

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS
FALL 2008

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

PSC 101 Section 005 (4 credits)

Satisfies the United States and Nevada Constitutions requirement. This course is a survey of United States national, state, and local governments with attention to unique aspects of Nevada government.

Timing: Wednesdays 5:30 pm – 9:00 pm

Room Assignment: WRI C144

Instructor: Olga Kuznetsova-Elliott

Office Hours: Wednesdays - 9:00 pm - 10:30 pm, and/or by appointment

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COURSE OBJECTIVES, CONTENT, PURPOSE AND SCOPE:

This is an introductory course in American Politics. As such, it is designed to explore the origins, the underlying principles, the reasoning behind, and the important elements of the *American Political System & American Federalism*. We will examine and analyze the basic documents themselves - the US Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, and other significant writings on the fundamental structural rules that define the American political system. We will engage in in-depth discussion of the topics and issues at hand. We will examine contemporary issues and their implications for the present and for the future. *The course is designed to achieve the following:*

1. Introduce students to American Politics as a dynamic and evolving field, undergoing constant change and development. We will look at various US political institutions and their continuity and change.
2. Examine the institutional framework and the inner workings of the US political system at the federal and state levels.
3. Introduce students to the basic methodological, theoretical, and conceptual tools for the analysis and study of American Politics.
4. Familiarize students with the historical and philosophical basis for US polity as envisioned by the Founding Fathers. Based on the historical perspective, we will navigate through the institutional framework of the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary branches at the national, state, and local levels.
5. Analyze contemporary political issues and policy implications for the present and for the future. We will gain insight into the workings and the dynamics of various branches of US government, as they strive to influence policy-making and policy agenda.
6. Analyze *Nevada Government, Nevada Politics and the Nevada State Constitution*. We will take a closer look at the mechanics of *American Federalism* "in action" as it relates to the state of Nevada and local issues. We will analyze state and local policy issues.
7. Gain insight into US politics and review such important **topics** as Federalism, Public Opinion and the Media, Political Parties, Congress, the Presidency, the Judiciary, Electoral process, Voting and Elections, Interest Groups, Political Culture, Foreign Policy Formulation, States' Rights, Social Policy, Public Policy, etc.
8. Seek understanding into such fundamental **concepts** as Liberty, Order, Equality, Democracy, Ideology, Legitimacy, Sovereignty, Majority Rule, Pluralism, Plurality Rule, Constitutionalism, Limited Government, Constitutional Restraints, Pragmatism, Liberalism, Conservatism, Judicial Review, Judicial Activism, Judicial Restraint, Interest Articulation, Interest Aggregation, Two-Party System, etc.

Course Structure and Expectations:

Each session will consist of **three parts**. The *first* ‘warm-up’, *introductory part* will help us “activate” our political vocabulary. During this part, we will tackle various concepts to enlarge our political vernacular and enhance our knowledge of American politics. During this time, the instructor will conduct **chapter quizzes and review sessions** (could be found at the end of each chapter of the textbook/required reading). This part, as well as all other parts of the class, will be based on the *required* reading, which will be assigned *prior* to that week. The *second part* will consist of a lecture, where the topic at hand will be discussed at length. The *third part* will be based both on **theory and practice**. Students will participate and engage in **interactive activities, games, debates, case studies, discussion groups and policy formulation assignments**.

We will be actively engaged in discussions and presentations, as well as “question-answer” time. This will be a chance for students to shine and show active participation. We will **conclude each class** with a brief summary of the subject matter. Homework and assignments for the next class will be discussed. Students will leave the classroom with a list of discussion topics for the next class and will be asked to ponder over some probing issues, as they relate to American politics and their own experiences.

I will expect everybody **to read the required materials prior** to each class to allow you to participate in each session to your full potential. Students will be **required and expected** to follow **current events** by watching the news, reading newspapers and magazines, listening to the radio, researching political issues on the Internet, etc.

Evaluation:

Grades will be determined based on the following and the overall score of 100% will be distributed as follows:

1. Attendance and participation can greatly affect your grade! **(10%) I will subtract points for each missed class. Each class is worth 10 points! (If you miss 4 classes without an excuse and without proper documentation, you may be dropped from the class.)**
2. **A written mid-term examination, consisting of 3 PARTS (35%):** 1. multiple choices, true/false statements, 2. a short quiz based on concepts and terms, and 3. a short 2-page essay (in-class). With regards to essays, students will be free to select their favorite topic from an extensive list, provided by the instructor. Most essay topics will be phrased in the form of a question or a probing issue to allow students to expand on an idea or a theory.
3. **A written final examination, consisting of 3 PARTS (35%):** 1. multiple choices, true/false statements; 2. a quiz based on concepts, terms, and 3. a short 2-page essay (in-class). Students will be free to select their favorite topic from an extensive list, provided by the instructor. Again, most essay topics will be phrased in the form of a question to allow students to expand on an idea or a policy issue.
4. Each student will be assigned **1 (one) oral group presentation (20%)**. You will have ample time to research a topic for it. **Presentation assignments** will encompass a vast array of topics. As a group, try to polish the presentation *before* you have to present it to the rest of the class. The quality of your oral presentation can greatly improve your overall grade evaluation. Be ready for the “question-answer” time. After you select a topic for your oral presentation, you will have the whole month to research it and to prepare the presentation itself. The presentation is graded based on the substance, content, depth, originality and the overall delivery. You will be required to distribute a **short 1-page outline** to the class with the most important highlights of your presentation (dates, facts, statistics, etc). I will be happy to make copies of the outlines for you, provided you give it to me ahead of time. **You will be required to make a copy of your entire oral presentation for the instructor prior to the class. You are welcome to e-mail it to me ahead of time.** The size of the group for your presentation should be 3-4 students. Due to the time constraints, individual presentations are not allowed.

Attendance policy:

Throughout the entire semester I will be tracking down and taking everyone's attendance. Students who arrive late or leave early will be marked absent. Since this is such a significant part of your grade, you must have a legitimate and compelling excuse to miss a class (with proper documentation). Failure to take your mid-term or final exam on a scheduled date may result in an inferior grade. **Mid-term make-up exams may be arranged for those students with legitimate and compelling excuses (with proper documentation).**

As a general rule, a student missing a class because of observance of a *religious holiday* shall have the opportunity to make up missed work within a week. Students must notify you of anticipated absences by the *last day of late registration, August 29, 2008*, to be assured of this opportunity.

NOTE: Students who *represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity* shall also have the opportunity to make up assignments, but the student must provide official written notification to the instructor no less than one week prior to the missed class(es).

NOTE: Make-up exams are NOT offered for the final exam.

Other Important Announcements:

Children are not permitted in class.

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" (Revised May 9, 2007, in the approval process).*

Disruptive Behavior: Any type of disruptive behavior (vulgar and/or foul language, rude remarks, sidebar conversation, any other kind of offensive language, fighting words, cheating, etc.) shall not be tolerated. **Disruptive usage of electronic devices (computers, cellular phones, text-messaging devices, etc.) will not be permitted. The use of computers and/or other electronic devices for accessing the Web and the Internet during classes is not permitted.** Please, keep in mind that one of my prerogatives is to ensure the utmost nourishing and enjoyable learning environment. **We will respect everyone's right to learn.**

NOTE: Non-compliant disruptive students may be dropped from the class.

Copyright: The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. **YOU ARE INDIVIDUALLY AND SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLATIONS OF COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE LAWS. THE UNIVERSITY WILL NEITHER PROTECT NOR DEFEND YOU NOR ASSUME ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEE OR STUDENT VIOLATIONS OF FAIR USE LAWS.** Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. To familiarize yourself with copyright and fair use policies, the University encourages you to visit its copyright website at: www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/.

Disability Resource Center: the UNLV **Disability Resource Center (DRC)** houses the resources for students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. 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. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137, and the contact numbers are: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. For additional information, please visit: <<http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>>.

Course Outline:

Note: The following topics and dates are subject to minor changes to accommodate your interests, requests and needs. Your suggestions and ideas are very welcome.

Week #1 (8/27/08) – Introductions. Overview of the syllabus: policies, procedures, and expectations. *Should We Care About Politics? What IS Politics? Why do People Form Governments? What IS Government?* John Locke & Second Treatise of Civil Government (the Concept of Social Contract). The Declaration of Independence. Three Perspectives on Power. The Dichotomy between *what is vs. what should be*.

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapter 1, and Appendix A, B, C, and D:*

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union (see the hand-out), The Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, The Federalist Papers #10 and #51 (Found in the Appendix Section).

Week #2 (9/3/08) – Politics and the Roots of Conflict. The Role of Government in Human Affairs – Conflict Management & Rule Making. The Constitution & Federalism (the Vertical Dimension): Setting the Ground Rules for Politics. Federalists vs. Anti-federalists. The Colonial Experience. The Constitutional Convention: *The Virginia Plan, the New Jersey Plan, and the Connecticut Compromise.*

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapter 2,*

Appendix E: Anti-Federalists and the Constitution, and Federalist #63.

Week #3 (9/10/08) – Public Opinion. Political Beliefs. Political Ideologies. The Nature and Acquisition of Opinions and Values. Media and Public Opinion. The Social Context of American Politics. Diversity and Pluralism.

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapter 3.*

Week #4 (9/17/08) – Political Culture. Political Socialization. Voting and Political Participation.

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapter 4.*

Week #5 (9/24/08) – The Mass Media and Political Parties. What is a Political Party? Characteristics and the History of U.S. Parties. The Two-Party System. The Role of the Third Parties in U.S. Politics.

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapters 5 & 6.*

Week #6 (10/1/08) – Campaigns and Elections. The Electoral College. Defining Interest Groups. Interest Group Formation, Maintenance, Influence, and Strategies. Types of Interest Groups. Lobbyists and Lobbying.

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapters 7 & 8.*

Week #7 (10/8/08) – CONGRESS – the Legislative Branch – The People's Branch? Law making – Delegate vs. Trustee. Party Structure & Committee Structure. How does a bill become law? Presidency in American Politics. The Presidency as an Institution. The Many Roles of the President. Growth of the Presidency.

Reading: *Matthew Kerbel, Chapters 9 & 10.*

GET READY FOR THE MID-TERM EXAM!

Reading: *Review American Government Chapters 1-10, Federalist Papers #10, #51, #35, #63; Appendix Sections A-E, The Bill of Rights, the U.S. Constitution, and ALL THE LECTURE NOTES!*

Week #8 (10/15/08) – MID-TERM EXAMINATION- MARK YOUR CALENDARS! (Good Luck!) BRING 2 (two) SCANTRONS TO THE EXAM.

Week #9 (10/22/08) – The Federal Bureaucracy – the Real Power? The Politics of the Federal Bureaucracy; the Pursuit of Competing Values. The U.S. Judicial System – the Federal Courts and State Courts. The Federal Courts as Policy Makers. Judicial Review. The Supreme Court as a Political Institution.

Reading: Matthew Kerbel, Chapters 11 & 12, The Federalist # 68.

Week #10 (10/29/08) – IMPORTANT: ORAL PRESENTATIONS ARE DUE TODAY!

Make sure to e-mail your complete presentation to the instructor ahead of time (at least 1 day prior). Thank you in advance and good luck! **IMPORTANT:** You have to prepare 1 page outline highlighting the main concepts, dates, statistics, etc. - be sure to make copies for distribution in class.

Reading: Matthew Kerbel, Chapters 13 & 14, The Federalist # 78.

Week #11 (11/5/08) – Civil Liberties and Civil Rights: Interpreting the Constitution. Establishing Civil Rights. Protecting Civil Liberties. The Bill of Rights and State Government. Conflicting Theories of Equality: Equal Opportunity or Equal Outcomes?

Reading: Matthew Kerbel, Chapters 15 & 16, Appendix F – Race and the U.S. Constitution.

Week #12 (11/12/08) – The Federal Budget: Budgets, Deficit Spending, and National Debt. The Budgetary Process and Tax Policy - Revenue & Spending. **Domestic Policy:** Managing the Economy - Fiscal and Monetary Policies. **Foreign Policy** Formation and Execution. Models of Foreign Policy Decision Making. Short Overview of US Foreign Policy. Defense Policies. The Bush Doctrine. The Theory of Just War.

Reading: Michael W. Bowers, The Sagebrush State, Chapters 1- 7, and the Nevada State Constitution.

Week #13 (11/19/08) – **Politics in Nevada.** Nevada's ORIGINS and Early History. Nevada Territory and Statehood.

Reading: Michael W. Bowers, The Sagebrush State, Chapters 1- 7, and the Nevada State Constitution.

Week #14 (11/26/08) – Civil Rights and Liberties in Nevada. Forming the Constitution. Political Parties & Elections in Nevada. Interest Groups & Lobbying in Nevada. The Legislative, the Executive, and the Judicial Branches in Nevada.

Reading: Michael W. Bowers, The Sagebrush State, Chapters 8-11, and the Nevada State Constitution.

Week #15 (12/3/08) – The Past, The Present, and the Future of Nevada. Revisiting Federal and State Politics - Brief Overview in Preparation for the Final Exam.

REVIEW: Matthew R. Kerbel, AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, Chapters 1 - 16.
Michael W. Bowers, The Sagebrush State.

Review ALL the materials and lecture notes in preparation for the final exam.

Week #16 – 12/10/08 – FINAL EXAMINATION – Good Luck!

THE TIME and LOCATION OF THE FINALS TBA (awaiting final determination from the Registrar’s Office) BRING 2 SCANTRONS, PENCILS & ERASERS.

REQUIRED READING:

- **Matthew R. Kerbel, *AMERICAN GOVERNMENT. Your Voice, Your Future*, 2nd Edition, 2008, Atomic Dog/THOMSON Publishing. (Note: All Appendix Sections in this textbook are required reading).**
- **Michael W. Bowers, *The Sagebrush State, Nevada’s History, Government & Politics*, 3rd Edition.**
- **The Declaration of Independence.**
- **Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (See the Syllabus for Details).**
- **The Articles of Confederation.**
- **The Constitution of the United States of America, including the Bill of Rights and the Constitutional Amendments.**
- **The Constitution of the State of Nevada.**

NOTES/QUESTIONS/COMMENTS: _____

