

January 23, 2008
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Intro to American Politics POS 101-017 (BEH 111)
Monday and Wednesday 10:00a.m.-11:45a.m.
Office Hours: Wright Hall Monday and Wednesday 1:00p.m.-2:00p.m.
Instructor: Mickey Geiser

SYLLABUS

This is a class in American Politics. On Page 1 of our text, the author's state: "The Oldest Constitutional Democracy in the world, the United States of America, has survived for more than two centuries, yet it is still an experiment and a work in progress. We think of it as an enduring, strong government, but our constitutional political system is built on a fragile foundation. The U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights survive not because we still have the parchment they were written on, but because each generation of Americans has respected, renewed, and worked to understand the principles and values found in these 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. Seventh 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!

ASSIGNMENTS

Jan. 23: Read Chapter I "Constitutional Democracy" in Magleby. **Pay special attention to our historical background and the framing of our Constitution.

****Due Jan. 28**

Jan. 28: Read Declaration of Independence A-1
Read American Constitution P. 40-47 ***Due Jan. 30**

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Jan. 30: **Taking a look at today, bring in an **article** that deals with the present political arena and which speaks to an issue that pertains to the Bill of Rights. **Attach a typewritten one page response paper indicating your name, school and class. We will discuss your responses and start an open dialogue that I hope will continue for the rest of the semester.** * **Due Feb. 4**

Feb. 4: **Prepare for an **in class test** on the Amendments to the Constitution that will take place at our 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.******Due Feb. 6**

Feb. 6: ****TEST ON THE AMENDMENTS**** .

ASSIGNMENT #1: Consider the following list: “Challenges for Our Constitutional Democracy,” and respond to **one** of them:

- 1) “All men are created equal”: What kinds of equality are-and should be protected by the Constitution, and by what means?
- 2) “Government by the people” Does the evolving constitutional system, including political parties and interest groups, strengthen fair and effective representation of the people?
- 3) “Minority Rights” Does the Constitution adequately protect the rights of women, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, other ethnic groups, and recent immigrants?
- 4) “Individual Liberties” Are individual liberties adequately protected in the Constitution? Do big government and big business diminish the freedom of the individual?
- 5) “Constitutional Responsibilities” Are Americans participating adequately in our democratic system? Do citizens have the proper understanding of our governmental processes in order to be heard and to make a difference?

You are asked to speak to the issues your selection 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 must be included in your essay.
****Due Feb. 11**

Feb. 11: Read “Political Culture and Ideology” **Due Feb. 13**

Feb. 13 **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 required.
****Due Feb. 20**

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

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- Feb. 18: **NO CLASS TODAY – PRESIDENTS DAY HOLIDAY CELEBRATED**
- Feb.20: **DEBATE BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS HELD TODAY*****
Read Chapter V: “Political Parties and Interest Groups” **Due Feb. 25**
- Feb. 25: Read Chapter XIII “Equal Justice Under the Law” ****Due Feb. 27**
- Feb. 27: **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 3**
- March 3: Read Chapter XII “First Amendment Freedoms” ***Due March 5**
- March 5: Find a copy of Martin Luther King’s “Letter From Birmingham Jail” which you are asked to bring to class, and let’s discuss the rationale for Civil Disobedience. ****Due March 10**
- March 10: Read Chapter VII “The Media and American Politics”
- March 12: 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 24 (after Spring Break)**
- March 17: SPRING BREAK**
- March 24 Read the Judiciary” P. 340-368 ****Due March 26**
- March 26: *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. Attach the data you used for your response.* **Due March 31**
- March 31: Video “Separate But Equal” The Warren Court continues as a fine example of judicial activism on the Court. The issue of what defines the responsibility of the Supreme Court remains an open one. However, this film which speaks of a different era may provide an example of how the Court functions and its ability to make change.** **Seen April 2**
- April 2: 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 whom 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 April 7**

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- April 7: 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. 250 of the text. ****Due April 9**
- April 9 ***IN CLASS TEST HELD TODAY***
No official assignment. Take this day to finish up work on your **Midterm Essay** that is due at the next class. **** Due April 14**
- April 14: **MID TERM ESSAY DUE TODAY!**
Read “Making Foreign and Defense Policy” ****Due April 16**
- April 16: We will hold another **debate at the next class** and you will be placed in a group that either defends or criticizes the policies of our present administration. Your assignment is to do some research that will help to fortify the position of the group you are assigned to. ****Due April 21**
- April 21: **ANOTHER CLASS DEBATE HELD TODAY!**
Read Chapter VI: Public Opinion, Voting and Elections
A look at today’s news! Bring in an article that deals with the upcoming elections in 2008, and speaks to how our two major political parties are preparing for it. Be sure to attach a **one page typewritten response** to this article. ****Due April 23**
- April 23: For our next class we will hold another **debate** in which you will be asked to defend either the Democratic or Republican platforms. You will need to Google your way to the websites of both parties so you can familiarize yourself with their positions on the issues facing our nation. ****Due April 28**
- April 28: **ANOTHER CLASS DEBATE HELD TODAY!**
Read Chapter IV : The American Political Landscape ***Due April 30**
- April 30: No official assignment. Prepare your short outline of how you plan to present your final paper. ****Due May 5**
- May 5: ****This is the day for Individual conferences** regarding final papers. Prepare a **short outline** of how you plan to present your work and if possible bring the texts you plan to use. **(This is a required meeting and must be attended by you! It will directly affect your final grade.)**
- May 7: No official class held today. Take this time to work on your final essay that is due on May 14. **I will be here to discuss any problems you may still have regarding your essay.**
- May 14: ****FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS TODAY** BRING SCANTRON AND PENCIL! REMEMBER THAT NO LATE OR E-MAILED PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED! YOUR ATTENDANCE AT THIS CLASS IS REQUIRED!**

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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. **This is most significant, and will directly affect the grade you receive on this essay.**

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**

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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) In the early days of 2008 the **Primary process** can affect the outcome of the presidential election that takes place in November 2008. The selection of those individuals who will represent the two major parties and their political platforms can importantly change the course of American history. In choosing one of the potential candidates for the presidential race you are asked here to present an argument as to why that particular person is best qualified to lead this nation. **Your opinion will not be enough. You will need to supply outside data to substantiate your position.**

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 and Brown v Board of Education, as well as other Supreme Court decisions that have changed the course of American social history.

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 a possible approach for responding. It is not necessary that you answer all of them.) (Choose A, B or C)**

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 WILL BE ACCEPTED.

**** 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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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”

THE UNIVERSITY REQUIRES ALL MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY TO FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES AND TO FOLLOW COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE LAWS: THE UNIVERSITY WILL NEITHER PROTECT NOR DEFEND YOU NOR ASSUME ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEE OR STUDENT VIOLATIONS OF FAIR USE LAWS. VIOLATIONS OF COPYRIGHT LAWS COULD SUBJECT YOU TO FEDERAL AND STATE CIVIL PENALTIES AND CRIMINAL LIABILITY, AS WELL AS DISCIPLINARY ACTION UNDER UNIVERSITY POLICIES. TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE POLICIES, YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITE <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/>

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 ACCOMODATIONS TO QUALIFIED STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES. IF YOU HAVE A DOCUMENTED DISABILITY THAT MAY REQUIRE ACCOMODATIONS, 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 ADDITIONAL INFO. PLEASE VISIT <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/> after they have been admitted to the university. For more Information, see <http://rebelmail.unlv.edu>

RebelMail—Student’s UNLV e-mail (RebelMail) is one of the primary ways students will receive official university communication; information about deadlines, major campus events, and announcements. All UNLV students receive a RebelMail account

***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. I will hold office hours on Monday and Wednesday between 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. 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

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want you to feel free to see me with any questions OR problems.

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.

*****Check the following link provided by UNLV for student support:
http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm**

UNLV Writing Center: One-on-one or small group assistance with Writing is available free of charge to UNLV students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-301. Although walk-in consultations are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person by calling 895-3908. The student's Rebel ID Card, a copy of the assignment (if possible) and two copies of any writing to be reviewed are requested for the consultation. <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/>

*****If you are having any problems writing your papers, please avail yourself of this opportunity to seek assistance!**