

# AP UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

## ***SYLLABUS: A (American Government)***

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum is designed to give students an analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States. Students will study both general concepts used to interpret U.S. politics and examine specific examples. The AP Government course requires students to learn facts and concepts and understand typical political processes. The course will require students to master historical and analytic skills, including; chronological and spatial thinking, historical research and interpretation. Students will evaluate viewpoints presented through major print and electronic media, understand statistical data and analyze trends related to significant political events. Emphasis is placed on applying problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, interpreting graphs and tables, organizing information, evaluating information, and communicating orally and in writing. The course aims to help the student to participate effectively and democratically in the American political society

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

This course explores the political theory and everyday practice that direct the daily operation of our government and shape our public policies. The express purpose of this course is to prepare students to take the AP Exam for U.S Government and Politics. The course is for all intents and purposes taught on a college level and it requires a substantial amount of reading and preparation for every class. The objectives of this course go beyond a basic analysis of how our government “works.” Students will develop a critical understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the American political system, as well as their rights and responsibilities as citizens. In addition to described content, the course will also work to refine important skills. They include analyzing data and writing and presenting written and oral arguments. In order to help students master the ability to write a good political science essay the course will concentrate on the instruction of several essential skills:

- Effective writing style
- The ability to make arguments
- The ability to evaluate critically and to compare scholarly works
- The ability to synthesize political science data
- The ability analyze, interpret, and respond to stimulus-based data including charts, graphs, cartoons, and quotes

The course will cover a large amount of content. The study of American Government is both historical and contemporary. Therefore, it is essential that students remain aware of what is happening in the world. It is suggested that regular reading of newspapers and news magazines as well as the regular viewing of news broadcasts be maintained throughout the course.

**COURSE STANDARDS:**

1. Students explain the fundamental principles and moral values of American democracy as expressed in the U.S. Constitution and other essential documents of American democracy.
2. Students evaluate the scope and limits of civil rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.
3. Students evaluate the fundamental values and principles of civil society (i.e., the autonomous sphere of voluntary personal, social, and economic relations that are not part of government), their interdependence, and the meaning and importance of those values and principles for a free society.
4. Students analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government as established by the U.S. Constitution.
5. Students summarize landmark U.S. Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution and its amendments.
6. Students evaluate issues regarding national, state and local elective offices.
7. Students analyze and compare the powers and procedures of the national, state, and local governments.
8. Students evaluate the influence of the media on American political life.
9. Students analyze the origins, characteristics, and development of different political systems across time, with emphasis on the quest for political democracy, its advances, and its obstacles.
10. Students formulate questions about and defend their analyses of tensions within our constitutional democracy and the importance of maintaining a balance between the following concepts: majority rule and individual rights; liberty and equality; state and national authority in a federal system; civil disobedience and the rule of law; freedom of the press and the right to a fair trial; the relationship of religion and government.

**TEXTBOOK:**

Wilson, John Q. and John J. Dilulio, Jr. American Government. 10<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

**SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS:**

Ladd, Everett (ed.) American Polity. Third Edition, Lanahan Publishers, 2003.

Federalist Papers (Online edition)

Primary Source Documents as selected by the instructor from the 100 Milestone Documents collection at the NARA website <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/>

Articles from: NY Times, Congressional Quarterly, Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor and other sources

Collegeboard.com/ap website

Various test preparation books will be shared at year-end for your review and use.

## **UNIT I: CONSTITUTIONAL UNDERPINNINGS**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 2 The Constitution and Chapter 3 Federalism

### **Objectives**

Students will analyze the Constitutional underpinnings, the establishment of the Constitution with particular attention to federalism and separation of powers. Students will focus on the ideological and philosophical traditions on which the framers drew. (Constitution) Understand the influence of federalism and separation of powers on our constitutional system. Explain the evolving nature of federalism and separation of powers within a judicial framework. Understand varying interpretations of the constitution and their philosophical basis.(Federalist Papers)

### **Themes**

Considerations that influenced the formulation and adoption of the Constitution;  
Separation of powers; Federalism; Theories of democratic government

### **Topics**

The problem of liberty; The Constitutional Convention; The plans and compromise;  
Constitution and Democracy; The Constitution and Liberty; Motives of the Framers;  
Constitutional Reform; Governmental Structure; The Meaning of Federalism; Federal-  
State relations; Federal Aid and control; Congress and Federalism

### **Assignments & Assessments**

Federalist 10, 51 and 78 Readings & Questions

State-Federal Government Venn diagram Powers Worksheet

Teacher Created Questions for Chapters 2 & 3

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: All essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

## **UNIT II: POLITICAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC OPINION**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 4 American political Culture and Chapter 7 Public Opinion

### **Objectives**

Students will understand how political beliefs and behaviors evolve and the processes by which they are transmitted. Understand differing political ideologies and beliefs. Determine why U.S. citizens hold certain beliefs about politics. Explore how families, schools, religion and the media act to perpetuate or change beliefs.

**Themes**

Beliefs that citizens hold about their government and its leaders; Processes by which citizens learn about politics; The nature, sources, and consequences of public opinion; The ways in which citizens vote and otherwise participate in political life; Factors that influence citizens to differ from one another in terms of political beliefs and behaviors

**Topics**

Political Culture; Comparing American with other Nations; Sources of Political Culture; Mistrust of Government; Political Efficacy; political Tolerance; Public Opinion; Political Socialization: The Family; Cleavages in Public Opinion; Political Ideology; Political Elites, Opinion and Public Policy

**Assignments & Assessments**

Teacher Created Questions for Chapters 4 & 7

Class Discussion of Issues and the Political Spectrum of Opinions held by students

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: All essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

**UNIT III: THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 8 Political Participation, Chapter 9 Political Parties and Chapter 10 Elections and Campaigns

**Objectives**

Students will analyze political parties with regard to the mechanisms that allow citizens to organize and communicate their interests and concerns. Students will focus is on the historical evolution of the US party system, the functions and structure of political parties, and the effects they have on the political process. Explore the historical evolution of the U.S. party system. Compare the functions and structures of political parties, and their effects on the political process.

**Themes**

Political parties and elections: Functions, Organization, Development, Effects on the political process, Electoral laws and systems; Interest groups, including political action committees (PACs), The range of interests represented, The activities of interest groups, The effects of interest groups on the political process, The unique characteristics and roles of PACs in the political process; The mass media; The functions and structures of the media; The impacts of media on politics

**Topics**

The issue of non-voting; Rise of the American electorate; political participation; Rise and decline of political parties; National Party structure; State and Local Parties; The Two Party System; Minor Parties; Nominating a President; Parties and Voters; Presidential and Congressional campaigns; Primary and General Campaigns; Money; Elections and policy

### **Assignments & Assessments**

Teacher Created Questions for All Chapters

Student assessment: Who is a Republican? Who is a Democrat?

Video Notes on Political Parties History (1960-1996)

Essay on Campaign Finance History

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: all essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

### **UNIT IV: THE UNELECTED**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 11 Interest Groups and Chapter 12 The Media

#### **Objectives**

Students will analyze interest groups with regard to the mechanisms that allow citizens to organize and communicate their interests and concerns. Students will focus is on the historical evolution of the media and interest groups and the effects they have on the political process. Explain the activities of interest groups and their effects on the political process. Investigate the role of the media as a major force in U.S. politics.

#### **Themes**

Political parties and elections: Functions, Organization, Development, Effects on the political process, Electoral laws and systems; Interest groups, including political action committees (PACs), The range of interests represented, The activities of interest groups, The effects of interest groups on the political process, The unique characteristics and roles of PACs in the political process; The mass media; The functions and structures of the media; The impacts of media on politics

#### **Topics**

Interest groups; Kinds and Organization; Interest groups and social movements; Funds for Interest Groups; Problem of Bias; Activities of Interest Groups; Regulating Interest Groups; The Media; Journalism in American Political History; The Structure of the Media; Rules governing the Media; Media Bias; Government and the News

### **Assignments & Assessments**

Teacher Created Questions for Chapters 11 & 12

Notes on PowerGame Video “The Elected”

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: All essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

## **UNIT V: INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 13 Congress, Chapter 14 The Presidency, Chapter 15 The Bureaucracy and Chapter 16 The Judiciary

### **Objectives**

Students will become familiar with the Institutions of National Government, the organization and powers of the Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the federal courts. Understand both the formal and informal power arrangements of these institutions. Explain the formal and informal links between these institutions. Explain the selection and confirmation of federal judges. Understand the election and nomination process.

### **Themes**

The major formal and informal institutional arrangements of power; Relationships among these four institutions and varying balances of power; Linkages between institutions and the following: Public opinion and voters, Interest groups, Political parties, The media, Subnational governments

### **Topics**

Congress versus Parliament; The Evolution of Congress; Who is Congress?; member representation; Ideology and Civility in Congress; Congressional Organization: Parties and Caucuses; Congressional Committees; Congressional staffing and Specialized offices, How a Bill Becomes a Law; Power and Perks; Presidents and Prime Ministers; Evolution of the Presidency; powers of the Presidency; Office of the Presidency; Presidential Character; The Power to Persuade, Executive Privilege; Presidential Programs; The Transition; The Bureaucracy; Growth of the Bureaucracy; Federal Bureaucracy.; Congressional Oversight; Reforming the Bureaucracy; The Judiciary; Development of the Federal Court System; The Structure of the Federal Courts; Jurisdiction of the Federal Courts; The Supreme Court; Powers of the Federal Courts; Checks on Judicial power

### **Assignments & Assessments**

Essay on How A Bill Becomes a Law

Quiz on Congress' Powers Lecture

Quiz on Presidency Lecture

Chapter 13 Quiz

Teacher Created Questions on all 4 Chapters (112 Questions)

Notes on Power Game Video "The Elected"

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: All essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

Chapter Notes on Each Chapter

"Reapportionment' Worksheet

"The House of Reps & Senate Worksheet"

## **UNIT VI: PUBLIC POLICY**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 17 The Policy-Making Process, Chapter 18 Economic Policy, Chapter 19 Social Welfare, Chapter 20 Foreign and Military Policy, and Chapter 21 Environmental Policy

### **Objectives**

Students will focus on understanding the Policy-Making Process, multiple processes by which policy is made in a federal context, as well as the kinds of policies that result. Understand the formation of policy agendas. Understand the multiple processes by which policy is made in a federal context. Explain the role of categorical and block grants in the federal system. Investigate the role of institutions in the enactment of policy. Explore agenda setting. Explain linkages between policy processes and the various institutions involved in policy making.

### **Theme**

The formation of policy agendas; The role of institutions in the enactment of policy; The role of the bureaucracy and the courts in policy implementation and interpretation; Linkages between policy processes and the following: Political institutions and federalism, Political parties, Interest groups, Public opinion, Elections, Policy networks

### **Topics**

The Policy making Process; Decision making; Majoritarian Politics; Interest Group Politics; Client Politics; Entrepreneurial Politics; Business Regulations; Perceptions, Beliefs, Interests, and Values; Economic Policy; Politics of Taxing and Spending; Economic Theories and Political Need; Machinery of Economic Policy Making; Spending Money; The Budget; Social Welfare; Welfare Politics; Foreign and military Policy; Constitution and Legal Context; The Machinery of Foreign Policy; Foreign policy and Public Opinion; Foreign Policy Elites; Use of Military Force; Defense Budget; Structure of defense Decision-Making; Environmental Policy; Global Warming; Acid Rain; Agricultural Pesticides; Environmental Uncertainties

### **Assignments & Assessments**

Teacher Created Questions for All Chapters

Budget Essay

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: All essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

## **UNIT VII: CIVIL RIGHT AND CIVIL LIBERTIES**

**Readings:** *American Government*, Chapter 5 Civil Liberties and Chapter 6 Civil Rights

### **Objectives**

Students will study the development and defense issues involving civil rights, civil liberties, and their impact on citizens. Understand the development of civil liberties and civil rights by judicial interpretation. Knowledge of key decisions of the Supreme Court; *Marbury v Madison*, *McCullouch v. Maryland*. Learn and understand the First Amendment Freedoms.(First Amendment Cyber-Tribune) Examine the substantive rights and liberties. Know the responsibilities of citizenship. Understand the impact of the Fourteenth Amendment on the constitutional development of rights and liberties. Explore the rights of the accused. Research minority-group and women's rights. Examine controversies that have resulted over the changing interpretations of civil rights (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Ed*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, etc.). Understand Judicial Activism v. Judicial Restraint and *Warren v. Rehnquist* courts.

### **Themes**

The development of civil liberties and civil rights by Judicial interpretation; Knowledge of substantive rights and liberties; The impact of the Fourteenth Amendment on the constitutional development of rights and liberties

### **Topics**

Civil Liberties; Interpreting and Applying the First Amendment; What is Speech?; Church and State; Crime and Due Process; The Black Predicament; Campaign in the Courts; Campaign in Congress; Women and Equal Rights; Affirmative Action

### **Assignments & Assessments**

Teacher Created Questions for Both Chapters

Civil Right Definitions Followed By Civil Rights Paper Examining the Evolution of Rights and Liberties in the U.S. Over Time

Multiple Choice Test

Free Response Essay Question: All essay questions require students to analyze, evaluate or defend a proposition.

## **UNIT VIII: AP REVIEW AND SELECTED TOPICS**

Final dates to be determined

In-class exercise: AP released exam multiple choice with immediate discussion and feedback regarding “why this answer?” This will establish a diagnostic baseline for ongoing AP exam review.

60 Question released M/C

Free Response essay

Selected Topics: See Units of Study

## **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

This is a large lecture course and, as such, the teaching strategies used focus on giving students opportunities to analyze and respond in class, to write mini-essays of 50 words or so reacting to provocative statements, and to do short role-play simulations.

Instructions are given throughout the course on the following:

- Essay organization diagram for free-response questions
- Essay tasks for AP Exam free-response questions
- List of directive terms used in free-response questions
- Reminders for answering timed essay questions
- Essay frame
- Generic free-response scoring guidelines

## **STUDENT EVALUATION**

Quizzes are given on the reading assignments. Occasional outside-of-class assignments may also count as daily grades.

Test formats are objective (multiple choice), free-response questions (Essay Exams)

Most objective tests consist of 60 to 65 multiple-choice questions and a 25-minute essay question, and are timed to approximate the time allowed on the AP Exam.

Homework is accepted before students begin to take the unit exam. The homework consists of unit terms and/or outlines; questions about readings, notations, and/or assigned primary and secondary sources; charts that pertain to the unit and applicable historical maps, diagrams or political cartoons. Well-completed terms and course themes demonstrate a student’s effort and most students find this to be indispensable in maintaining a high grade point average.

The unit exams are a requirement of the AP Government and Politics course. A final semester comprehensive exam for all material covered will be given at the end of the term.

The AP Government and Politics exam is comprehensive, covering material from the entire semester. Students who are enrolled in the course are expected to take the AP United States Government Exam. Class time and after school reviews are held prior to the AP Exam. In addition, many students participate in informal study group review sessions.