



## AP United States Government and Politics Syllabus

### Course Description:

AP United States Government and Politics is a one-semester, college level course offered to students who wish to be academically challenged and plan to take the AP exam in the spring. It is a survey course that provides an introduction into the operation of American national government. As such, we will examine:

- Foundations of American Democracy
- Interactions Among Branches of Government
- Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
- American Political Ideologies and Beliefs
- Political Participation
- Primary source materials and contemporary news analyses

In exposing you to these areas, it is our goal to foster the development of the analytical perspectives for interpreting, understanding, and explaining the political processes and events in this country.

### Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of AP United States Government and Politics, the student will be able to identify and explain the formation, function, players, organizations, and institutions that make up the American system of government based on the following themes:

- U.S. Constitution—the U.S. Constitution is a living document that revolves around interpretations of our democratic ideals.
- Civil Rights and Liberties—the government's responsibility is to protect civil rights and liberties for all citizens.
- Federalism—our government is more responsive to the people due to the division of power between the states and the federal government.
- Separation of Powers—distributing political authority among three branches of government protects against potential abuse of power through a system of checks and balances.
- Civic Responsibilities—A democratic government's ability to protect every one's rights requires the participation of citizens in the political process.
- The Media's Role—the media has a great amount of influence on American politics.

### Current Events:

One of the most effective ways of learning about politics and reinforcing what you have learned is to pay attention to current political events. Therefore, it is expected that you are actively reading a major newspaper, a magazine such as Newsweek, a politically oriented journal such as Foreign Policy, or watching the news and other politically oriented programs. The more you pay attention to current events and how they relate to what you have learned, the more effective you will be during class discussions.

### Content Standards:

This college-level United States Government and Politics course is written to the content standards outlined by the College Board's [United States Government and Politics Course Requirements](#).

**Required Texts:**

Title: American Government Roots and Reform  
Author(s): Karen O'Connor; Larry Sabato  
Publisher: Pearson  
Year published: 13<sup>th</sup> edition,  
ISBN: 9780134611648

**Supplemental Readings:**

The primary text will be heavily supplemented by outside readings, including the 15 required Supreme Court cases and nine foundational documents which will all be assigned during the course.

In addition to the required cases and documents, recent articles regarding political science concepts and current political issues will be provided to students to supplement the primary text. Links to the supplemental readings will be posted on the course website.

**Course Methodology:**

This is an inquiry-based course where you will discover and utilize knowledge about the American political system via the textbook, supplemental readings, primary sources, political websites, and synchronous and asynchronous discussions with other students and the instructor.

Acting as a facilitator, your instructor will guide you through the process however, as the learner you are responsible for actively acquiring and constructing information by completing all assigned readings and activities.

Both formal and informal assessment will be used in evaluating your performance throughout the course. Informal assessment will include an evaluation of the quality and timeliness of your participation in class activities. Formal assessment will involve multiple-choice quizzes, written essays, a midterm and a final exam.

**Course Content and Big Ideas:**

The course content consists of the essential political knowledge that will be synthesized in the construction of enduring understanding and big ideas about the American government and politics. The big ideas that connect the content in the course units include:

- Constitutionalism (CON)
- Liberty and Order (LOR)
- Civic Participation in a Representative Democracy (PRD)
- Competing Policy-Making Interests (PMI)
- Methods of Political Analysis (MPS)

**Unit 1: Foundations of American Democracy**

Course Units 1 and 2

Essential Questions:

- How did the founders of the U.S. Constitution attempt to protect individual liberty, while also promoting public order and safety?
- How have theory, debate, and compromise influenced the U.S. constitutional system?
- How does development and interpretation of the Constitution influence policies that impact U.S. citizens?

**Unit 2: Interactions Among Branches of Government**

Course Units 3, 4, 5

Essential Questions:

- How do the branches of the national government compete and cooperate in order to govern?
- To what extent have changes in the powers of each branch affected how responsive and accountable the national government is in the 21st century?

### Unit 3: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Course Units 5 and 6

Essential Questions:

- To what extent do the U.S. Constitution and its amendments protect against undue government infringement on essential liberties and from invidious discrimination?
- How have U.S. Supreme Court rulings defined civil liberties and civil rights?

### Unit 4: American Political Ideology and Beliefs

Course Units 7 and 8

Essential Questions:

- How are American political beliefs formed and how do they evolve over time?
- How do political ideology and core values influence government policy making?

### Unit 5: Political Participation

Course Units 7 and 8

Essential Questions

- How have changes in technology influenced political communication and behavior?
- Why do levels of participation and influence in politics vary?
- How effective are the various methods of political participation in shaping public policies?

### Reasoning Processes

The reasoning processes are the thought processes that will facilitate connection-making and analysis in the pursuit of effectively executing the disciplinary practices in the course. In other words, the reasoning processes form the cognitive bridge between the course content/big ideas and the disciplinary practices. The reasoning processes in this course include:

- Definition/Classification – Demonstrating knowledge of course concepts
- Explain- Process: Explaining political processes
- Explain – Causation: Explaining causes and effects of political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors
- Explain – Comparison: Explaining similarities and differences among political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors.

### Disciplinary Practices

The disciplinary practices are the tasks students will apply to the course content using the reasoning process. Becoming proficient in these disciplinary practices gives students the tools to analyze political information, regardless of the format, and develop factually accurate, thoughtful, and well-reasoned argument or opinion about an issue related to American government and politics. The disciplinary practices in this course include:

- Practice 1: Apply political concepts and processes to scenarios in context
- Practice 2: Apply Supreme Court decisions
- Practice 3: Analyze and interpret quantitative data represented in tables, charts, graphs, maps, and infographics
- Practice 4: Read, analyze, and interpret foundational documents and other text-based and visual sources
- Practice 5: Develop an argument in essay format

Every AP Exam question fuses content, reasoning processes, and disciplinary practices. Thus, assignments will focus on the acquisition of course content and the application of course content to disciplinary practices and using reasoning skills.

### Required Supreme Court Cases

This course will incorporate the analysis of the following 15 required Supreme Court cases:

- Marbury v. Madison (1803)
- McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)
- Schenck v. United States (1919)
- Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
- Baker v. Carr (1961)
- Engel v. Vitale (1962)
- Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)
- Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (1969)
- New York Times Company v. United States (1971)
- Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972)
- Roe v. Wade (1973)
- Shaw v. Reno (1993)
- United States v. Lopez (1995)
- McDonald v. Chicago (2010)
- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC) (2010)

For each of these cases, the facts, issues, holdings, and reasoning underlying the majority and dissenting opinions can be found through the Oyez database online. Oyez also has an app that can be downloaded to smartphones. Students will be required to complete multiple assignments analyzing and comparing these cases with nonrequired cases. The list above is not an exhaustive list of Supreme Court Cases that will be analyzed and discussed in the course.

### Required Foundational Documents

This course will incorporate the analysis and discussion of nine required foundational documents to help understand the context and beliefs of the founders and their critics and the debates surrounding the writing and ratification of the U.S. Constitution:

- The Declaration of Independence
- The Articles of Confederation
- *Federalist No. 10*
- *Brutus No. 1*
- *Federalist No. 51*
- The Constitution of the United States
- *Federalist No. 70*
- *Federalist No. 78*
- "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

### Overview of the AP Exam and Keys to AP Exam Success

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam will be comprised of the following sections:

Multiple Choice Questions:

Number of Questions: 55

Structure – The questions on multiple choice will ask students to:

- \* Analyze and compare political concepts
- \* Analyze and interpret quantitative, text-based, and visual sources
- \* Apply course concepts, foundational documents, and Supreme Court decisions in a variety of hypothetical and real-world scenarios.

Timing: One hour and 20 minutes

Percentage of Total Exam: 50%

Free Response Questions:

Number of Questions: 4

Structure – The four questions on the free response will ask students to:

- \* Apply political concepts in real-world scenarios
- \* Compare the decisions and implications of different Supreme Court Cases
- \* Analyze quantitative data
- \* Develop an argument using required foundational documents as evidence

Timing: One hour and 40 minutes

Percentage of Exam: 50%

As the breakdown of the AP Exam highlights, success in this course and on the AP Exam requires far more than the memorization of political knowledge. Success in this course and on the AP Exam requires connection-making with the aim of being able to analyze political information, regardless of the format the information is presented, and develop a factually accurate, thoughtful, and well-reasoned opinion regarding this information.

### **Major Class Activities:**

Discussions: Students will prepare and share discussions related to course concepts and current events. The discussions will also include visual sources such as photos, political cartoons, graphs, etc. The goal is to connect big ideas/course content to current events.

Analytical Paper Assignment: Students will be required to write two analytical papers about important topics in United States government and politics. These papers will be due in Units 3 and 5. Each paper must be no more than four pages in length. In each paper students must briefly summarize the assigned readings, connect the readings to current units of study (how they will do this will vary depending on the resources provided for each paper and the unit of study it is due), and make a connection between the readings and a current political issue. The papers will also incorporate required cases/foundational documents and how they corroborate or contradict one another.

Project: The civic engagement project in this course will culminate in students creating a research paper, Power Point Presentation, website, or “Ted Talk” that they will share with the class. The project applies course concepts to real-world political issues, processes, institutions, and policymaking by having students research a topic across the institutions of government as well as examine historical roots, foundational documents, and public opinion as it relates to the chosen topic.

## **Constitutional Underpinnings (Units I and II)**

### **Unit I – Constitution**

Required Readings:

- Pearson text: Chapter 1 – American Government: Roots, Context, and Culture
- Pearson text: Chapter 2 – The Constitution

Primary Source Documents:

- James Madison Federalist #10
- James Madison, Federalist # 51
- Alexander Hamilton, excerpts from Federalist # 84
- Antifederalist, excerpts from Centinel I
- Antifederalist, excerpts from Brutus I
- The Declaration of Independence
- Articles of Confederation
- U.S. Constitution (see Pearson text)
- The Bill of Rights (Amendments #'s 1-10) (see Pearson text)



Lecture:

- Constitutional Underpinnings

Unit Activities:

Discussion Boards

What should the government do?

Political Cartoon Analysis

For each threaded discussion topic, be sure to utilize the primary source documents, the internet links provided in this unit, and your textbook.

Assignment #1

Constitution Scavenger Hunt

Assignment #2

Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists

Assignment #3:

Chapter Reading Questions

Unit 1 Assessment

Chapter's 1 & 2 terms and objectives; documents

Unit 1 Free Response

Unit 2- Federalism

Required Readings

- Pearson Textbook Chapter 3 - The Federal System

Primary Source Documents

- 10th Amendment
- 14th Amendment
- Supreme Court Cases

Lecture

- Federalism

Unit Activities:

Discussion Boards

Federalism

Natural Disasters

For each threaded discussion topic, be sure to utilize the resources within this unit and your textbook.

Assignment #1

What is Federalism?

Assignment #2

Federalism in Action Research Assignment

Assignment #3 (Essay 1 Rough Draft)

Please be sure to read the prompt carefully and follow all instructions before submitting your rough draft of Essay #1 (you will revise this essay in Unit 3)

Assignment #4 (Project Milestone #1)

Please be sure to carefully review the Project Instructions and the Milestone Instructions before you submit this assignment

Unit 2 Assessment

Chapters 3 terms and objectives; documents

Unit 2 Free Response



## Interactions Among Branches of Government (Units III, IV, V)

### Unit 3 -Congress

#### Required Readings

- Pearson Textbook Chapter 6 – Congress
- Steven Smith *The Senate Syndrome*
- John Ellwood/Eric Patashnik *In Praise of Pork*
- Senator John McCain *Hey There! Senator John McCain is Using Twitter*
- Online Resources

#### Lecture

- Congress

#### Unit Activities:

##### Discussion Boards

Incumbency Advantage

Congress vs. Constituents

For each threaded discussion topic, be sure to utilize the resources within this unit and your textbook.

##### Assignment #1

The Functions of Congress

##### Assignment #2

Selected Readings, Congress

##### Assignment #3

Gerrymandering

##### Assignment #4

Essay 1 - Revision

##### Unit 3 Assessment

Chapter's 6 terms and objectives; documents

##### Unit 3 Free Response

### Unit 4 – Presidency, Bureaucracy

#### Required Readings

- Chapter 7 - The Presidency
- Chapter 8 - The Executive Branch and the Federal Bureaucracy
- Chapter 15 - Social and Economic Policy
- Chapter 16 - Foreign and Defense Policy
- Arthur Schlesinger *The Imperial Presidency*
- Kenneth Mayer *With the Stroke of a Pen*
- James Q. Wilson *Bureaucracy*
- Federalist #70
- Online Resources

#### Lecture

The Bureaucracy



Unit Activities:

Discussion Boards

- The Presidency
- The Bureaucracy
- The Budget

For each threaded discussion topic, be sure to utilize the resources within this unit and your textbook.

Assignment #1

Bureaucracy and the Presidency

Assignment #2

Lanahan Reading Questions

Assignment #3

Seven Roles for One President

Assignment #4 (Essay 2 Rough Draft)

Please be sure to read the prompt carefully and follow all instructions before submitting the rough draft of your essay

Assignment #5 (Project Milestone #2)

Please be sure to carefully review the Project Instructions and the Milestone Instructions before you submit this assignment

Unit 4 Assessment - Midterm

Chapters 7, 8, 15 and 16 objectives and terms

Unit 4 Free Response - Midterm

**Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (Unit V and VI)**

Unit 5 – Judiciary and Civil Rights

Required Readings

- Chapter 9 - The Judiciary
- Chapter 5 - Civil Rights
- Important landmark Supreme Court decisions
- Martin Luther King Jr. *Letters from A Birmingham City Jail*

Lecture

The Judiciary

Unit Activities:

Discussion Boards

- Senate Confirmation
- Same-Sex Marriages

For each threaded discussion topic, be sure to utilize the resources within this unit and your textbook.

Assignment #1

The Judicial System and Civil Rights Questions

Assignment #2

Essential Readings - Critical Analysis Questions

Assignment #3

Analyzing Key Supreme Court Cases





Assignment #4 - Essay 2 Revision

Please be sure to read your teacher's feedback in the gradebook before submitting your final draft of Essay #2.

Unit 5 Assessment

Chapters 9 and 5 objectives and terms

Unit 5 Free Response

Unit 6- Civil Liberties

Required Readings

- Pearson Textbook Chapter 4 - Civil Liberties
- Selected Court Cases
- Online Resources

Lecture

Civil Liberties

Unit Activities

Discussions

Free Speech

Civil Liberties and Patriot Act

Religion

Assignment #1

Civil Liberties Reading Questions

Assignment #2

Court Case Comparison

Assignment #3

Essential Court Cases Chart

Assignment #4

Civil Rights/Civil Liberties Organizations

Assignment #5 (Project Milestone #3)

Please be sure to carefully review the Project Instructions and the Milestone Instructions before you submit this assignment

Unit 6 Assessment

Chapter 4 objectives and terms

Unit 6 Free Response

**American Political Ideologies and Beliefs (Unit VII)**

Unit 7 – Public Opinion, Socialization, and Media

Required Readings

- Pearson Textbook Chapter 10 - Public Opinion and Political Socialization
- Pearson Textbook Chapter 13 - The News Media
- Diana Mutz *How the Mass Media Divides Us*
- Bill Bishop *The Big Sort*
- Robert Putnam & David Campbell *American Grace*
- New York Times Co v. US (1971)
- Online Resources



Lecture

Political Participation

Unit Activities:

Discussion Boards

Political Socialization

Political Participation

Assignment #1

Chapter Reading Questions

Assignment #2

Collage of America

Assignment #3

Practice with Polling/Media

Assignment #4

Supreme Court Case / Article Analysis

Unit 7 Assessment

Chapter's 10 and 13 terms and objectives; documents

Unit 7 Free Response

**Political Participation (Unit VIII)**

Unit 8 – Political Parties, Campaigns, Elections, and Interest Groups

Required Readings

- Chapter 11 - Political Parties
- Chapter 12 - Campaigns, Elections, and Voting
- Chapter 14 - Interest Groups
- Citizens United v. FEC (2010)
- Online Resources

Lecture

Political Parties

Interest Groups

Unit Activities:

Discussion Boards

Interest Groups v. Political Parties

Interest Groups and PACS

Campaigns and Elections

Reflections on Course

Assignment #1

Political Parties, Campaigns, Elections and Interest Groups Reading Questions

Assignment #2

Political Parties and Interest Groups

Assignment #3

Campaigns and Elections

Unit 8 Quiz

Chapter's 11, 12 and 14 terms and objectives; documents

Unit 8 Final- Free Response

Final Project



**Assessment:**

Activity	Points (1372.5 possible)
Assignments (8)	10-35 points (vary)
Essays 1 and 2	30 points each
Project Milestone Activities (3)	10 points each
Threaded Discussions (21)	5 points each
Timed Essays (10)	10 points each
Quizzes (8)	25 – 40 points (vary)
Midterm (1)	40 points
Final Exam (1)	60 points
Final Project (1)	100 points

**Grading Scale:**

Letter Grade	Percentage Earned
A	95%+
A-	90% - 94.9%
B+	87% - 89.9%
B	84% - 86.9%
B-	80% - 83.9%
C+	77% - 79.9%
C	74% - 76.9%
C-	70% - 73.9%
D+	67% - 69.9%
D	64% - 66.9%
D -	60% - 63.9%
F	59% and lower



## **Student's Role and Responsibilities in this Course**

### **Expectations:**

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a responsible manner that reflects sound ethics, honor, and good citizenship. It is the student's responsibility to maintain academic honesty and integrity and to manifest their commitment to the goals of the school and course through their conduct and behavior. Students are expected to abide by all school policies and regulations. Any form of academic dishonesty, or inappropriate conduct by students or applicants may result in penalties ranging from warning to dismissal, as deemed appropriate by the school.

### **Communication:**

Throughout this course students will need to be in close contact with their instructor and fellow students. Students are expected to communicate via email and electronic discussion boards. Therefore, students should plan on checking email at least three times a week and participate in the discussion boards during the weeks they are live.

Instructors strongly encourage and welcome open communication. Clear, consistent, and proactive communication will ensure a successful experience in this course. It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor immediately if and when a personal situation occurs that affects your performance in this class. Being proactive with communication will result in a quick solution to any problems that may occur.

### **Time Required For This Course:**

To complete this course, students should plan to allocate at least 12-15 hours a week on assigned readings, assignments, discussions (asynchronous and synchronous), quizzes, and exams. It is highly recommended that students organize themselves around the course schedule.