

Introduction to American Politics (POS 101 011)

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Spring 2007**

**Tuesday / Thursday: 2:00 - 3:45 p.m. WRI C239
Office Hours: 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday
Dr. Jeffrey Crouse**

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.

Classroom Etiquette

Students must arrive to class prepared and on time. Cell phones must be turned off and stored out of sight. The use of laptops during class is solely limited to note taking and information the instructor may invite you to look up during a discussion; otherwise their use for music listening, game playing, web browsing, or Internet chats is prohibited. No one should talk while another person is speaking, nor should there be any remarks meant for a classmate rather than the group. Classroom behavior should be courteous, respectful of others, and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory and roll will be taken. Students will be allowed to miss two (2) classes before one's grade is affected. For every absence afterward, the student's *entire semester grade* will drop by 10% for every class missed.

Reading

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 (Third ed., 2006) 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 (17-19 Jan.)	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 (24-26 Jan.)	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.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading Due</i>	<i>Assignments Due</i>
WEEK 3 (31 Jan.- 02 Feb.)	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.
WEEK 4 (07-09 Feb.)	Chapter # 3 in <u>Government By The People</u> (“Political Culture and Ideology”), pp. 76 - 99).	Assignment # 1: Choose <i>one</i> (1) of the 10 statements listed on p. 21 of the textbook 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 (14-16 Feb.)	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 (21-23 Feb.)	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.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading Due</i>	<i>Assignments Due</i>
WEEK 7 (28 Feb.- 2 March)	Discussion of Response Paper # 2 during class. <u>Sagebrush State</u> (entire book — 240 pages).	No tests or essays.
WEEK 8 (07-09 March)	<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 (14-16 March)	SPRING BREAK	
WEEK 10 (21-23 March)	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.	No test or essay.
WEEK 11 (28-30 March)	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 12 (04-06 April)	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).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading Due</i>	<i>Assignments Due</i>
WEEK 13 (11-13 April)	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.
WEEKS 14-15 (18-25 April)	On the 18th come prepared to meet with me individually to discuss your plans for the final paper that is due on <u>11 May</u> . Prepare a <i>short outline</i> of how you plan to present your work and, if possible, bring the texts you will use. On the 20th and 25th, there will be a <u>screening of Fahrenheit 9/11</u> (2004) 122 min. (Note: Rated R.) Response Paper #4: in a one (1)-paper argue whether <i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i> is a fact-finding documentary or a piece of distortion-ridden propaganda. Has time been kind to Michael Moore’s film by vindicating his analysis, or have his critics had the last laugh? <u>Due: 27 April.</u>	
WEEKS 15-16 (27 April - 04 May)	Discussion of <i>Fahrenheit 9/11</i> on the 27th. Reading: Ch. 15 <u>Government by the People</u> (“Making Foreign and Defense Policy”), pp. 454 - 481.	
WEEK 17 (09 May)	Our last official class. This is the opportunity to tie all the pieces together of what we have studied this semester.	
WEEK 17 (11 May)	Final Exam Research Paper Due	

Course Grading

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

- 1 Midterm Research Paper (25%)
- 1 Final Exam Research Paper (25%)
- 4 Response Papers (20%)
- 3 Assignments (20%)
- 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 Research Paper: 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 Paper: 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 *per day* (as opposed to *per class*). 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.

Contact Information

Besides my office hours (*see* page 1), feel free to e-mail me at: jeffrey.crouse@unlv.edu. Such correspondence should be professional, and only occur when needed. 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. To reach me by phone, call 895-5247. My office is located in Wright Hall, room A223.

Academic Integrity

For this course, any attempt to cheat on an examination or to present someone else's work (including material copied from the Internet) as your own for a written assignment will be subject to the most severe penalty the University allows.

“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 ethical choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a way compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution.” — *Student Academic Misconduct Policy*

Religious Holidays

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with a religious holiday that you observe, the instructor must be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the examination so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Official Extracurricular Activity

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with an official extracurricular activity, the instructor must be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the examination and provide official written notification no less than one (1) week prior to the examination so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Disabilities

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), Rm. 137, and the contact numbers are: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. For more information, visit: [http:// studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/](http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/).