

**PSC 101, Section 7**  
**Introduction to American Politics - Spring 2009**  
**2:30-4:15 PM, Tuesdays and Thursdays**  
**WRI-C144**

**Instructor:** Melanie Young

**Office:** Wright Hall A206. **Office Hours:** 1:00-2:30PM Tuesdays and Thursdays; & by appointment.

**Phone:** 895-0403

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Course

This course offers an exploration of unique features of the American political system. Particular attention is paid to federalism and the role of states in the American polity using theoretical and analytical approaches. The objective of this course is to increase your understanding of the foundations, organization, and functions of the national and Nevada governments. In so doing, we will study the main processes of decision-making, the administration of those decisions, and their importance to individual Americans. The course will be divided into three separate but related sections.

The first section will examine the formal constitutional framework of American government. This will focus on the Constitution, the nature of democracy, and federalism in the United States. Limited government will be discussed, as well as civil liberties and civil rights.

The second section will focus on informal institutions of American government. This section will examine the role of political socialization and ideology, public opinion, interest groups, political parties, and the media in American politics.

The final section will focus on the institutions of American government. This section will provide an in-depth examination of the U.S. Congress, the American Presidency and Bureaucracy, and the American Judiciary. Interspersed throughout the semester at appropriate times will be readings and discussion of the Nevada Constitution and how our state system of government functions here in Nevada.

4 credits.

Required and optional Materials for the Course

Required texts:                   Patterson, Thomas E. *We the People: A Concise Introduction to American Politics*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition. 2009. Text.  
  Bowers, Michael. *The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 2006. Text.

You will be responsible for any videos, handouts, or reserve readings assigned throughout the semester.

Method of instruction

The course will be taught in an informal lecture/seminar format with emphasis on student participation. Your contributions to the class through your attentiveness, the frequency and quality of your contributions, and the degree of your preparation may influence your grade. While the syllabus provides a structured path, current events may suggest some worthwhile detours. The contents and/or dates of this syllabus are thus subject to change.

Course Objectives: *The successful student will be able to:*

1. Discuss the constitutional framework that shapes and controls the political process in the United States and the State of Nevada.
2. Identify how and why the United States and Nevada State Constitutions limit power, and how limited constitutional government benefits Nevadans.
3. Explain the origin, meaning and purpose of the basic principles of the American and Nevada political systems.
4. Provide a standard by which to evaluate the constitutional merits of public policies proposed and adopted by Congress and the President, and judicial opinions rendered by the U.S. Supreme Court.
5. Identify how the U.S. and Nevada Constitutions provide for separation of powers and federalism.

### Class Attendance

Attendance in this course is crucial. If you must leave class before it is over, please notify me before class and make the least possible disruption. **The instructor reserves the right to institute pop quizzes if either attendance or participation becomes an issue throughout the semester.**

While student participation is not formally calculated into your final grade, students may improve their final score by ½ a letter grade (e.g., B+ to A- or A- to A) if the quality and quantity of their participation merits it. The standard university grading system will be used when issuing final grades: A=94+, A-= 90-93, B+=87-89, B=84-86, B-=80-83, C+=77-79, C=74-76, C-=70-73, D+=67-69, D=64-66, D-=60-63, F=0-59. All grades will be posted on WebCampus.

### Exams

There will be 3 exams throughout the semester (including the final). The exams will be a combination of multiple choice questions, true/false statements, and/or fill in the blank. Exams will cover readings, lectures, videos, and any additional handouts/readings from the previous weeks. The final exam is not comprehensive. **Each exam is worth 1/3 (33%) of your final grade for the course.**

**No make-ups will be given unless extraordinary circumstances exist and, a legitimate excuse and adequate documentation are provided prior to the examination that will be missed. In other words, plan on showing up for exams. All make-up exams will be given during the last regularly scheduled day of class, Thursday, April 30<sup>th</sup>. Students must provide their own scantrons for exams.**

**Final day to drop the class is March 27<sup>th</sup>.**

### Academic Misconduct and Copyright Violations

Neither cheating nor plagiarism (using the words or ideas of another without citing the source) will be tolerated. Any attempt to cheat on an examination will be subject to the most severe penalty the University allows. Please review the University handbook for penalties.

“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.”

See the “Student Academic Misconduct Policy” (approved December 9, 2005, located at <<http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html>>).

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 violation 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: <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright>.

#### Disability Resource Center

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. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. 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/>>.

#### Religious Holidays and Absences

If you miss a class or exam because of a religious holiday that you observe, you will have the opportunity to make up the missed work. You must notify the instructor at least 2 weeks prior to the examination.

#### Official Extracurricular Activity

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with an official extracurricular activity, notify the instructor at least 2 weeks prior to the examination and provide official written notification no less than 1 week prior to the examination.

#### Rebelmail

Rebelmail is UNLV’s official e-mail system for students. It is one of the primary ways students receive official university communication. All UNLV students receive a Rebelmail account after admission to the university. Non-admitted students should contact the Student Help Desk at (702) 895-0761, in the Student Union Room 231, or by e-mail: [studenthelp@unlv.edu](mailto:studenthelp@unlv.edu). See <http://rebelmail.unlv.edu/> for information.

#### 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 or 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/>

## *Tentative Schedule*

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Topics, Assignments &amp; Holidays</u>
January 13 & 15	Patterson, Chapter 1	Introduction & Foundations of American Democracy: Concepts & History
January 20 & 22	Patterson, Chapters 2 & 3	Constitutional Democracy & Federalism
January 27 & 29	Patterson, Chapters 3 & 4	Federalism & Civil Liberties
February 3 & 5	Patterson, Chapters 4 & 5; Bowers, Chapter 3	Civil Liberties & Equal Rights
February 10 & 12	None	<i>Exam 1</i>
February 17 & 19	Patterson, Chapter 6	Public Opinion & Political Socialization
February 24 & 26	Patterson, Chapter 7 & 8	Voting & Participation; Political Parties
March 3 & 5	Patterson, Chapters 8 & 9; Bowers, Chapter 4	Political Parties, Candidates & Campaigns; Interest Group Politics
March 10 & 12	Patterson, Chapter 10	News Media
March 17 & 19	None	<i>Exam 2</i>
March 24 & 26	Patterson, Chapter 11; Bowers, Chapter 6	Structure, organization, & policymaking of Congress & the Nevada legislature
March 31 & April 2	Patterson, Chapter 12; Bowers, Chapter 7	Presidential selection and office & the Nevada executive
April 7 & 9	None	<i>Spring Break Recess</i>
April 14 & 16	Patterson, Chapters 13 & 14; Bowers, Chapter 8	The Bureaucracy & Judiciary
April 21 & 23	Patterson, Chapter 14	The Judiciary
April 28 & 30	Bowers, Chapters 9 & 10	Local Government; State & local Finance; <i>Make-up exams</i>

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**Exams:** Exams will be given on:

February 12 and March 19.

Final Exam is Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup> at 3:10PM.

**All make-up exams will be administered on April 30, during the last day of regularly scheduled class.**