

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

Department of Political Science

PSC 101
Section 016

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Fall 2005
Thursday 5:30 PM – 9:00 PM
Location: BHS 134

Instructor: Olga Kuznetsova-Elliott
Office Hours: Thursday - 9:15PM - 9:45PM & Friday -10:30AM - 1:00PM
Office: WRI A216
Phone: (702) 895-1498
E-mail: olga.kuznetsova@cmail.nevada.edu

COURSE OBJECTIVES, CONTENT, PURPOSE AND SCOPE:

This is an introductory course in American Politics. As such, it 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. We will examine the institutional framework and inner workings of the US political system.
2. Introduce students to the basic methodological, theoretical, and conceptual tools for the analysis and study of American Politics.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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, etc.
7. Seek understanding into such fundamental concepts as Liberty, Order, Equality, Democracy, Ideology, Legitimacy, Sovereignty, Majority Rule, Pluralism, Constitutionalism, Limited Government, Constitutional Restraints, Pragmatism, Liberalism, Conservatism, Judicial Review, Interest Articulation, Interest Aggregation, etc.

Course Structure and Expectations:

Each lecture will consist of **three parts**. The ‘**warm-up**’, **introductory part** will help us “activate” our political vocabulary. During this part, we will tackle various concepts to enlarge our political vernacular. This part, as well as all other parts of the class, will be based on the *required* reading, assigned for 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 in **interactive activities and games**, based on the required reading and other assignments for that week. We will have 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 week’s 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 policy-making and our own political experience.

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 in the US and Nevada politics** by watching the news, reading newspapers and magazines, researching political issues on the Internet, staying curious, etc.

Evaluation: Grades will be determined based on the following:

1. **Attendance and participation can greatly improve your grade! (15%)**
2. **A written mid-term examination**, consisting of **3 PARTS (30%)**: multiple choices, a short quiz based on concepts and terms, and 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 to allow students to expand on an idea or a policy issue.
3. **A final examination**, consisting of **3 PARTS (30%)**: multiple choices, a quiz based on concepts, terms, and political vocabulary, and a short 3-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. Throughout the semester, I will be conducting short **pop quizzes (10%)**, which can help you greatly in your overall grade evaluation.
5. Each student will be assigned **two (2) oral presentations (15%)**. You will be given ample time to research a topic; presentation assignments will encompass a vast array of topics – policy issues and controversies, leaders and personalities, legal cases, constitutional amendments, history, etc.) Certain presentation assignments will require work in groups. Your group will have an opportunity to polish the presentation before you have to presents it to the rest of the class. These presentations can greatly improve your grade as well.

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. Please, e-mail me or call me *in advance* if you are going to miss a class. 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. **Make-up exams are NOT offered for the final exam.**

Course Outline:

Note: The following topics and dates are subject to minor changes to accommodate your interests, requests and needs.

Week #1 (9/1/05) – **Introduction. Overview of policies & procedures. A framework for Analysis** – US Political System and three perspectives on ‘power’: *Democratic, Elitist, and Pluralist theories*. The dichotomy between *what is vs. what should be*.

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 1 and 2, US Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence.*

Week #2 (9/8/05) – US Political System and **Conceptual Analysis: American Federalism and the Division of Powers. American Federalism in Action: Constitutional Framework. The drafting of the Constitution - the Constitutional Convention.** The US Constitution, rigid or flexible? **The “Living” Constitution?** The conceptual analysis of the **separation of powers and checks and balances:** a government of “separated institutions sharing powers.” Limited Government: Constitutional restraints on political Power.

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 3 & 4, US Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Amendments.*

Week #3 (9/15/05) – US **Political culture** and US **political landscape.** What is **Political Socialization?** Overview of different ideologies and methodologies.

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 5 & 6.*

Week #4 (9/22/05) -- American **political parties and their origins.** The **two-party system** – policy formulation and coalition formation in the two-party system. **US Interest Groups** – the politics of faction? Types of interest groups, PACs, the “iron” triangles.

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 7 & 8, and the United States Constitution (Article I).*

Week #5 (9/29/05) – **Citizen Politics:** To vote or not to vote? The concept of **Political Efficacy. Voting and Elections** – the Democratic Struggle. The Concept of **Majority Rule. Political Participation** – Involving the people. **Media Politics** - Does **Public Opinion** Matter?

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 9 & 10, and the United States Constitution (Articles I & II).*

Week #6 (10/06/05) -- **CONGRESS: The People’s Branch** - lawmaking, representation, and oversight functions. Is Congress effective in its policymaking function? **BALANCING NATIONAL GOALS & LOCAL INTERESTS.** The **PRESIDENCY: Leading the Nation, the Leadership Branch** – Too much power? **Foundations** of the Modern Presidency and **Functions of the President.** The **INTERPLAY** between Congress and **the President.** The culture of Compromise?

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 11 & 12, and US Constitution (Article III).*
REVIEW CHAPTERS 1-10 AND ALL THE NOTES!

Week #7 (10/13/05) – MID-TERM EXAMINATION- MARK YOUR CALENDARS! (Good Luck!)

Week #8 (10/20/05) - The **Federal Bureaucracy – Administering** the Government. Bureaucratic Power and Accountability. Controlling the Bureaucrats – Who and How? Fragmented Government?

The JUDICIARY as the balancing branch? The Judiciary as the **guardian of limited government**. The inner workings of the US **judicial system** will be outlined. The **Supreme Court** and its milestone cases. The concept of **judicial review**. **Judicial Power and Democracy**: legal and political influences on judicial decisions. The Courts: Applying and Deciding the Law.

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 13 & 14.*

Week #9 (10/27/05) – **CIVIL LIBERTIES – First Amendment Rights** and Freedoms, Protecting individual rights and economic rights – **expressing individualism**. Rights to Life, Liberty, and Property. **Equal Justice** under the law: **Equal rights** - struggling towards justice and fairness. **Liberty & Order** – the “achievable” balance?

Reading: *Burns, Chapters 15 & 16.*

Week #10 (11/03/05) – Making Economic and Social Policy; Making Foreign and Defense Policy. National, state and local issues.

Reading: *Bowers, Chapters 1, 2, & 3, and the Nevada State Constitution.*

Week #11 (11/10/05) – Nevada’s **ORIGINS** and Early History. Nevada Territory and Statehood. Civil Rights and Liberties in Nevada. Forming the Constitution.

Reading: *Bowers, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8, and the Nevada State Constitution.*

Week #12 (11/17/05) – Political parties and Elections. Interest Groups and Lobbying. The Legislative, the Executive, and the Judicial branches in Nevada.

Reading: *Bowers, Chapters 9, 10 & 11, and the Nevada State Constitution.*

Week #13 (11/24/05) – **NO CLASS/THANKSGIVING**

Week #14 (12/01/05) -- City and County Governments; State and Local Governments. State and Local Finance; Taxation and Intergovernmental Relations. Nevada: Past, Present, and Future. Discussion Session – Policy issues, State and Local issues, Development issues. Federalism and New Federalism.

Reading: *Review ALL the materials in preparation for the final exam.*

Week #15 (12/08/05) -- American Politics and US Government Revisited: Review and Concluding Remarks. Presentations and Discussion Groups.

Reading: *Review ALL the materials and get ready for the FINAL EXAM!*

12/15/05 – FINAL EXAM – GOOD LUCK!

REQUIRED READING:

- James MacGregor Burns, et.al. Government by the People. Brief Fifth Edition.
- Michael W. Bowers, The Sagebrush State, Nevada's History, Government & Politics.
- The Declaration of Independence.
- The Constitution of the United States of America, including Bill of Rights and the Constitutional Amendments.
- The Constitution of the State of Nevada.

SUGGESTED READING:

- The Federalist Papers.
- The Articles of Confederation.

"IF YOU HAVE A DOCUMENTED DISABILITY THAT MAY REQUIRE ASSISTANCE, YOU WILL NEED TO CONTACT THE LEARNING ENHANCEMENT SERVICES FOR COORDINATION OF YOUR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS. THE LES IS LOCATED IN THE REYNOLDS STUDENT SERVICES COMPLEX IN ROOM 137. THE PHONE IS (702) 895-0866 and www.drcssc@ccmail.nevada.edu"