

# AP U.S. Government and Politics

## Syllabus

AP U.S. Government and Politics is an intensive study of the formal and informal structures of government and the processes of the American political system, with an emphasis on policy-making and implementation. This course is designed to prepare students for the AP Exam.

### **GOALS: Students successfully completing this course will:**

- Know important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. Government and Politics
- Understand typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures)
- Be able to analyze and interpret basic data relevant to U.S. Government and Politics

To help students reach these goals the following themes will be covered throughout this course.

### **The following themes will be covered in AP U.S. Government and Politics**

- I. Constitutional Underpinnings of U.S. Government**
- II. Political Beliefs and Behaviors**
- III. Political Parties, Interest Groups, and the Mass Media**
- IV. Institutions of National Government**
- V. Public Policy**
- VI. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

### **Texts**

Janda, Kenneth, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Jerry Goldman. *The Challenge of Democracy*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Woll, Peter. *American Government: Readings and Cases*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Longman, 2003.

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

**Grading and Course Requirements:**

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

**Data Analysis:**

Students will examine multiple forms of information including political maps, election results, and public opinion polls throughout the year.

**Current Events:**

Students are responsible for keeping up with the daily events in the nation and the world. Students will need to stay up to date with events that are going on both locally and nationally. They will be encouraged to read, watch, and listen to several different sources such as The New York Times, NPR, or CNN. Online sources will also be encouraged.

**Tests, Quizzes, and Projects:**

Tests will be given upon completion of specific units i.e (Foundations of U.S Government, Federalism, ect.). Tests will be composed of multiple-choice questions, data based questions, and several essay questions. Quizzes will be given throughout the year and will be focused on vocabulary and important topics covered. Projects will be given periodically and will reflect major topics covered.

**Reading Assignments and Course Calendar****WEEK ONE-TWO: I. Constitutional Underpinnings of U.S Government**

**Foundations of U.S Government:** What is the purpose of government? What was the founders' view of the purpose of government? What made this new system great, and what still applies to founders' initial intent. Why did Madison fear factions? What were the reasons of the swift adoption of the Bill of Rights? Define the following concepts: democratic theory, republicanism, pluralist theory, majoritarianism, and the elitist theory. Considerations that influenced the formulation and adoption of the Constitution

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 1-3  
Woll: "Second Treatise on Civil Government"

**WEEK THREE-FOUR: I. Constitutional Underpinnings of U.S Government**

**Federalism:** Why did the Anti-Federalists fear this new system? Does this new system of government strengthen or weaken the separation of powers between the State and Federal Government? What are the powers of state and local governments when compared to the powers of the National Government. What influence should the federal government have over state and local issues such as education, abortion, and the environment?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 4  
Woll: "Federalist #39 Merits of the Federal System"

**WEEK FIVE-SIX: II. Political Beliefs and Behaviors**

**Political Socialization and Identity:** Political Beliefs, Ideologies, and Stereotypes. What am I? and more importantly why am I that? How do we come by our political beliefs? Is it how or where we were raised? or is it a decision we make on our own? What are the sources of public opinion? What is "political culture? What is the role of the citizen in a civil society? Which citizens vote and why?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 5  
Woll: "Theory of Critical Elections"

**WEEK SEVEN-EIGHT: III: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media**

**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 decision and policy making?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch.5 and 6  
Woll: Federalist 10  
Woll: "Divided We Govern"

**WEEK NINE-TWELVE: III: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media Campaigns and Elections:** Is this the best system to develop and select leaders? Are citizens well served by the current process? How has the electoral process changed over time?

**Elections:** How are candidates selected to run for office? What role is played by party organizations, PAC's and money generally in campaigns? What role do these groups play in the electoral process? Should the current campaign system be overhauled and reformed? What could we expect from the 2008 Presidential election?

**Media:** What role does the media play in elections and shaping public opinion? In what ways does the media influence the electoral process?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 7-10  
Woll: Madison's Dilemma  
Woll: Interest Groups and the American Political System  
Woll: American Presidential Elections  
Woll: Media Power and Congressional Power

**WEEK THIRTEEN-FOURTEEN: IV: Institutions of National Government**

**Congress:** How are our laws made? Does the current system reflect what founders intended? Does the current system adequately 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 focusing on rules and leadership.

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 11  
Woll: Ch. 8

**WEEK FIFTEEN-SIXTEEN: IV: Institution of National Government**

**Presidency:** What are the formal and informal powers of the presidency? How has Presidential power changed over time? How have Presidents abused/used powers throughout history? How do the other branches of government check and balance out the Executive Branch?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 12  
Woll: Federalist # 70  
Woll: Presidential Character

**WEEK SEVENTEEN-EIGHTEEN: IV: Institutions of National Government**

**Judiciary:** What role do the courts play in interpreting the Constitution and implementing public policy? What is the proper role for the judicial branch in the public policy process? How do cases make their way to the Supreme Court?

**Readings Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 13  
Woll: Chapter 9

**WEEK NINETEEN-TWENTY: IV: Institutions of National Government**

**Bureaucracy:** 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 implementations? Who controls the bureaucracy: The president? Congress? The people? Does a largely permanent professional bureaucracy serve democracy?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 14  
Woll: Ch. 7

**WEEK TWENTYONE-TWENTYTWO: V: Public Policy**

**Case Studies in Public Policy:** Who sets policy agendas for our nation? How does federalism affect public policy? Potential topics include:

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?
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 U.S play in the world? What is, and what should be, our relationship with the United Nations?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 17-20

**WEEK TWENTYTHREE-TWENTYFOUR: VI: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

**1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Freedoms:** What constitutes free speech? How does the national Bill of Rights apply to states? Do the courts “legislate” from the bench?

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

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 15  
Woll: Engle v. Vitale

**WEEK TWENTYFIVE-TWENTYSIX: VI: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

**14<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** What is the “equal protection: under the law? How does the national Bill of Rights apply to the 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 Under the Law:** 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?

**Reading Due:** Challenge of Democracy: Ch. 16  
Woll: Gideon v. Wainwright  
Woll: Plessy v. Ferguson  
Woll: Roe v. Wade

**WEEK TWENTYSEVEN-TWENTYNINE**

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

**WEEK THIRTY:**

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