

August 31, 2007
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Intro to American Politics POS 101-017 (BEH 127)
Friday: 11:30-3 p.m.
Office Hours: Friday: 9:30-11 a.m. (A-215 Wright Hall)
Instructor: Mickey Geiser

SYLLABUS

This is a class in American Politics. On Page 1 of our text, the author's state: "The Oldest Constitutional Democracy in the world, the United States of America, has survived for more than two centuries, yet it is still an experiment and a work in progress. We think of it as an enduring, strong government, but our constitutional political system is built on a fragile foundation. The U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights survive not because we still have the parchment they were written on, but because each generation of Americans has respected, renewed, and worked to understand the principles and values found in these documents." What will happen here will be our joint attempt to answer two important questions. First, where have we been, and second, where are we going both as a nation and as individual citizens in pursuit of that "experiment" which began when fifty-five human beings met in Philadelphia some 215 years ago? *Your **personal involvement** in this 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 hopefully carry this nation toward a positive and productive future.

****The assignments indicated on the syllabus are to be prepared for the following class and are noted accordingly.**

There will be two texts in this class: Government by the People, ed. David B. Magleby et al. Seventh Edition, and The Sagebrush State by Michael Bowers. These books are available in the bookstore, but it is assumed that you already have them in your possession

***Your grade for this class will be based on three two page essays (25%), response papers (15%), short tests (10%), Midterm (25%), and Final essay (25%).

GRADING SCHEDULE (100% POSSIBLE)

A	90-100%
B	89-80%
C	79-70%
D	69-60%
F	Incomprehensible – No one should fail this class!

ASSIGNMENTS

Aug. 31: Read Chapter I "Constitutional Democracy" in Magleby. **Pay special attention to our historical background and the framing of our Constitution.

****Due Sept. 7**

Sept. 7: Read Declaration of Independence A-1
Read American Constitution P. 40-47

Taking a look at today, bring in an **article that deals with the present political arena and which speaks to an issue that pertains to the Bill of Rights. Attach a **typewritten one page response indicating your name, school and class.** * **Due Sept. 14**

PAGE 2 – SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

Prepare for an **in class test on the Amendments to the Constitution that will also take place on **Sept. 14**. (Make sure that you have familiarized yourself with **all** of the amendments!) **This test will be without the aid of book or notes.**

Sept. 14

****TEST ON THE AMENDMENTS****

ASSIGNMENT #1: Consider the following list: “Challenges for Our Constitutional Democracy,” and respond to one of them:

- 1) “All men are created equal”: What kinds of equality are-and should be protected by the Constitution, and by what means?
- 2) “Government by the people” Does the evolving constitutional system, including political parties and interest groups, strengthen fair and effective representation of the people?
- 3) “Minority Rights” Does the Constitution adequately protect the rights of women, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, other ethnic groups, and recent immigrants?
- 4) “Individual Liberties” Are individual liberties adequately protected in the Constitution? Do big government and big business diminish the freedom of the individual?
- 5) “Constitutional Responsibilities” Are Americans participating adequately in our democratic system? Do citizens have the proper understanding of our governmental processes in order to be heard and to make a difference?

You are asked to speak to the issues your selection presents, and to do so in a **two page, double spaced essay. Any quotations from the text or outside resources should be appropriately **footnoted** and must be included in your essay.

****Due Sept. 21**

Sept. 21:

Read “Political Culture and Ideology”

Assignment #2: You are asked here to take a position as to where you stand Conservative or Liberal. Which of the two positions is most convincing and why? In this two page essay select only one of the two possible choices. Try to determine which view is closer to your own. The chapter speaks to this subject matter, but outside research is importantly required.

****Due Sept. 28**

I will also randomly place each of you in a group that will defend one of these political points of view. You will be asked to select a representative who will participate in a formal debate to be held at the next class.**

Sept. 28:

DEBATE BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS HELD TODAY***

Read Chapter V: “Political Parties and Interest Groups”

Read Chapter VI: Public Opinion, Voting and Elections

A look at today’s news! Bring in an article that deals with the upcoming elections in 2008, and speaks to how our two major political parties are preparing for it. Be sure to attach a **one page typewritten response** to this article. ****Due Oct. 5**

PAGE 3 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

- Oct. 5: Read Chapter XII: “First Amendment Freedoms”
Read Chapter XIII “Equal Justice Under the Law”
- **Get a hold of a copy of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream”
speech and **write a one page typewritten response** to how
much of his dream has come to pass. ****Due Oct. 12**
- Oct. 12: No assignment work on Mid Term which is due on ****Oct. 19**
- Oct. 19: **MID TERM ESSAY DUE**
Video: “Separate but Equal” A great film that graphically shows
how the Civil Rights Movement in this country worked to change
the political landscape It will also give you an inside view of the
workings of our Supreme Court.
- Oct. 26: **NO CLASS – Nevada Day**
Read Chapter VII “The Media and American Politics”
Bring in an article and a **one page response** which in your view
indicates how much power the media wields in today’s world.
****Due Nov. 2**
- Nov. 2: Read Chapter IX “The Presidency: The Leadership Branch”
ASSIGNMENT#3: After reading this chapter on the presidency,
indicate in your two page paper those qualities that define a good
president. Select one of our presidents who you believe is or was
most representative of those particular qualities, and provide a
short background of that individual’s contributions to American
politics. ****Due Nov. 9**
- Nov. 9: Read Chapter VIII “Congress the People’s Branch”
*Prepare for in class **test** the next time we meet. The test will deal
with the differences between the House of Representatives and
the Senate to be found on P. 250 of the text. ****Due Nov. 16**
- Nov. 16: ***IN CLASS TEST HELD TODAY***
- Read “The Judiciary” P. 340-368
*Spend some time on the Internet investigating cases presently
being discussed by the Supreme Court of the United States, or
look for any recent decisions of the Court. In a **one page**
typewritten response paper, indicate the issues involved and/or
the decision the Court has already rendered in that particular
case. Please attach the data you used for your response.
****Due Nov. 30 (after Thanksgiving Break)**
- Nov. 23: **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- Nov. 30: Read “Making Foreign and Defense Policy” We will hold another
debate at the next class and you will be placed in a group that
either defends or criticizes the policies of our present
administration. ****Due Dec. 7**

PAGE 4 – SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

Dec. 7: **ANOTHER CLASS DEBATE HELD TODAY!**

****This is also the day for Individual conferences regarding final papers. Prepare a short outline of how you plan to present your work and if possible bring the texts you plan to use. (This is a required meeting and must be attended by you!)**

Dec. 14 ****FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS TODAY** BRING SCANTRON AND PENCIL! REMEMBER THAT NO LATE OR E-MAILED PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED!**

CONCERNING EXAMINATIONS

Short Assignments: You will be assigned **three two page essays**. These papers will totally represent **25%** of your cumulative grade. They should be typewritten and double spaced, and must have your class and school indicated thereon. Quotations from the readings will be required, and they should be **footnoted** appropriately. Please do not submit any handwritten copy! Be prepared to share your ideas with the other members of the class in open discussion.

Response papers: You will be assigned response papers that are due as noted on the syllabus. These papers will represent **15%** of your grade and will hopefully add to the **open dialogue** I plan for this class.

In class tests: You will receive **two** class tests which will be without either notes or textbooks, and will represent **10%** of your total class grade.

Midterm Exam Essay:After reading The Sagebrush State, you will be asked to write a **five page essay** in which you examine both the political history of Nevada (one page) and after choosing a specific issue (for example the legislative process or civil rights) in the next four pages you are to discuss either the similarities or differences that exist between our Federal Constitution and our State Constitution. ****No specific assignments will be given as to your reading of the text.** You will be responsible for reading the entire book prior to when your midterm essay is due. You will be expected to use quotations from the general historical material in the Sagebrush State as well as **quotations** from the **United States** and **Nevada Constitution** to fortify your argument.

Please note: outside research should be used, and all references should be footnoted appropriately. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU START READING THE BOOK IMMEDIATELY IN ORDER THAT YOU ARE READY TO COMPLETE YOUR MIDTERM ESSAY APPROPRIATELY!** This essay will represent **25%** of your class grade.

PAGE 5 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

Final Exam Essay: This exam will require that you prepare an essay of at least **ten pages** in length. You are asked here to select one of the subjects from the list below, and that you take a position in the debate surrounding the questions it raises. This exam will represent **25%** of your class grade. As the final exam requires that you take a **position** as it relates to the subject you select, references to the views of specific political science sources should be an important part of your work. Quotations from this material and the class text (where applicable) should be incorporated in your essay as substantiation of your point of view! ****You will need to use at least three outside book sources in addition to the class text, as well as the Internet. Remember, all quotations must be properly footnoted.**

FINAL ESSAY TOPICS

1) The American Constitution: a living document yes or no? Is “original intent” a viable concept? Can we follow the words of the framers to the letter, or did they intentionally leave the Constitution an “open” document because they realized that times would change and that the laws had to grow as the nation grew?

2) In the early days of 2008 the **Primary process** can affect the outcome of the presidential election that takes place in November 2008. The selection of those individuals who will represent the two major parties and their political platforms can importantly change the course of American history. In choosing one of the potential candidates for the presidential race you are asked here to present an argument as to why that particular person is best qualified to lead this nation. **Your opinion will not be enough. You will need to supply outside data to substantiate your position.**

3) **The Supreme Court:** What do you believe is the real job of the Supreme Court of the United States? Is its only responsibility to determine the constitutionality of specific laws made by Congress, and decisions of lower courts, or is its job to make positive social change. Consider Roe v Wade and Brown v Board of Education, as well as other Supreme Court decisions that have changed the course of American social history.

4) **Do our laws really work?** **A)** Are the laws regarding drug usage, abortion, welfare or terrorism providing positive change in our society? **B)** Should the law be followed to the letter even if citizens believe that it is wrong? For example, was it the obligation of all German citizens to follow the Nazi laws? **C)** Is Civil Disobedience ever warranted? Consider the civil rights movement of the 1960’s as well as the reaction of many Americans to the Vietnam War and more recently the war in Iraq and the Patriot Act. Might there ever be an occasion for Americans to once again choose to question decisions made by their government, and what might their recourse be? **(Use one of these questions as possible approaches for responding. It is not necessary that you answer all of them.)**

Class Participation: Your participation in class discussions will reflect importantly in your class grade. No **unexcused** absences will be permitted. **Should it be necessary for you to miss a class due to illness or unforeseen problems, I will expect an e-mail from you explaining why you will not be attending. Any more**

absences can affect your grade. Roll will be called regularly.

PAGE 6 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

Late Papers: Please note! You have a one week grace period to hand in short essay and response papers. Should you find it necessary to do so it will bring your grade for the paper one letter grade down (i.e. an "A" will receive a "B", etc.) **** MIDTERM AND FINAL ESSAYS MUST BE TURNED IN ON SPECIFIED DATES IN CLASS! NO EXCEPTIONS AND NO E-MAILED PAPERS!**

**** All papers must be appropriately marked with your name, this class, section and the date, and must be fastened together by clip or staple. I won't accept assignments that are not properly attached.**

Academic Misconduct: "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 choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution." An example of Academic misconduct is plagiarism: "Using the words or ideas of another, from the internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources." See the "Student Academic Misconduct Policy"

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PAGE 7 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

RebelMail—Student's UNLV e-mail (RebelMail) is one of the primary ways students will receive official university communication; information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a RebelMail account

***THE CONTENT OF THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE IF IT SHOULD BECOME NECESSARY DURING THE SEMESTER.**

SHOULD YOU NEED TO ARRANGE AN APPOINTMENT WITH ME, OR NEED TO CONTACT ME WITH A QUESTION DURING THE SEMESTER, PLEASE EMAIL ME AT mickey.geiser@unlv.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Fridays from 9:30 to 11 a.m. IN MY OFFICE A-215 IN WRIGHT HALL. PLEASE TRY TO NOTIFY ME IN ADVANCE BY E-MAIL OR IN CLASS. If that isn't possible, come anyhow! I want you to feel free to see me with any questions or problems.

A student missing a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday shall have the opportunity to make up the missed work. Students must notify me of the anticipated absence no more than a week after class starts.

Students who represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity shall have the opportunity to make up assignments, but the student must provide official written notification to me no less than one week prior to the missed classes.

KEEP INTERRUPTIONS TO A MINIMUM. PLEASE ARRIVE ON TIME. CELL PHONES AND PAGERS SHOULD BE TURNED OFF AND NO SIDE-BAR CONVERSATIONS HELD.

*****Check the following link provided by UNLV for student support: http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm**

UNLV Writing Center: One-on-one or small group assistance with Writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person by calling 895-3908. The student's Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible) and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>