

**PSC 101.002**  
**Introduction to American Politics**  
**Fall 2006**

Time: MW 10-11:45

Location: CEB HEA

Instructor: Dr. David Damore

Teaching Assistant: Don Mirjanian

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Office Hours: MW 9:30-10; 11:45-12:45

Office Hours: M 1-2:30, W 2:30-4

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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:**

Bowers, Michael W. 2002. *The Sagebrush State*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Reno: University of Nevada Press.

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

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 2006. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, Core 9<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Norton.

Course readings (available on the course WebCt site).

Students also are expected to read a daily newspaper (either print or online; current event questions for the exams will come from the *Las Vegas Review Journal* and nytimes.com).

**Requirements:**

1. Exams (75%) – Three exams, consisting of multiple choice and true/false questions. Exams draw on lecture, reading, and current events and each exam counts for 25% of course grade. Exams are open note and open book and are administered via the course WebCt site (details forthcoming).

2. Classroom Contribution (20%) – Based upon students’ activity in the WebCt discussion threads, interactions with the instructor and teaching assistant, and participation in class discussions. Within WebCt three threads (Common Ground, Course Content, and Current Events) will be used to organize course discussions. Topics will appear within each thread throughout the week. After new topics are posted, old postings will be removed. Students’ postings are evaluated in terms of their depth, engagement with course content, and quality of writing (e.g., grammar and spelling).

3. Syllabus and Netiquette Quiz (5%) – A multiple choice quiz that covers the course WebCt site, the course syllabus, and Netiquette. Quiz will be available from 12:00 pm Monday August 28<sup>th</sup> until 10:00 pm Thursday August 31<sup>st</sup>.

**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 university for investigation.

2. Make-ups are granted for documented illnesses or deaths in the immediate family (documented as well). If an exam conflicts with observance of a religious holiday students must notify instructor no later than week three of the semester. Students who represent UNLV at an official extracurricular activity may make-up missed assignments provided that official written notification is provided no less than one week prior to the missed classes.

3. Lecture begins at 10 and ends at 11:45. If you choose to attend lecture, do so for the duration. Disrupting class by showing-up late, leaving early, or talking will adversely affect your grade.

4. Learning Enhancement Services (LES) houses Disability Services, Tutoring Services, and Learning Strategies. If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you need to contact the LES for coordination in your academic accommodations. LES is located in Reynolds Student Services Complex, Suite 317. The phone number is 895-0866. You may also visit their website at <http://www.unlv.edu/studentilife/les>.

5. Cut-offs for final grades:

A = 100–93.0	B = 86.9–83.0	C = 76.9–73.0	D = 66.9-63.0
A- = 92.9–90.0	B- = 82.9–80.0	C- = 72.9–70.0	D- = 62.9-60.0
B+ = 89.9–87.0	C+ = 79.9–77.0	D+ = 69.9– 67.0	F = 59.9-0

## Course Calendar and Reading Assignments

Date	Topic	Reading
8/28	Course Overview and Introduction	Reader: Class Action
<b>Part One: The Founding and Development of Our Democracy</b>		
8/30	Why Government?	Lowi: Preface, chapter 1 Dahl: chapter 1
9/4	<b>Labor Day Holiday</b>	
9/6	The Americanization of Democracy	Lowi: A1-A44 Dahl: chapter 2
9/11	The U.S. Constitution	Lowi: 36-64, 105-115 Dahl: chapter 3
9/13	Amendments	Lowi: 65-75 Dahl: chapter 4
9/18	The Nevada Constitution	Bowers: chapters 1, 2, and Appendix
9/20	Federalism	Bowes: chapters 9 and 10 Lowi: 78-100 Dahl: chapter 5
9/25-9/27	Civil Rights	Bowers: chapter 3 Lowi: 133-157 Dahl: chapter 6
10/2	Civil Liberties	Lowi: 118-132 Dahl: chapters 7
10/4	<b>Exam 1</b>	
<b>Part Two: Political Processes and Participation</b>		
10/9	Political Socialization	Lowi: 378-396
10/11	Public Opinion	Lowi: 397-419
10/16	Participation and Voting	Lowi: 422-451
10/18-10/23	Presidential Elections	Lowi: 452-475

10/25	Congressional Elections	Lowi: 169-177
10/30	Political Parties	Bowers: chapter 4 Lowi: chapter 11 Reader: "An Antiwar Campaign That Takes a Page from the G.O.P. Playbook"
11/1	Interest Groups	Bowers: chapter 5 Lowi: chapter 12 Reader: "Hiring Federal Lobbyists, Towns Learn Money Talks"
11/6	The Media	Lowi: chapter 13
11/8	Catch up and Election Round up	
11/13		<b>Exam 2</b>

**Part Three: The Formal Institutions and the Policy Process**

11/15-11/20	Congress	Bowers: chapter 6 Lowi: chapter 5
11/22	The Presidency	Bowers: chapter 7 Lowi: chapter 6 Reader: "The Hidden Power"
11/27-11/29	The Federal Courts	Bowers: chapter 7 Lowi: chapter 8 Reader: "In Las Vegas, They're Playing With a Stacked Judicial Deck," "A Judge Who Isn't Playing by Fast and Loose Rules," and "For a Vegas Judge and His Friends, One Good Turn Let to Another"
12/4	The Federal Bureaucracy	Lowi: chapter 7 Reader: "Former Antiterror Officials Find Industry Pays Better"
12/6	Catch up	
12/11		<b>Exam 3, 10:10-12:10</b>

**This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Additions, subtractions, and deviations may be necessary.**