

PSC 101.03
Introduction to American Politics
Summer Session II 2009

Instructor: Dr. David Damore
Location: WRI C235
Time: M – Th 4:15 – 6:45 pm

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Scope and Purpose:

This course offers students an overview of the American governing and political process. The course is divided into three parts. Part one examines the "rules of the game" by focusing on the founding and the subsequent development of our republican system of government. Particular attention is given to the philosophical underpinnings of our constitutional system, competing explanations of how the system should operate, and assessments of how well it meets its democratic ideals. Part two focuses on the conduits that link the governed to the government (i.e., political parties and interest groups, campaigns and elections, and the media); notable attention is given to analyzing how these linking institutions form and constrain popular input into the governing process. Part three covers the formal institutions of the government (e.g., Bureaucracy, Congress, the Supreme Court, and Presidency). Here, the powers of each institution are addressed with emphasis given to examining their development over time.

Readings:

Dahl, Robert J. 2003. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 2007. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, Core 10th ed. New York: Norton.

Students are expected to read a daily newspaper either printed or online (exam questions will come from the *Las Vegas Review Journal* and nytimes.com).

Requirements:

1. Exams (90%) – Three exams, consisting of multiple choice and true/false questions. Exams draw on lecture, reading, and current events. Exams are open note and open book and are administered via the course WebCampus site (details forthcoming). Highest exam score counts for 35% of total grade; middle exam score counts for 30% of total grade; and lowest exam score counts for 25% of total grade.
2. Classroom Contribution (10%) – This component of the grade is based upon a combination of attendance, attention, and willingness to enter into discussions as they arise.

Course Goals:

1. Increase substantive understanding of the political process.

2. Motivate participation in the political process.
3. Increase newspaper readership.
4. Sharpen critical thinking and information gathering skills.

Policies and Miscellaneous:

1. The honor code is strictly enforced. Any evidence of collaboration, plagiarism, or other violations of the honor code will be immediately referred to the administration for investigation.
2. Make-ups are granted for documented illnesses or deaths in the immediate family (documented as well). If the exams for this course conflict with work in other courses you are taking, plan ahead and either adjust your schedule or study habits accordingly. If you need to miss class because of observance of a religious holiday you must notify me no later than week three of the semester. Students who represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity may make-up any missed assignments provided that official written notification is provided no less than one week prior to the missed classes.
3. Lecture begins at 4:15 and ends at 6:45. If you choose to attend lecture, plan to do so for the duration. Do not disrupt class by showing-up late, leaving early, or talking. Violations will adversely impact on your final grade. More generally, if the subject matter is not of interest to you or you are unwilling to meet its expectations, do not enroll in this course.
4. If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, you need to contact Disability Resource Service (DRS) for coordination of your academic accommodations. The DRS is located in the Student Services Complex, Room 137 and can be reached at 895-0866 or <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>.
5. Cut-offs for final grades are:

A = 100–93 A- = 92–90 B+ = 89–87 B = 86–83 B- = 82–80 C+ = 79–77
 C = 76–73 C- = 72–70 D+ = 69–67 D = 66–63 D- = 62–60 F = 59–0

Course Calendar and Reading Assignments

Date	Topic	Reading
Part One: The Founding and Development of Our Democracy		
June 1	Course Overview and the Purpose of Government	Lowi: Preface, chapter 1 Dahl: chapter 1
June 2	The Americanization of Democracy	Lowi: A1-A44 Dahl: chapter 2

June 3	The U.S. Constitution	Lowi: 36-64, 105-115 Dahl: chapter 3
June 4	Amendments and the Nevada Constitution	Lowi: 65-75 Dahl: chapter 4
June 8	Federalism	Lowi: 78-100, Dahl: chapter 5
June 9	Civil Rights	Lowi: 133-157
June 10	Civil Liberties	Lowi: 118-132 Dahl: chapters 6, 7

June 11 **Exam 1**

Part Two: Political Processes and Participation

June 15	Political Socialization and Public Opinion	Lowi: 378-396
June 16	Participation and Voting	Lowi: 397-419
June 17	Presidential Elections	Lowi: 422-451
June 18	Congressional Elections	Lowi: 452-473
June 22	Political Parties and Interest Groups	Lowi: chapters 11, 12
June 23	The Media	Lowi: chapter 13

June 24 **Exam 2**

Part Three: The Formal Institutions and the Policy Process

June 25	Congress	Lowi: chapter 5
June 29	The Presidency	Lowi: chapter 6
June 30	The Federal Courts	Lowi: chapter 8
July 1	The Bureaucracy	Lowi: chapter 7

July 2 **Exam 3**