

January 19, 2007
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Intro to American Politics POS 101-018 (WRI C239)
Friday: 11:30-3 p.m.
Office Hours: Friday: 9:30-11 a.m.
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 and are noted accordingly.**

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

- Jan. 19: Read Chapter I “Constitutional Democracy” in Magleby. **Pay special attention to our historical background and the framing of our Constitution. ****Due January 26**
- Jan. 26: 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 on **Feb. 2**. (Make sure that you have familiarized yourself with **all** of the amendments!) **This test will be without the aid of book or notes.** ****Due February 2**
- Feb.2: ****TEST ON THE AMENDMENTS!****
Taking a look at today, bring in an **article** 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. ****Due Feb. 9**
- ASSIGNMENT #1:** 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. ****Due Feb. 9**
- Feb.9: 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. Try to determine which view is closer to your own. The chapter speaks to this subject matter, but outside research is **importantly** recommended. ****Due Feb. 16**

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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.**

Feb.16:

DEBATE BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS HELD TODAY***

Read Chapter V: “Political Parties and Interest Groups”
Read Chapter VI: Public Opinion, Voting and Elections

A look at today’s news! Bring in an article that deals with the present political landscape and speaks to an issue that is characteristic of the 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. ****Due Feb. 23**

Feb. 23:

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. ****Due March 2****

March 2:

No assignment work on Mid Term which is due on **March 9**

March 9:

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 It will also give you an inside view of the workings of our Supreme Court.

March 16

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Read Chapter VII “The Media and American Politics”
Bring in an article and a **one page response** which in your view indicates how much power the media wields in today’s world. ****Due March 23**

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- March 23: Read Chapter IX “The Presidency: The Leadership Branch”
ASSIGNMENT#3: After reading this chapter on the presidency, indicate in your two page 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. ****Due March 30**
- March 30: 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. ****Due April 6**
- April 6: ***IN CLASS TEST HELD TODAY***
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. ****Due April 13**
- April 13: Read “Making Foreign and Defense Policy” We will hold another **debate** and you will be placed in a group that either defends or criticizes the policies of our present administration. ****Due April 20**
- April 20: **ANOTHER CLASS DEBATE HELD TODAY!** Come prepared to meet with me individually on April 27 to discuss your plans for the final paper that is due on May 11. Prepare a short outline of how you plan to present your work and if possible bring the texts you plan to use. ****Due April 27**
- April 27: ****This is the day for 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.

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May 4: Our last regular class. This is the opportunity to tie all the pieces together, and to acknowledge how our world is presently changing. Now is the time for us to list those questions that need answers as they relate to our nation's future.

May 11 ****FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS TODAY****

CONCERNING EXAMINATIONS

Short Assignments: You will be assigned **three two page essays**. These papers will totally represent **25%** of your cumulative grade. They should be typewritten and double spaced, and must have your class and school indicated thereon. 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 as noted on the syllabus. 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, 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 (one page) and after choosing a specific issue (for example the legislative process or civil rights) in the next four pages you are to discuss either the similarities or differences that exist between our Federal Constitution and our State Constitution. ****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. You will be expected to use quotations from the general historical material in the Sagebrush State as well as **quotations** from the United States and Nevada Constitution to fortify your argument.

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Please note: 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 in addition to the class text, 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 decisions of lower courts, or is its job to make positive social change. Consider Roe v Wade or Brown v Board of Education.

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4) **Do our laws really work?** **A)** Are the laws regarding drug usage, abortion, welfare or terrorism providing positive change in our society? **B)** 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? **C)** 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 can affect your grade. Roll 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 IN CLASS! NO EXCEPTIONS AND NO E-MAILED PAPERS!

**** All papers must be appropriately marked with your name, this class, section and the date, and must be fastened together by clip or staple. I won't accept assignments that are not properly attached.**

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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

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

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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.

KEEP INTERRUPTIONS TO A MINIMUM. PLEASE ARRIVE ON TIME. CELL PHONES AND PAGERS SHOULD BE TURNED OFF AND NO SIDE-BAR CONVERSATIONS HELD.