

August 26, 2008
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Intro to American Politics POS 101-008 (Wright Hall C239)
Tuesday and Thursday. 5:00 p.m.-06:45 p.m.
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 3:30-4:30 Wright Hall
Instructor: Mickey Geiser

SYLLABUS

This is a class in American Politics. It has been written that 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: America at Odds 6th 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 four two page essays (25%), response papers (15%), short test (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

August 26: Read Chapter I “The Contours of American Democracy”, and consider the following question: Why study politics and government? Is there such a thing as human nature, and if so does it directly affect the kind of government that is best for human beings to create? **PLEASE COME TO CLASS WITH A ONE PAGE PAPER IN WHICH YOU PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION OF THIS CHAPTER.. Due Aug. 28**

PAGE 2 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

- Aug.28: Assignment #1: Something to think about! In a **two page, double spaced essay** please answer the following: Have Americans chosen to ignore what is happening in Washington when in past elections only 50% voted? Clearly the mid term elections “brought out the vote”, but Americans have historically disengaged from the political arena. Do our citizens feel helpless to affect what their government does? Is it vital that Americans go to the polls and cast a vote? This is the year when those individuals who plan to run for the Presidential election in 2008 will be determined. What do you think will affect how Americans will respond to the present political climate and the positions taken by these particular individuals? **Due Sept.2**
- Sept. 2: Read: Chapter II “The Constitution”
PLEASE COME TO CLASS WITH A ONE PAGE PAPER IN WHICH YOU PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION OF THIS CHAPTER.
Due Sept. 4
- Sept. 4: Read Declaration of Independence in Appendix A
Read American Constitution at Appendix B
Due Sept. 9
- Sept. 9: Read “Civil Rights”
*****Also find a copy of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream Speech” which we will also discuss in class. Due Sept. 11**
- Sept. 11: Read Civil Liberties **Due Sept. 16**
- Sept. 16: For this assignment take a look at the local newspaper and find an **article** that deals with what is going on in government, and which relates to our civil liberties, and the Bill of Rights. Please **attach a one page response** to the issues covered in the article.
Due Sept. 18
- Sept. 18: Read Chapter Chapter VII: Political Parties **Due Sept. 23**
****ONCE AGAIN PLEASE COME TO CLASS WITH A ONE PAGE PAPER DESCRIBING THESE CHAPTERS.**
- Sept. 23: A look at today’s news! For the next class bring in an **article** that deals with the present political landscape and speaks to an issue that is characteristic of the political ideology and/or the agenda of one of our two major parties. Be sure to **attach a one page response** to the article, and make sure you have indicated your school and class on your work. **Due Sept. 30**
- Sept. 30: Assignment #2: What do you think? The question of what particular philosophy of government is best, i.e. liberal or conservative has been an on-going debate in this country. In determining your personal point of view, check back in the text at Page 15 and re-read their definition of what constitutes both the liberal and conservative viewpoints. More importantly, please

PAGE 3 – SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

Use the definitions of what constitutes these two positions by today's standards. Remember to incorporate this outside information in your **two page** paper using footnotes. **Due Oct. 2**

Oct. 2: **WE WILL HAVE A DEBATE WHEN THE CLASS MEETS NEXT TIME AS TO WHAT POINTS OF VIEW ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF BOTH THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PHILOSOPHIES. I WILL RANDOMLY PLACE YOU IN A GROUP AND YOU WILL BE ASKED TO SELECT SOMEONE TO REPRESENT EACH PHILOSOPHY IN THE DEBATE.**
*****OUTSIDE RESEARCH IS VERY IMPORTANT HERE!** **Due Oct. 7**

Oct. 7: ****DEBATE BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS**

Oct. 9: For next time find an article that deals with Nevada Government on line or in our local newspaper and bring it to class with a **response paper** . **Due Oct. 14**

Oct. 14: **Read "Congress"** **TEST ON CONGRESS** Due Oct. 16

Oct. 16: **Assignment #3:** For this **two page** assignment you will need to do some surfing on the Internet. You are asked here to find out who are our Nevada Senators in the U.S. Senate. You are also asked to find out who are our Representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives. After locating this information, you are asked here to devote most of your paper to indicating which of these individuals best represents your political viewpoint and tell me why this is so. **Due Oct. 21**

Oct. 21: **No Assignment – Prepare for midterm due Oct. 23**

Oct. 23: *****MIDTERM ESSAY DUE*** (PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE PAPER MUST BE HANDED IN IN CLASS. NO E-MAILED PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.)**
****Read Public Opinion and Voting Due Oct. 28**

Oct. 28: For the next class find an **article** on line or in our local newspaper that deals with the elections in 2008 and write a one page response paper that deals with it. **Due Nov4**

Nov. 4: Read Politics and the Media **Due Nov. 6**

NO CLASS ON NOVEMBER 11 – PRESIDENTS DAY

Read Chapter IX "The Presidency Due Nov. 13

PAGE 4 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

- Nov. 13: **ASSIGNMENT #4:** After having read the 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. 18**
- Nov. 18: Read "The Judiciary" **Due Nov. 20**
- Nov. 20:: *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.
Due Nov. 25
- Nov. 25 Read "Foreign Policy"
For next time find an **article** on the Internet or in your local newspaper that deals with current American foreign policy and attach a one page **response paper**. **Due Dec. 2**

****NO CLASS NOVEMBER 27 – THANKSGIVING BREAK****

- Dec.2.: ****Meetings with each of you to discuss what you plan to cover in your final paper. (It is mandatory that you are in class this day, as what you plan for your final paper is vital to your class grade.)**
- December 4: Let's spend this class discussing where we have come in this class. How will the presidential elections affect our lives? What do you believe we have to look forward to in 2009?
- Dec. 8: No official class. Work on Final Paper **Due Dec. 11**
- Dec. 11: ****FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS** (REMEMBER: PAPERS MUST BE HANDED IN TO ME IN CLASS. NO E-MAILED OR LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.)**

CONCERNING EXAMINATIONS

Short Assignments: You will be assigned four two page essays that are due at the next class session. These papers will totally represent **25%** of your cumulative grade. They should be typewritten and double spaced. 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.

PAGE 5 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

Response papers and test on Congress: You will be assigned response papers that are due at the next class session as well as a test on Congress. They will cumulatively represent **25%** of your final grade and will hopefully add to the **open dialogue** I plan for this class.
(Response papers 15% and Test 10%)

Midterm Exam Essay: MUST BE TURNED IN TO TEACHER ON SPECIFIED DATE DURING CLASS!!!

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.

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 essay 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 should be incorporated in your essay as substantiation of your point of view and **appropriately footnoted!** ****You will need to use at least three outside book sources as well as the Internet. PLEASE NOTE: **E-MAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. THIS ESSAY MUST BE TURNED IN TO TEACHER ON SPECIFIED DATE DURING CLASS!!!**

FINAL ESSAY TOPICS

1) **The War on Terrorism:** "One of the most difficult challenges faced by governments around the world is how to control terrorism." You are asked here to examine the question this issue has required that we confront as a nation, and in so doing consider whether our presence in Iraq and in the Middle East in general has served to help control the threat of further terrorist attacks on our nation, or whether our involvement in that area may have provided a larger stage upon which terrorism may grow and become an even greater threat to our nation.

PAGE 6 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

2) **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 to rule on the constitutionality of decisions of the lower courts, or is its place in our society to make positive social change by virtue of the decisions it renders? Consider Roe v Wade or Brown v Board of Education or any recent Supreme Court decisions that you believe may be relevant to your argument.

3) **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 laws of the Nazi regime? **C)** Is Civil Disobedience ever warranted? Consider the civil rights movement of the 1960's or 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 only 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 on 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. Roll will be called regularly. Send emails to me at profgieser@prodigy.net**

Late Papers: Please note! You have a one week grace period to hand in short essay 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! THESE EXAMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE OR BY EMAIL!!

**** All papers must be appropriately marked with your name, this class, section and the date, and must be clipped or stapled.**

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: Scholastic dishonesty will not be Tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. You are Expected to have read and understood the current issue of the Student handbook (published by Student Services) regarding student Responsibilities and rights, and the intellectual property policy, for Information about procedures and about what constitutes acceptable on-campus behavior.)

****Any information contained in this syllabus, other than the Academic policy and the ADA information may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.**

PAGE 7 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

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. I will be holding Office hours from 3:30 to 4:30 in my office in Wright Hall on Tuesday and Thursday. As soon as I know which office I have been assigned I will notify you.

ADA STATEMENT

If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, You will need to contact the Disability Resource Center located in The Student services center at each campus. Cheyenne phone Number is 651-4045, Henderson 651-3086 and West Charleston is 651-5089.

For those students who would like to earn a little extra cash, stop By the Disability Resource Center to fill out a job interest card. This office hires students as note takers, readers, proctors, scribes, Lab assistants and research assistants as needed.

TUTORIAL SERVICES: Students are entitled to 12 hours free tutoring per semester. For appointment call 651-4232-Cheyenne, 651-5732 Charleston, and 651-3125-Henderson.