodation** Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the instructor during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable. All accommodations must be approved through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Administration Annex 206, 335-3417.

**Course Outline**

**Introduction (Jan 12, 14)**

- JBGH-Chapter 1

**The Constitution (Jan 16, 21, 23)**

- JBGH-Chapter 2, The U.S Constitution-CCM (pages 635-661)
- CCM-Chapter 1 (pages 3-21 only)

**Federalism (Jan 26, 28, 30)**

- JBGH-Chapter 3
- CCM-Chapter 2

**Public Opinion and the Media (Feb 2, 4, 6)**

- JBGH-Chapter 4
- CCM-Chapter 8
2/9: MAKE-UP DAY

2/11: FIRST MIDTERM EXAM!

Voting and Participation (Feb 13, 18, 20)

• JBGH-Chapter 5
• CCM-Chapter 9 (pages 318-340)

Parties, Campaigns and Elections (Feb 23, 25, 27, Mar 1)

• JBGH-Chapter 6
• CCM-Chapter 9 (294-317)
• CCM-Chapter 10

Interest Groups (Mar 3, 5, 8)

• JBGH-Chapter 7
• CCM-Chapter 11

Congress (Mar 10, 12, 22)

• JBGH-Chapter 8
• CCM-Chapter 4

The Presidency (Mar 24, 26, 29)

• JBGH-Chapter 9
• CCM-Chapter 5

3/31: MAKE-UP DAY

4/2: SECOND MIDTERM EXAM!

Bureaucracy (Apr 5, 7, 9)
• JBGH-Chapter 10
• CCM-Chapter 6

The Courts (Apr 12, 14, 16)

• JBGH-Chapter 11
• CCM-Chapter 7

Civil Liberties (Apr 19, 21, 23)

• JBGH-Chapter 12
• CCM-Chapter 3

Civil Rights (Apr 26, 28, 30)

• JBGH-Chapter 13

5/6 (7-9 p.m.): Final Examination