

January 20, 2006
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
Department of Political Science
Intro to American Politics POS 101-019 (Wright Hall Room C239)
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

Jan. 20: Read Chapter I “Constitutional Democracy” in Magleby.

Jan. 27: Read Declaration of Independence A-1
Read Federalist #10
Read Federalist #51
Read American Constitution P. 40-47
Prepare for a short 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.**

Feb. 3: ****SHORT 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 **short 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.

Feb. 10: 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 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.**

Feb. 17:

**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 response** to the article, and make sure you have indicated your school and class on your work.

Feb. 24:

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.

March 3:

**No assignment work on Mid Term

March 10:

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.

March 17:

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

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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- March 24: 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. (*We will discuss the next time class meets.)
- March 31: 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.
- April 7: ***SHORT 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.
- April 14: ** For the next class come prepared to meet with me individually to discuss your plans for the final paper that is due on May 5. Prepare a short **outline** of how you plan to present your work and if possible bring the texts you plan to use.
- April 21: Individual conferences regarding final papers. **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.
- April 28: Our last official class dialogue. Plan on a class discussion regarding how far we have come in understanding our political landscape. Your views are very important to me, so please bring along a short list of what you see as the important issues our country must face in the coming months of 2006.

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May 5: ****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 **five** response papers that are due at the next class session. These papers will be valued at 3 % each. They will represent **15%** of your final 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 Constitution as they speak to a **specific constitutional issue**. ****No definite 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 provide information concerning the general historical background of the state of Nevada, as well as the Nevada Constitution which is included in the Sagebrush State, and from the American Constitution which is in your official text. Outside research should be used, and all references should be footnoted appropriately. This essay will represent **25%** of your class grade. **PLEASE NOTE: E-MAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. THIS ESSAY MUST BE TURNED IN TO TEACHER ON SPECIFIED DATE DURING CLASS!!!**

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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 essay 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 should be incorporated in your essay as substantiation of your point of view and **appropriately footnoted!** ****You will need to use at least three outside book sources as well as the Internet. PLEASE NOTE: ** E-MAILED PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. THIS ESSAY MUST BE TURNED IN TO TEACHER ON SPECIFIED DATE DURING CLASS!!!**

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

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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 laws of the Nazi regime? 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 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 on 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. Roll will be called regularly.**

Late Papers: Please note! You have a one week grace period to hand in short essay 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! THESE EXAMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE OR BY EMAIL!!**

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

PLAGERISM IS A SERIOUS OFFENCE AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED ANYWHERE AT THIS UNIVERSITY. WHEN USING THE WORDS OF AN AUTHOR, OR PARAPHRASING HIS OR HER IDEAS, MAKE CERTAIN THAT YOU HAVE PROPERLY FOOTNOTED THE WORK IN YOUR ESSAY! YOU ARE INDIVIDUALLY AND SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLATIONS OF 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.

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

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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 Room A219 IN WRIGHT HALL. PLEASE TRY TO NOTIFY ME IN ADVANCE, EITHER BY E-MAIL OR IN CLASS IF YOU WISH TO MEET WITH ME.

DISABILITIES: IF YOU HAVE A DOCUMENTED DISABILITY THAT MAY REQUIRE ASSISTANCE, YOU WILL NEED TO CONTACT LES FOR COORDINATION IN YOUR ACADEMIC ACCOMODATIONS. DISABILITY SERVICES IS LOCATED WITHIN THE LEARNING ENHANCEMENT SERVICE (LES), IN THE REYNOLDS STUDENT SERVICES COMPLEX, ROOM 137. THE PHONE NUMBER IS 702-895-0866, OR TTD 702-895-0652.

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 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. LATE ARRIVALS ARE DISRUPTIVE SO MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARRIVE ON TIME! CELL PHONES AND PAGERS SHOULD BE TURNED OFF AND NO SIDE-BAR CONVERSATIONS HELD.