Course Description:

Montana Energy Policy (PSCI 491) is a 12 week, 1-credit special topics course that integrates perspectives from political science, business, economics, and environmental science to explore the forces that shape Montana’s energy policies. Students will learn about the institutions in place that govern energy policy in the state, as well as regional, national, and international factors that contribute to a shifting energy policy landscape. To evaluate the future of energy policy in the state, it is essential to understand these diverse perspectives and the foundations of policy development in Montana.

This course will begin by exploring the stakeholders and governing bodies in Montana energy policy, such as NorthWestern Energy, the Montana Public Service Commission, the Montana House Energy Committee, Montana Electric Cooperatives, tribal entities, non-profits, and individual users. We will explore the role that these stakeholders play in the decision-making process, the legal distinctions between them, and how their operations affect state-wide energy.

We will explore current Montana energy policies, their effects on the price of electricity, the job market, and renewable energy in Montana. We will discuss the relationship between energy policies and energy job markets, with a focus on coal energy and Colstrip, MT. To put state policies into perspective, we will put them into the context of regional (Northwestern), nation-wide, and international energy policies. We will explore the effects that the Paris Climate Accord and the Clean Power Plan have had on energy policy at these varying levels, and we will discuss the response that Montana has had to the plans. We will discuss how the interaction between regional, national, and international policies can influence the policies of our state.

To end the course, we will discuss how economic and social factors play an important role in determining energy policy. Topics such as energy grid infrastructure, smart grids and security, costs of renewable energy, energy independence, tribal sovereignty, and other factors will be discussed. We will talk about how these factors might shape energy policy in the future. The class will then travel to Helena to speak with legislative representatives and attend committee meetings related to energy policy to learn more about the current political climate surrounding this topic.