

PSC 101-016: Introduction to American Politics

Fall 2006

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Office Hours: Thursday 4:30 to 5:30pm & 9:00 to 9:30pm

SYLLABUS

Course Description:

The aim of this course is to familiarize the student with many major parts of American-style democracy. The noble experiment in democracy ingeniously devised -- and argued over -- by a relatively small number of farmers, merchants, lawyers, military leaders, and writers (not to mention one very famous scientist-inventor) during the last quarter of the 1700s, designed a system of government built upon compromise and checks and balances that has been challenged by never-ending developments in society.

To understand the US political system it will be necessary, for example, to analyze how the three main branches of government work, the relationship between national, state, and local authority, the role of the media, interest groups, public opinion, and political parties, and the evolution of civil liberties. Since the framework of American government comes from The Bill of Rights and The Constitution the course will be grounded in these vital documents. But after existing for more than 200 years, it is fair to ask whether this style of democracy survives as something of an anachronism in the face of the Internet, nuclear weapons, the television sound bite, and public apathy, or, for all its messiness, if it can be said that the system remains unusually open, dynamic, and efficacious.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third US President, believed that the best defense of freedom was an educated people actively participating in government. This course will be conducted with this concept in mind so as to prepare the next generation of *citizens*.

Toward this end, material found in the Government By The People (sixth edition) book will form our lectures and discussions. Space will also be reserved for an examination of Nevada government and history. Note: your *personal involvement* in this important 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, it is hoped, carry this nation into a productive and positive future.

Course Conduct:

Take time to know your rights and freedoms as a student as well as your responsibilities and duties. Guidelines regarding student behavior are found in the "Academic Policies" section of the UNLV Undergraduate Catalog, and in the UNLV Student Conduct Code and Policies booklet (items also featured on-line at the UNLV web site). To guarantee an atmosphere of learning and development in the classroom, no disruptive language or behavior will be tolerated. Such improper conduct (including plagiarizing) will result in removal of the student.

Course Books:

Two books will be used extensively in our study: Government By The People (Sixth ed., 2006) by David B. Magleby, et. al; The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics (Second ed., 2002) by Michael W. Bowers.

Course Schedule and Assignments:

Disclaimer: It is expected that the following schedule will be observed. Should a change arise, I reserve the right to make any alteration as long as it is made clear to the students.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading Due</i>	<i>Assignments Due</i>
WEEK 1 (31 Aug.)	Chapter # 1 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“Constitutional Democracy”), pp. 6 - 39. *** Pay special attention to our historical background and the framing of our Constitution.	No papers or tests.
WEEK 2 (7 Sept.)	Declaration of Independence A-1 Federalist #10 (Appendix) Federalist #51 (Appendix) US Constitution, pp. 40 - 47	Bring in article that deals with an issue today that pertains to the Bill of Rights Attach a typewritten one-page response to the article: Response Paper # 1.
WEEK 3 (14 Sept.)	Discussion of Response Paper #1 during class; no textbook or outside reading.	Test # 1 (in-class; <i>no</i> notes) on the twenty-seven Amendments to the Constitution.
<i>Date</i> WEEK 4 (21 Sept.)	<i>Reading Due</i> Chapter # 3 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“Political Culture and Ideology”), pp. 76 - 99).	<i>Assignments Due</i> Assignment # 1: Choose <i>one</i> (1) of the 10 statements listed on p. 21 of the text-book in the box marked “Challenges for Our Constitutional Democracy,” and write a two (2)-page, double-spaced essay. <i>All</i> outside sources must be duly noted.
WEEK 5 (28 Sept.)	Chapters # 5 and 6 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“Political Parties and Interest Groups” and “Public Opinion, Voting, and Elections”), pp. 128 - 205.	Assignment # 2: You are asked to take a position as to where you stand as a Liberal or a Conservative. Of these positions, which is more convincing -- and why? In this two-page essay, select one even if you are in the middle or apolitical.

You may use outside reading material here, as long as you note them carefully. In class you will be asked to defend your side.

WEEK 6 (5 Oct.)	Chapters # 12 and 13 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“First Amendment Freedoms” “Equal Justice Under the Law”), pp. 348 - 409. And: get a copy of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.	Response Paper # 2: Bring in article that speaks to an issue that is characteristic today of the ideology of the Left or Right, and a one-page typewritten response.
WEEK 7 (12 Oct.)	Discussion of Response Paper # 2 during class. <u>Sagebrush State</u> (entire book -- 240 pages).	<i>No tests or essays.</i>
WEEK 8 (19 Oct.)	<i>Good Night and Good Luck</i> (2005) 93 min. In-class viewing.	Midterm Essay Due (See instructions on p. 6 of syllabus.)
WEEK 9 (26 Oct.)	Chapter # 7 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“The Media and American Politics”), pp. 208 - 229. In class there will be a close comparison of three (3) different TV presentations of the news of a specific day.	<i>No test or essay.</i>
WEEK 10 (2 Nov.)	Chapter # 9 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“The Presidency: The Leadership Branch”), pp. 265 - 297.	Assignment # 3: After doing the chapter reading, indicate those qualities that define an outstanding president. Select one of our presidents who you argue most closely encapsulates those traits. Provide a short background of that person’s contributions to US politics. Lastly, list and describe two (2) genuine criticisms of your choice as well. Length: three pages. We will discuss your selections next class.

WEEK 11 (9 Nov.)	Chapter # 8 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“Congress: The People’s Branch”), pp. 232 - 263.	Test # 2 (in-class; no notes). The test deals with the differences between the chambers of Congress (p. 240 of textbook).
WEEK 12 (16 Nov.)	Chapter # 11 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“The Judiciary: The Balancing Branch”), pp. 322-347.	Response Paper # 3: Spend some time on the Internet looking at cases currently being discussed by the top Court, or any recent decisions they have made. In a one page paper indicate the issues involved and/or the decision the Court has rendered in that specific case. Attach the data you used for your paper.
WEEK 13 (23 Nov.)	Thanksgiving Break (No Class)	
WEEK 14 (30 Nov.)	For this class come prepared to meet with me individually to discuss your plans for the final paper that is due on <u>14 December</u> . Prepare a <i>short outline</i> of how you plan to present your work and, if possible, bring the texts you will use.	
WEEK 15 (7 Dec.)	Our last official class. This is the opportunity to tie all the pieces together, and to acknowledge how our nation and planet are changing today. <u>Bring</u> to class your list of those questions that need answers as they relate to our future.	
WEEK 16 (14 Dec.)	Final Exam Essay Due	

Course Grading:

Grades are assessed based on performance in five (5) major areas. The breakdown is as follows:

- 1 Midterm Exam Essay (25%)
- 1 Final Exam Essay (25%)
- 3 Response Papers (15%)
- 3 Assignments (25%)
- 2 Scantron-style, in-class Tests (10%)

The standard breakdown will be observed (59% or below = F; 60-69% = D; 70-79% = C; 80-89 = B; 90-100 = A). **Class participation** will **not** count as a formal grade category. However in the case of a border-line grade at the end of the semester, class participation will be weighted so as to bump you up

to the higher grade. Important note: absolutely **no extra credit** will be offered in class, so please do not ask.

Midterm Exam Essay: After reading The Sagebrush State, you will be asked to write a *five* (5)-page essay in which you examine both the political history of Nevada and the similarities or differences that exist between our federal Constitution and that of our state. No specific assignments will be given to you as to your reading of the text. Instead you will be responsible for reading the entire book prior to when your midterm essay is due. Your grade on this essay will be predicated upon the thoroughness of your examination of the text, and you will be expected to use quotations from both the general historical material as well as the constitutional documents included in the Bowers book, as well as the US Constitution which is in your regular textbook. Outside research should be used, and all references be footnoted appropriately. Start reading The Sagebrush State as soon as you can.

Final Exam Essay: This exam will require that you prepare an essay of *eight to ten* (8 - 10) pages in length. In the second half of the semester you will be given a list of topics from which you will write, taking a position on the questions it raises. Quotations from either of the course textbooks need to be employed, as well as *at least three* (3) from other books or the Internet. Remember, as always, all quotations have to be annotated.

Response Papers: These are typewritten, double-spaced, *one-page* positions based on your learned opinion (often coupled with an article that you locate) on a major subject area in politics. Despite their short length, put your best foot forward in terms of critical reasoning skills, intellectual support, terse writing (exactness), clear mindedness, sense of fair play, sense of personal vision, and thinking outside of the box. My wish is that these add to the open dialogue I am planning for the class.

Assignments: These assignments will either be two (2) or three (3) pages depending on the assignment. They are much like the response papers, but are somewhat longer and are more academic. As with all of the types of writing assignments for this class, they must be typewritten and double spaced.

In-Class Tests: Unlike the other assignments that are writing-based, these are Scantron-style tests. *No* notes or textbooks will be allowed for use on these tests. Compromising only 10% of your cumulative grade, these are the quickest to grade and return to the student.

Late Works and Absences: Late work *will* be accepted, but with a 10% reduction (e.g. a 95% drops to an 85%) in most circumstances. Cases such as hospitalization, funerals, and other *extraordinary* situations (no, cruise vacations planned six months ago do not count), as long as they can be officially validated (a parent's note is *not* an example), will be left up to the instructor to determine. I do *not* take roll in class with the interest of assigning a grade, but honor the student's free will in deciding whether he or she wishes to attend and participate in class. My *strong advice*, however, is that you come *on time* to *every* class, silence your cell phone, and make the best use of this extraordinary time in your life. You only have one undergraduate experience, and it would be sad not to make the most of it.

Note: **never** send me your assignments via e-mail attachments (hard copy only), and *no* correspondence from parents/guardians -- even if they foot your education.