**ADVANCED PLACEMENT**

**UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

**SYLLABUS &**

**STUDENT EXPECTATIONS**



**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 Text:**

Government in America, by Edwards, Wattenberg and Lineberry¹

**Materials needed:**

Class Notebook

Pen or Pencil

**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.

**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 discussions with other students and myself.

Acting as a facilitator, I 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 reading quizzes, written essays, Unit tests 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)

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

1. Political Beliefs and Behaviors
2. Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government
3. Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media
4. Institutions of the National Government: The Congress, The Presidency, The Bureaucracy, and the Federal Courts
5. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
6. Public Policy

**I. Political Beliefs and Behaviors**

Individual citizens hold a variety of beliefs about their government, its leaders, and the U.S. political system in general. It is important for students to understand how these beliefs evolve and the processes by which they are transmitted. Specifically, students should know why U.S. citizens hold certain beliefs about politics, and how families, schools, and the media act to perpetuate or change these beliefs. The ways in which these beliefs affect and inform political participation are also critical. For example, students should know what voting and protest mean to those who engage in them. Finally, it is essential that students understand what leads citizens to differ from one another in their political beliefs and behaviors. We will examine the divergent views of the political process in the United States held by members of specific ethnic and racial groups and the political ramifications of these differences.

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?

• Why do levels of participation and influence in politics vary?

**II. Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government**

The study of modern politics in the United States requires grounding in the Constitutional underpinnings of its government. Students examine the kind of government the Constitution established with particular attention to federalism and the separation of powers. Understanding these developments involves both knowledge of the historical situation at the time of the Constitutional Convention and a grasp of the ideological and philosophical traditions on which the framers drew. We might also address specific concerns of the framers: for example, why Madison feared factions and reasons for the swift passage of the Bill of Rights. We might also choose to examine fundamental pluralism.

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?

**III. Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media**

Students should understand the mechanisms that allow citizens to organize and communicate their interests and concerns. Among these are political parties, elections, political action committees (PACs), interest groups, and the mass media. Students should examine the historical evolution of the U.S. party system, the functions and structures of political parties, and the effects they have on the political process. Important features of this section of the course include an explanation for why some interests are represented by organized groups while others are not, and the consequences of these differences. Students are also expected to understand the role of the media in the political system.

Essential Question

• How have changes in technology influenced political communication and behavior?

**IV. The Institutions of Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy and the Federal Courts**

Students must become familiar with the organizations and powers of the Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the federal courts. An understanding of both the formal and informal powers of these institutions, as well as the ways in which they relate to one another, is essential. Students are also expected to understand the ties between the various branches of national government and political parties, interest groups, public opinion, the media, and state and local governments. For example, a study of the conflicting interests and powers of the President and Congress may help explain the recent struggles to adopt a national budget.

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?

**V. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

An understanding of United States politics includes the study of the development and defense of issues involving civil rights and civil liberties. Basic to this study is an analysis of the workings of the Supreme Court and an awareness of its most significant decisions. Students examine Constitutional interpretations of freedom of speech, assembly, and expression; the rights of the accused; and the civil rights of minority groups and women. For example, students should understand the legal and political evolution of the Supreme Court's decisions on segregation. Finally, it is important that students be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Supreme Court decisions as tools of social change.

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?

**VI. Public Policy**

Public policy is the result of interactions and dynamics among actors, interests, institutions, and processes. The formation of policy agendas, the enactment of public policies by Congress and the President, and the implementation and interpretation of policies by the bureaucracy and the courts are all stages in the policy process with which students should be familiar. Students should also investigate policy networks, iron triangles, and other forms of policy sub governments in the domestic and foreign policy areas.

Essential Question:

• 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.

Free Response Questions:

Number of Questions: 4 and 1 Essay

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

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.

**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: ssinger@amphi.com**

Throughout this course students will need to be in close contact with me and fellow

students. Students are expected to communicate via email thru zoom and google classroom. I 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.

**GRADING**

Students will be evaluated based on chapter quizzes and tests, unit exams, homework assignments, projects, papers, activities and class participation.



1. GRADING SCALE-

The grading scale for assignments and work in this class is as follows:

90 – 100 A

80 – 89 B

70 – 79 C

60 – 69 D

59 – below F

**WELCOME TO AP GOVERNMENT!**