

Introduction to American Politics

PSC 101

Spring 2006

Prof. Bradley Hays
WRI A214
Phone: 895-2525
Email: bradley.hays@unlv.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, 9-10:30; Wednesday, 10:00-11:30; or by appointment

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the key concepts, theories, and institutions in American government. We will also use these major themes as springboards to discuss some of the major policy debates in contemporary American politics. We will start with an overview of American political culture and how this impacts the development of our institutions and national political action. We will then reflect on the Founding era with an intensive study of the choices the Constitution's framers made and debate whether their institutional design remains relevant in American politics today. We will then move on to studying the federal system of government and how a dual system (or, perhaps, a triadic system) functions and why it matters. Then, our attention will shift away from institutional design to political behavior in the form of public opinion, participation and voting, campaigns and elections, and how the media covers American politics in general. We will then examine collective political action through political parties and interest groups. Finally, we will conclude by an examination of the most well known and powerful political institutions: Congress, the executive (with primary emphasis on the presidency), and the judiciary.

Copyright:

The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. **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.** 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, the University encourages you to visit its copyright website at: www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright.

Accommodations:

Students with disabilities are requested to inform the instructor of their needs at the beginning of the course. Accommodations for disabilities will be happily granted, however, all such guidelines will follow the requirements of university-wide policy (see <http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/disability/>).

As a general rule, a student missing a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday shall have the opportunity to make up missed work. Students must provide notice of anticipated absences by the last day of late registration (September 2) to be assured of this opportunity.

Also, 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 no less than one week prior to the missed class(es).

Missing deadlines or exams due to illness requires documentation from a doctor. Please refer to University policy if you have any questions or contact me directly.

Academic Integrity:

All students are expected to conduct themselves and their academic work consistent with the standards outlined by the Office of Student Conduct, particularly as they relate to academic integrity. For more information, visit the office website at <http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/judicial/student.html>.

Students found responsible for academic dishonesty will fail the course and will be subject to further academic sanction through the Office of Student Conduct.

Grading:

Class Participation	10%
Pop Quizzes	15%
Exam 1	25%
Exam 2	25%
Exam 3	25%

Class Participation—One of the great joys of the university experience is interaction in the intellectual community. You as students are an important member of that intellectual community. Your intellectual development will shape the world's social and political environment. As such, your opinions, beliefs, and critical thinking must play in important factor in the course. Class participation will be particularly critical when we have discussion classes when controversial political and policy debates will be examined.

I expect you to be fully prepared to discuss the readings in all classes but, particularly, the discussion classes.

Pop Quizzes—Mancur Olsen, a “famous” economist and political scientist from the University of Maryland (Go Terps!), discovered that large groups fail to act even when it is in their collective benefit to act. He dubbed this conundrum the collective action problem. One way to overcome the collective action problem is to provide incentives and/or disincentives for inaction. Since careful and complete reading is a necessary component for a high grade, the course includes pop quizzes to provide you with an incentive (disincentive?) to read. Pop quizzes will cover the assigned reading *for the day the quiz is given*.

Exams—Each of the exam will cover the material in that particular section (in other words, they are not comprehensive). Exams will consist of fill in the blank, multiple choice, and short essay questions.

Required Texts:

Ginsberg, Low, & Weir, *We the People: Introduction to American Government* (5th ed)
Canon, Coleman, and Mayer, *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics* (4th ed)
Bowers, *The Sagebrush State: Nevada’s History, Government, and Politics* (2nd ed)

Suggested Reading:

The *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (We will be discussing current events throughout the semester and the better informed you are the better you will be able to participate in class discussion. The New York Times is available in full at www.nytimes.com and an abridged version of the Washington Post is available at www.washingtonpost.com.)

Course Outline:

Jan 17—Introduction and Preliminaries

Jan 19—Political Culture 1; Read: Chapter 1 of *We the People* (2-31)

Jan 24—Political Culture 2; *Sagebrush State* (1-14)

Jan 26—Political Culture 3; Read: *The Enduring Debate* (3-26)

Jan 31—Founding 1; Read Chapter 2 of *We the People* (36-74)

Feb 2—Founding 2

Feb 7—Founding 3; Read *Declaration of Independence* (A3-A4 of the text) and *U.S. Constitution* (A10-A15)

Feb 9—Founding 4; *The Enduring Debate* (37-45)

Feb 14—Federalism 1; Read Chapter 3 of *We the People* (80-113)

Feb 16—Federalism 2; *The Enduring Debate* (68-72)

Feb 21—Civil Liberties; Read Chapter 4 of *We the People* (119-156); *Sagebrush State* (28-43)

Feb 23—Civil Rights; Read Chapter 4 of *We the People* (163-203)

Feb 28—EXAM ONE

March 2—Public Opinion 1; Read Chapter 6 of *We the People* (208-246)

March 7— Public Opinion 2

March 9— Media; Read Chapter 7 of *We the People* (250-278)

March 14 & 16—Spring Break

March 21—Participation & Voting 1; Read Chapter 8 of *We the People* (282-314)

March 23— Participation & Voting 2; *The Enduring Debate* (330-353); *Sagebrush State* (44-56)

March 28—Political Parties; Read Chapter 9 of *We the People* (326-363); *Sagebrush State* (57-63)

March 30—Groups and Interests 1; Read Chapter 11 of *We the People* (436-457)

April 4—EXAM TWO

April 6—Congress 1; Read Chapter 12 of *We the People* (466-508)

April 11—Congress 2; *Sagebrush State* (64-75)

April 13—Congress 3; *The Enduring Debate* (158-174)

April 18—Presidency 1; Read Chapter 13 in *We the People* (520-556)

April 20—Presidency 2; *Sagebrush State* (76-88)

April 25—Presidency 3; *The Enduring Debate* (175-191)

April 27—Federal Courts 1; Read Chapter 15 in *We the People* (614-649)

May 2—Federal (and Nevada) Courts 2; *Sagebrush State* (89-101)

May 4—Federal Courts 3; *The Enduring Debate* (268-288)

EXAM 3—TBA