

Introduction to American Politics (POS 101 06)

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Fall 2007**

**Monday / Wednesday: 7:00 - 8:45 p.m. FDH 101
Office Hours: 4:00 - 5:30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday
Dr. Jeffrey Crouse**

SYLLABUS

Course Description

The aim of this course is to familiarize the student with many major parts of American-style democracy. The noble experiment in democracy ingeniously devised — and argued over — by a relatively small number of farmers, merchants, lawyers, military leaders, and writers (not to mention one very famous scientist-inventor) during the last quarter of the 1700s, designed a system of government built upon compromise and checks and balances that has been challenged by never-ending developments in society.

To understand the US political system it will be necessary, for example, to analyze how the three main branches of government work, the relationship between national, state, and local authority, the role of the media, interest groups, public opinion, and political parties, and the evolution of civil liberties. Since the framework of American government comes from The Bill of Rights and The Constitution the course will be grounded in these vital documents. But after existing for more than 200 years, it is fair to ask whether this style of democracy survives as something of an anachronism in the face of the Internet, nuclear weapons, the television sound bite, and public apathy, or, for all its messiness, if it can be said that the system remains unusually open, dynamic, and efficacious.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third US President, believed that the best defense of freedom was an educated people actively participating in government. This course will be conducted with this concept in mind so as to prepare the next generation of *citizens*.

Toward this end, material found in the Government by the People (sixth edition) book will form our lectures and discussions. Space will also be reserved for an examination of Nevada government and history. Note: your *personal involvement* in this important class can make it a life-changing experience. All of us in this room and beyond its doors must share in the ongoing *dialogue* that can, it is hoped, carry this nation into a productive and positive future.

Classroom Etiquette

Students must arrive to class prepared and on time. Cell phones must be turned off and stored out of sight. The use of laptops during class is solely limited to note taking and information the instructor may invite you to look up during a discussion; otherwise their use for music listening, game playing, web browsing, or Internet chats is prohibited. No one should talk while another person is speaking, nor should there be any remarks meant for a classmate rather than the group. Classroom behavior should be courteous, respectful of others, and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university.

Attendance Policy

Roll will be taken. However it will not be an explicit or direct factor in determination of the course grade. Instead it will be considered in cases where there is a borderline grade. Thus if students have attended class and participated constructively in discussion, being present would definitely be to one's advantage in such cases.

Reading

Two books will be used extensively in our study: Government by the People (Sixth ed., 2006) by David B. Magleby, et. al; The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics (Third ed., 2006) by Michael W. Bowers.

Course Schedule and Assignments

In order to free up the class for exciting explorations of the course material, the instructor will announce the upcoming reading material and assignments a week or more in advance rather than being tied to a locked-in outline at the start. Chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13 (Government by the People), and the entire Bowers book will be covered. There will other material used in class, involving those of the Internet and film (DVD).

Course Grading

Grades are assessed based on performance in three (3) major areas. The breakdown is as follows:

- 1 Midterm Research Paper (30%)
- 1 Final Exam Research Paper (30%)
- 4 Scantron-style in-class Quizzes (10% each)

The standard breakdown will be observed (59% or below = F; 60-69% = D; 70-79% = C; 80-89 = B; 90-100 = A). **Class participation** will **not** count as a formal grade category. However in the case of a border-line grade at the end of the semester, class participation will be weighted so as to bump you up to the higher grade. Important note: absolutely **no extra credit** will be offered in class, so please do not ask.

Midterm Research Paper: After reading The Sagebrush State, you will be asked to write a *five* (5)-page essay in which you examine both the political history of Nevada and the similarities or differences that exist between our federal Constitution and that of our state. No specific assignments will be given to you as to your reading of the text. Instead you will be responsible for reading the entire book prior to when your midterm essay is due. Your grade on this essay will be predicated upon the thoroughness of your examination of the text, and you will be expected to use quotations from both the general historical material as well as the constitutional documents included in the Bowers book, as well as the US Constitution which is in your regular textbook. Outside research should be used, and all references be footnoted appropriately. Start reading The Sagebrush State as soon as you can.

Final Exam Paper: This exam will require that you prepare a five (5)-page essay in length. In the second half of the semester you will be given a list of topics from which you will write, taking a position on the questions it raises. Quotations from either of the course textbooks need to be employed, as well as *at least three* (3) from other books or the Internet. Remember, as always, all quotations have to be annotated.

In-Class Tests: Unlike the other assignments that are writing-based, these are Scantron-style tests. *No* notes or textbooks will be allowed for use on these tests. Compromising only 40% of your cumulative grade, these are the quickest to grade and return to the student.

Late Works and Absences: Late work *will* be accepted, but with a 10% reduction *per day* (as opposed to *per class*). Cases such as hospitalization, funerals, and other *extraordinary* situations (no, cruise vacations planned six months ago do not count), as long as they can be officially validated (a parent's note is *not* an example), will be left up to the instructor to determine.

Contact Information

Besides my office hours (*see* page 1), feel free to e-mail me at: jeffrey.crouse@unlv.edu. Such correspondence should be professional, and only occur when needed. Note: **never** send me your assignments via e-mail attachments (**hard copy only**), and *no* correspondence from parents/guardians — even if they foot your education.

Academic Integrity

For this course, any attempt to cheat on an examination or to present someone else's work (including material copied from the Internet) as your own for a written assignment will be subject to the most severe penalty the University allows.

“Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged

when faced with ethical choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a way compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution.” — *Student Academic Misconduct Policy*

Religious Holidays

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with a religious holiday that you observe, the instructor must be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the examination so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Official Extracurricular Activity

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with an official extracurricular activity, the instructor must be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the examination and provide official written notification no less than one (1) week prior to the examination so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Disabilities

UNLV complies with the provisions set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, offering reasonable accommodations to qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Rm. 137, and the contact numbers are: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. For more information, visit: [http:// studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/](http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/).