

September 2, 2006  
University of Nevada at Las Vegas  
Department of Political Science  
Intro to American Politics POS 101-018 (BEH #112)  
Friday: 1-4:30  
Office Hours: Friday 11-12:30  
Instructor: Mickey Geiser

## **SYLLABUS**

This is a class in American Politics. On Page 1 of our text, the author's state: "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.**

There will be two texts in this class: Government by the People, ed. David B. Magleby et al. Sixth 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 three two page essays (25%), response papers (15%), short tests (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!

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### ASSIGNMENTS

- Sept 1: Read Chapter I “Constitutional Democracy” in Magleby. \*\*Pay special attention to our historical background and the framing of our Constitution.
- Sept 8: Read Declaration of Independence A-1  
Read Federalist #10  
Read Federalist #51  
Read American Constitution P. 40-47  
\*\*Prepare for an **in class test** on the Amendments to the Constitution that will take place at next class. (Make sure that you have familiarized yourself with **all** of the amendments!) **This test will be without the aid of book or notes.**
- Sept 15: **\*\*TEST ON THE AMENDMENTS!\*\***  
Taking a look at today, bring in an **article** for next time that deals with the present political arena and which deals with an issue that pertains to the Bill of Rights. Attach a **typewritten one page response** to the article on which you have noted your school and class.
- ASSIGNMENT #1:** \*This assignment is due at the next class. Take a look back at P. 21 in our text, and choose **one** of the ten statements specified in the box marked “Challenges for Our Constitutional Democracy.” You are asked to speak to the questions your chosen item presents, and to do so in a two page, double spaced essay. Any quotations from the text or outside resources should be appropriately footnoted and should be included in your essay.
- Sept. 22: Read “Political Culture and Ideology”
- Assignment #2:** You are asked here to take a position as to where you stand Conservative or Liberal. Which of the two positions is most convincing and why? In this two page essay select only one of the two possible choices, even if you find yourself somewhere in the middle. Try to determine which view is closer to your own. The chapter speaks to this subject matter, but outside research is importantly recommended.

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I will also randomly place each of you in a group that will defend one of the positions. You will be asked to select a representative who will participate in a formal debate to be held at the next class.\*\*

Sept 29:

\*\*Discussion on Political Culture and Ideology.

### **DEBATE BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS**

Read Chapter V: “Political Parties and Interest Groups”

Read Chapter VI: Public Opinion, Voting and Elections

A look at today’s news! For the next class bring in an article that deals with the present political landscape and speaks to an issue that is characteristic of the political ideology of one of our two major political parties. Be sure to attach a **one page typewritten response** to the article, and make sure you have indicated your school and class on your work.

Oct 6:

Read Chapter XII: “First Amendment Freedoms”

Read Chapter XIII “Equal Justice Under the Law”

\*\*Get a hold of a copy of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech and **write a one page typewritten response** to how much of his dream has come to pass.

Oct 13:

\*\*No assignment work on Mid Term

Oct 20:

### **MID TERM ESSAY DUE**

Video: “Separate but Equal” A great film that graphically shows how the Civil Rights Movement in this country worked to change the political landscape in the southern states. It will also give you an inside view of the workings of our Supreme Court.

Oct. 27:

### **NO CLASS – NEVADA DAY**

Read Chapter VII “The Media and American Politics”

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.

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- Nov.3: Read Chapter IX “The Presidency: The Leadership Branch”  
**ASSIGNMENT#3:** After reading this chapter on the presidency, indicate in your paper those qualities that define a good president. Select one of our presidents who you believe is or was most representative of those particular qualities, and provide a short background of that individual’s contributions to American politics. (\*We will discuss the next time class meets.)
- November 10: **NO CLASS VETERANS DAY**  
Read Chapter VIII “Congress the People’s Branch”  
\*Prepare for in class **test** the next time we meet. The test will deal with the differences between the House of Representatives and the Senate to be found on P. 240 of the text.
- November 17: **\*IN CLASS TEST\***  
Read “The Judiciary” P. 330-354  
\*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. Please attach the data you used for your response.
- November 24: **NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK**  
\*\* For the next class come prepared to meet with me individually to discuss your plans for the final paper that is due on December 15. Prepare a short outline of how you plan to present your work and if possible bring the texts you plan to use.
- December 1: Individual conferences regarding final papers. If time permits, we will hold a class discussion regarding how far we have come in understanding our political landscape. This discussion will continue at the next class session. \*\*For next time bring an article to class that you feel speaks to where our country stands as it enters the year 2006. No response paper will be required.

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December 8: Our last official class. This is the opportunity to tie all the pieces together, and to acknowledge how our world is presently changing. Now is the time to list those questions that need answers as they relate to our nation's future. **Please bring your list to class along with the article I've asked you to bring.**

December 15: **\*\*FINAL ESSAY DUE\*\***

### **CONCERNING EXAMINATIONS**

**Short Assignments:** You will be assigned **three** two page essays 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:** You will be assigned response papers that are due at the next class session. These papers will represent **15%** of your grade and will hopefully add to the **open dialogue** I plan for this class.

**In class tests:** You will receive **two** class tests which will be without either notes or textbooks. They will be in short essay form and will represent **10%** of your total class grade.

**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 and the similarities or differences that exist between our Federal Constitution and that of our state. **\*\*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. Your grade for 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 Sagebrush State, as well as from the American Constitution which

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is in your official text. Outside research should be used, and all references should be footnoted appropriately. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU START READING THE BOOK IMMEDIATELY IN ORDER THAT YOU ARE READY TO COMPLETE YOUR MIDTERM ESSAY 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 exam 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 and the class text (where applicable) should be incorporated in your essay as substantiation of your point of view! **\*\*You will need to use at least three outside book sources as well as the Internet. Remember, all quotations must be properly footnoted.**

### **FINAL ESSAY TOPICS**

**1) The American Constitution:** a living document yes or no? Is “original intent” a viable concept? Can we follow the words of the framers to the letter, or did they intentionally leave the Constitution an “open” document because they realized that times would change and that the laws had to grow as the nation grew?

2) Selecting **Federalist #10 or Federalist #51** by James Madison or **#78** by Alexander Hamilton, you are asked here to examine how the view taken is reflected in today’s political arena. In reading these papers, one can recognize that much of what these men wrote has become a reality. Look at their words and at American politics and find those parallels.

3) **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 decisions of the lower courts, or as suggested by some legal scholars, is its place in our society to make positive social change by virtue of the decisions it renders? Consider Roe v Wade or

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Brown v Board of Education or any recent Supreme Court decisions that you believe may be relevant to your argument.

4) **Do our laws really work?** **1)** Are the laws regarding drug usage, abortion, welfare or terrorism providing positive change in our society? **2)** Should the law be followed to the letter even if citizens believe that it is wrong? For example, was it the obligation of all German citizens to follow the Nazi laws? **3)** Is Civil Disobedience ever warranted?

Consider the civil rights movement of the 1960's as well as the reaction of many Americans to the Vietnam War and more recently 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 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 in 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. Any more absences will affect your grade. Roll call will be called regularly.**

**Late Papers: Please note! You have a one week grace period to hand** in short essay and response 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! NO EXCEPTIONS!**

**\*\* All papers must be appropriately marked with your name, this class, section and the date, and must be fastened together by clip or staple.**

**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"

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**\*THE CONTENT OF THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE IF IT SHOULD BECOME NECESSARY DURING THE SEMESTER.**

**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](mailto:mickey.geiser@unlv.edu)**

**OFFICE HOURS: Friday from 11 to 12:30 IN MY OFFICE AT WRIGHT HALL. PLEASE TRY TO NOTIFY ME IN ADVANCE, EITHER BY E-MAIL OR IN CLASS. If that isn’t possible, come anyhow! I want you to feel free to come and see me with any questions.**

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**A student missing a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday shall have the opportunity to make up the missed work. Students must notify me of the anticipated absence no more than a week after class starts.**

**Students who represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity shall have the opportunity to make up assignments, but the student must provide official written notification to me no less than one week prior to the missed classes.**

**THE CLASSROOM WHERE THIS COURSE IS BEING HELD IS SMALL. KEEP INTERRUPTIONS TO A MINIMUM. PLEASE ARRIVE ON TIME. CELL PHONES AND PAGERS SHOULD BE TURNED OFF AND NO SIDE-BAR CONVERSATIONS HELD.**