

January 14, 2009
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Intro to American Politics Pos **101-004**
Wednesday 5:30-9pm Room TBE B174
Instructor: Mickey Geiser
SYLLABUS

This is a class in American Politics. It has been said that the U.S. Constitution and its crucial Bill of Rights survive not because the parchment they were written on is still with us, but because each generation of Americans respects, renews, and works at understanding the principles and values found in these precious 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 after each assignment.**

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 two page assignments (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!

PAGE 2 – SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

ASSIGNMENTS

- Jan. 14: 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? **Response Paper #1**: In a **one page** paper, please respond to these questions in light of your own experience, and outside research. Due Jan. 21
- Jan. 21: **Assignment #1**: Something to think about! In a **two page, double spaced essay** please answer the following: In many past elections only 50% of the populous voted? Clearly the presidential election “brought out the vote”, but Americans have historically disengaged from the political arena. Do our citizens feel helpless to affect what their government does? This is the year when the American people determined that change was in order. We now have a new President who has chosen a new Cabinet. Will American politics turn a new corner in light of the new administration, and can we expect dramatic change in the direction our country will take in world politics? **Due January 28.**
- Jan. 28: Read: Chapter II “The Constitution”
Read Declaration of Independence at Appendix A
Read American Constitution at Appendix B
BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THESE READINGS AT THE NEXT CLASS Due Feb. 4
- Feb. 4: Read “Civil Liberties”
Response Paper #2: Taking a look at today, bring in an article which deals with what is going on in government and that relates to our Bill of Rights and civil liberties. Attach a **short typewritten one page response** to the article. **Due Feb. 11**
- Feb: 11 Read Civil Rights
Also find a copy of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream Speech” and “A Letter From Birmingham Jail” which we will discuss in class. **Due Feb. 18

PAGE 3 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

- Feb.18: Read Chapter Chapter VII: Political Parties
Read Chapter VIII: Public Opinion and voting
- :
- Assignment #2:** What do you think? The question of what particular philosophy of government – 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 incorporate data you have found on the Internet and look for definitions of what constitutes these two positions by today's standards. Remember to incorporate this outside information in your paper.** **WE WILL HAVE A DEBATE WHEN THE CLASS MEETS THIS 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 PEOPLE TO REPRESENT EITHER THE CONSERVATIVE OR LIBERAL PHILOSOPHIES IN THE DEBATE.**** **OUTSIDE RESEARCH IS VERY IMPORTANT HERE! DUE FEB. 25**
- Feb. 25: **Read: “The Judiciary”
Response Paper #3
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 March 4
- Mar.4: Read Chapter IX “The Presidency”
Assignment #3: After reading this chapter, indicate in a two page paper those qualities that define a good president. Select one of our presidents who you believe is or was most representative of them and provide a short background of that individual’s contributions to our politics. Due March 11.
- March 11: Prepare for Midterm Exam that is due the next time our class meets.

PAGE 4 – SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

- March 18: **MID TERM ESSAY DUE**
Read: Congress
Assignment #4: 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.
****TEST ON CONGRESS DUE AT NEXT CLASS***
Due March 27
- March 27: ***TEST ON CONGRESS TODAY***
Read Politics and the Media
Response Paper #4
Bring in an **article** and a **one page response** for this class which in your view indicates how much power the media wields in today's world. If you wish to do so, you can speak to a specific news broadcast you have watched and indicate your perspective on how it attempted to affect public opinion. **Due April 3**
- April 3: Read Foreign Policy
Response Paper #5
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 April 17**
- APRIL 17: Prepare for meeting at next class to discuss what you plan for your final paper. This meeting will be mandatory and you must come to class with a one page description of the subject matter you will cover.
Due April 24
- April 24: Meetings with each of you concerning your final paper. Please bring books and subject matter with you. It will also provide time for us to discuss your work so far.
- May 1: No official assignment. Work on final paper due next time.

PAGE 5 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

May 8: **FINAL ESSAY DUE (NO E-MAILED PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED. ESSAY MUST BE TURNED IN TO ME AT THE REGULAR CLASS TIME.)**

CONCERNING EXAMINATIONS

Short Assignments: You will be assigned two page essay assignments 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.

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 the Congress. They will cumulatively represent **25%** of your final grade and will hopefully add to the **open dialogue** I plan for this class.

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.

PAGE 6 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

**** IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU START READING THE BOOK IMMEDIATELY IN ORDER THAT YOU ARE READY TO COMPLETE YOUR WORK 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.

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.

PAGE 7 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

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 latter 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 reaction of many Americans to 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 class.** Roll will be called regularly. Send emails to me at mickey.geiser@unlv.edu **** (Use this address should you need to arrange an appointment with me during the semester or have any questions you need answered.)**

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.**

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

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 5:00 in my office#222 in Wright Hall on Wednesday afternoon

PAGE 8 SYLLABUS AMERICAN POLITICS

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”

THE UNIVERSITY REQUIRES ALL MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY TO FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES AND TO FOLLOW 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, YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITE <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/>

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 ACCOMODATIONS TO QUALIFIED STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES. IF YOU HAVE A DOCUMENTED DISABILITY THAT MAY REQUIRE ACCOMODATIONS, 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 ADDITIONAL INFO. PLEASE VISIT <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/> after they have been admitted to the university. For more Information, see <http://rebelmail.unlv.edu>

