

POLITICAL SCIENCE 101
American Government

Dr. Eric Herzik

Fall 2009

Office: 224 Mack Social Science

Office Hrs: Tuesday 1-2; Wednesday 11-12 and by appointment

Phone: 682-7764; Email: herzik@unr.edu

This is a course on the fundamentals of the American political system. The emphasis is on how the system operates (or attempts to operate) in contemporary society. Attention is directed at formal structures and procedures as well as on the behavior of people who interact with and make policy within the official framework. As the course is taught in Nevada, the politics and government of Nevada will be covered alongside the national model. The course also discusses how social science methods and models are used to assess political behavior.

The following books are required for the course:

Fiorina, Peterson, Johnson & Mayer, *The New American Democracy*, 6th edition

Fiorina, *Culture War?* 2nd edition

The course requirements are 3 exams -- two hourly exams and a final -- and a writing assignment. Each exam will be "objective" in format (multiple choice). Exam questions will be drawn primarily from lectures and the main course text, *The New American Democracy*. (There may be specific questions from *Culture War?* on both the second exam and final.) The writing assignment will address topics from the other course text, *Culture War?* (Additional information about the writing assignment is given below.) Each exam is worth 25% of the total course grade; the writing assignment is worth 25% of the total. *Attendance is strongly encouraged as you are responsible for all lecture material and/or any changes in exam dates, course structure or required reading.* Late papers cannot receive an "A" grade or full credit and after a stated deadline will not be accepted. All University rules concerning accommodations for disabilities, plagiarism and classroom decorum are in force.

Topics and Readings: (the notation Fiorina is for the main text)

Course description, introduction and overview

reading: none

Politics, Power and the Political System

reading: Fiorina, chapter 1

The American Political Culture

reading: Fiorina, chapter 4

The Constitutional Framework

reading: Fiorina, chapter 2, Appendix I - IV

The Federal System

reading: Fiorina, chapter 3

Rights and Liberties

reading: Fiorina, chapters 16 & 17

* * * * FIRST EXAM * * *

Public Opinion and Socialization

reading: Fiorina, chapter 5; *Culture War?* Chapters 1 - 6

Voting, Campaigns and Elections

reading: Fiorina, chaps 6 & 10; *Culture War?* Chapters 7 - 9

Political Parties

reading: Fiorina, chapter 8; *Culture War?* Chapter 10

Interest Groups

reading: Fiorina, chapter 7

The Role of the Media

reading: Fiorina, chapter 9

* * * SECOND EXAM * * *

Congress

reading: Fiorina, chapters 11 & 12

The Presidency

reading: Fiorina, chapter 13

The Courts

reading: Fiorina, chapter 15

The Bureaucracy

reading: Fiorina, chapter 14

Domestic and Economic Policy

reading: Fiorina, chapters 18 & 19

Foreign Policy

reading: Fiorina, chapter 20

* * * FINAL EXAM * * *

Writing Assignment
PSC 101 Professor Herzik

The course text, *Culture War?*, discusses whether American politics is as deeply divided on political issues as often portrayed in the media. The book discusses how Americans perceive issues and especially "hot button" social issues. The text also examines how parties, interest groups and the media may be using perceived differences for specific partisan or policy advantage. Using the analysis and data provided in *Culture War?* answer the following points in essay form. A superior answer may bring in outside data linked to the last election or other public opinion studies.

Your essay must be typed, double space in no less than 11 point font. Your essay may not exceed 10 pages. (An essay less than three pages is likely not fully addressing the points.) ***Outside sources need to be cited in a consistent fashion*** (although I do not prescribe a particular format) such that I can verify they exist. ***The paper is due 10 days after the second test. Papers will be accepted for one week after the initial due date but cannot receive an A grade. Any papers handed in later than one week from the assigned due date will not receive credit.***

All of the following should be addressed in your essay.

- What is the Culture War? What are the important components of this perceived part of American politics? Why does it persist as a key part of American politics?
- Discuss the question of whether America is deeply divided or evenly divided. Discuss the difference between elite opinion and mass public attitudes.
- Assess Fiorina's evidence about American public opinion on key issues of the so-called Culture War. Is he persuasive? Can you find counter evidence that disputes his analysis?
- How might a campaign use elements of the Culture War to their advantage? Does this distort the campaign and, if so, how?
- What are the negative effects (outlined by Fiorina but you might find others) for voter choice of the Culture War? What are the negative effects for American politics if cultural warriors are leading public policy making?