

AP[®] US Government and Politics Syllabus 2

Syllabus 1058814v1



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The AP® Government and Politics course has been traditionally taught in the spring semester with an average enrollment of twenty-five students. The academic calendar uses a “four-by-four” semester-block system. Students enroll in four classes each semester that meet every day for ninety minutes.

Teaching Strategies and Activities

The course is evenly divided between lecture and Socratic seminar. Students are responsible for keeping up with events in the news. Each class begins with a discussion of current events (public policy, international relations, etc.). The current events provide concrete connections for each lesson. Starting this year, students will have access to a Blackboard website with online quizzes, review material, and links to supplementary materials. Students have the option of completing a research paper or other cumulative project assignment approved by the teacher.

Course Overview/Description

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 U.S. Government and Politics Exam. 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.

Course Readings

There are two required texts for this course:

Burns, James M., J. W. Peltason, David B. Magleby, and Thomas E. Cronin. *Government by the People*, 18th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Woll, Peter. *American Government: Readings and Cases*, 19th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2011. **[SC10]**

These readings will be supplemented with classroom handouts throughout the semester.

SC10—The course provides students with practice analyzing information relevant to US government and politics.

Grading and Course Requirements

Grades are figured on a cumulative point basis. Each test, quiz, homework assignment, etc., is worth a given number of points according to the quality and level of completed work. At the end of a marking period, a grade average is determined by dividing the total points possible by points earned.

For example:

Assignment	Points Possible	Points Earned
Seminar Discussion	25	23
Homework	10	9
Chapter Quiz	20	19
Current Events	10	10
Essay	100	88
Group Presentation	100	94
Unit Test	100	80
Current Events	10	10
Totals	375	333

333 points earned is 88.8 percent of 375 points (333 divided by 375). Average = 89, or a grade of B.

Forty percent of the final course grade is based on the cumulative average of homework, seminar discussions, quizzes, current events, essays, group presentation, and unit tests. The remaining 60 percent is divided between a research paper and a final exam. [SC13]

SC13—The course requires students to answer analytical and interpretive free response questions on a frequent basis.

Current Events

Students are responsible for keeping up with the daily events in the nation and the world. Students will need to skim the front page of *The Washington Post* or *Washington Times*; listen to NPR or another radio news program; watch a TV news station, such as CNN; or access a reliable online source. [SC12]

SC12—The course includes supplemental readings, including contemporary news analyses that strengthen student understanding of the curriculum.

Using Graphs, Maps, and Charts

Students are tested on their understanding of quantitative and visually presented information (maps and graphs) at regular intervals in the quiz assignments. They are also responsible for including data analysis and interpretation in the cumulative project assignment. [SC9]

SC9—The course provides students with practice analyzing and interpreting data.

Reading Assignments and Course Calendar

Week One

Foundations of American Government: What is the purpose of government? What was the founders’ view of the purpose of government and the role of the citizen in the American Republic? Are these views still relevant today? In what ways does the Constitution underpin U.S. government? The concept of checks and balances was a novel idea in the 18th century. Why? How does Madison’s concept of checks and balances challenge popular understanding of Montesquieu’s theory of separation of powers? Define the following concepts: democratic theory, republicanism, pluralist theory, majoritarianism, and the elitist theory. [SC1]

SC1—The course provides instruction in constitutional underpinnings of United States Government.

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 1 and 2

Woll, Chapter 1: “Second Treatise on Civil Government,” “Founding Fathers: Reform Caucus in Action,” pp. 3–30

Woll, Chapter 1: “Federalist Papers,” “How Not to Read the Constitution,” pp. 41–49

Woll, Chapter 3: “Antifederalists,” pp. 95–98

Week Two

Federalism: Why did the Anti-Federalists fear this new system? Referring back to the questions from the last unit, does this new system strengthen or weaken the concept of separation of powers? Why or why not? What are the powers of state and local governments in an era of “new federalism” and devolution? What influence should the federal government have over state and local issues such as education, affirmative action, abortion, and the environment? **[SC1]**

SC1—The course provides instruction in constitutional underpinnings of United States Government.

Due this week: Burns, Chapter 3

Woll, Chapter 2: “Federalist 39,” “Merits of the Federal System,”

“McCulloch v. Maryland,” **[SC11]** “The Federal System,” pp. 60–78

SC11—The course includes supplemental readings, including primary source materials (such as the Federalist Papers).

Week Three

Political Socialization and Identity: How do we come by our political beliefs? What are the sources of public opinion? What is “political culture,” and is there a unique American political culture? What is the “political spectrum”? How do these political beliefs define who we are as citizens? What does it mean to be a citizen? **[SC2]** What is the role of the citizen in a civil society? Which citizens vote and why? What is the relationship between individual rights and the needs of the larger community? Is democracy in America healthy and viable today?

SC2—The course provides instruction in Political Beliefs, Political Behaviors, and Elections.

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 4 and 5

Woll, Chapter 4: “Theory of Critical Elections,” pp. 189–199

Woll, Chapter 4: “Voting Behavior Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory,” pp. 206–214

Putnam, Robert. “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* Volume 6, no. 1 (1995): pp. 65–78.

Week Four

Mass Movement Politics: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Movement

Politics: What is the difference between a Democrat and a Republican? Are there other options beyond these two choices? Political parties and interest groups are not mentioned in the Constitution, yet they play a critical role. How? Why? Do they serve our democracy or are they an obstacle? How do interest groups influence government decisions and policy making? **[SC3] & [SC4]**

SC3—The course provides instruction in Interest Groups.

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 6 and 7

Woll, Chapter 4: “Federalist 10,” pp. 163–169

Woll, Chapter 4: “Perspectives on American Political Parties,” “Divided We Govern,” pp. 179–189

Woll, Chapter 4: “Politics by Other Means,” pp. 200–206

Selection of research paper topic

SC4—The course provides instruction in Political Parties.

Week Five

Campaigns and Elections: Is this the best system to develop and select leaders? Are citizens well served by the current process? **[SC2]**

Elections: How are candidates selected to run for office? What role is played by party organizations, PACs, and money generally in campaigns? What roles do these groups play in the electoral process? What role should they play? Should the present campaign system be overhauled and reformed? **[SC4]**

Due this week: Burns, Chapter 8

Woll, Chapter 4: “Myths and Realities about the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002,” pp. 232–238

Woll, Chapter 5: “Madison’s Dilemma,” pp. 239–246

Woll, Chapter 5: “Interest Groups and the American Political System,” “The Misplaced Obsession with PACs,” pp. 256–267

Woll, Chapter 6: “American Presidential Elections,” pp. 323–327

SC2—The course provides instruction in Political Beliefs, Political Behaviors, and Elections.

SC4—The course provides instruction in Political Parties.

Week Six

Campaigns and Elections: Is this the best system to develop and select leaders? Are citizens well served by the current process?

Media: What role do the media play in elections and shaping public opinion? Is the media an impartial observer or an active participant in political elections and in the formation of public policy? **[SC5]**

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 9 and 10

Woll, Chapter 3: “New York Times v. Sullivan,” pp. 119–125

Woll, Chapter 8: “Media Power and Congressional Power,” pp. 372–379

SC5—The course provides instruction in Mass Media.

Week Seven

Public Policy and the Institutions of National Governance: Congress: How is public policy made? Does the system work as intended? Does the system work for citizens today? How does Congress represent and reflect the interest and desires of the nation? Is Congress representative of the nation as a whole? Is this the most efficient and effective way to make policy? Compare and contrast the makeup and operations of the House and Senate. How has Congress’s role in policy formulation changed over time in relation to the other branches? **[SC6] & [SC7]**

Due this week: Burns, Chapter 11

Woll, Chapter 8: All

SC6—The course provides instruction in Institutions of National Government.

SC7—The course provides instruction in Public Policy and Public Policy Areas.

Week Eight

Public Policy and the Institutions of National Governance: Presidency: How is public policy made? Does the system work as intended? Does the system work for citizens today? What are the formal and informal powers of the presidency? How does the president use these powers to influence policy? Is the president too powerful or not powerful enough vis-à-vis the legislative and judicial branches? **[SC6] & [SC7]**

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 12 and 13
Woll, Chapter 6: “Federalist 70,” pp. 269–274
Woll, Chapter 6: “Presidential Power,” “Presidential Paradoxes,”
“Presidential Character,” pp. 280–298

Week Nine: Spring Break

Week Ten

Public Policy and the Instruments of National Governance: Judiciary: How is public policy made? Does the system work as intended? Does the system work for citizens today? What role do the courts play in interpreting the Constitution and implementing public policy? Are the courts “guilty,” as some critics charge, of supplanting the legislative and executive branches by legislating from the bench? What is the proper role for the judicial branch in the public policy process? What is the evolving relationship between the courts and civil rights? **[SC6] & [SC7]**

SC6—The course provides instruction in Institutions of National Government.

SC7—The course provides instruction in Public Policy and Public Policy Areas.

Due this week: Burns, Chapter 14
Woll, Chapter 9: All

Week Eleven

Public Policy and the Instruments of National Governance: Bureaucracy: How is public policy made? Does the system work as intended? Does the system work for citizens today? What are the specific issues addressed in public policy making? Define an iron triangle. Does it exist, and if so, how does it influence policy implementation? Who controls the bureaucracy: The president? Congress? The people? Does a largely permanent professional bureaucracy serve democracy? **[SC7]**

Due this week: Burns, Chapter 15
Woll, Chapter 7: All Selections from current news stories about bureaucracy **[SC12]**

SC12—The course includes supplemental readings, including contemporary news analyses that strengthen student understanding of the curriculum.

Week Twelve

Case Studies in Public Policy: Who sets policy agendas for our nation? [SC10] How does federalism affect public policy?

Students will research each policy area and give presentations on the following policy areas: **[SC7]**

SC10—The course provides students with practice analyzing information relevant to US government and politics.

- 1. The Economy:** How is the federal budget made? How is monetary policy different from fiscal policy? What is the “global economy”? How does the global economy influence U.S. policy generally and you specifically?
- 2. Social Policy:** What are subsidies and entitlements? What is the proper role for government in social issues such as education, welfare, and crime?
- 3. U.S. Foreign Policy:** What role should the United States play in the world? What is, and what should be, our relationship with the United Nations?

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 19, 20, and 21
Cumulative project assignment/research papers

Week Thirteen

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights: What constitutes free speech? How does the national Bill of Rights apply to states? Do the courts “legislate from the bench”? **[SC8]**

1. **Freedom of Speech, the Press, and Assembly:** What forms of speech are protected? How is the First Amendment affected in times of crisis?
2. **Religion:** What constitutes “establishment”? What are the limits of “free exercise”?

SC8—The course provides instruction in Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

Due this week: Burns, Chapter 16

Woll, Chapter 3: “The Need to Maintain a Free Marketplace of Ideas,” pp. 113–119

Woll, Chapter 3: “Engle v. Vitale,” “Zelman v. Simmons-Harris,” pp. 134–145

Week Fourteen

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights: What is “equal protection” under the law? How does the national Bill of Rights apply to states? Do the courts “legislate from the bench”?

1. **Life, Liberty, and Property:** What is procedural due process? Is there a right to privacy? What do property rights mean in relation to community interests?
2. **Equal Protection and the Fourteenth Amendment:** How has the interpretation of the equal protection clause changed over time? How have laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and affirmative action influenced our understanding of the clause?

Due this week: Burns, Chapters 17 and 18

Woll, Chapter 3: “Gideon v. Wainwright,” pp. 105–113

Woll, Chapter 3: “Plessy v. Ferguson,” “Brown v. Board of Education I & II,” pp. 125–134

Woll, Chapter 3: “Roe v. Wade,” “Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña,” pp. 145–160

Week Fifteen

Review for AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam and in-class final exam

Final exam (30 percent of final course grade)

Week Sixteen**AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam**

Those not taking the AP Exam will have the second part of their final exam in class.