AP® U.S. Government and Politics Syllabus

Course Overview
AP U.S. Government and Politics is a year-long course designed for students with a strong interest in political philosophies, processes, and the structure of government in the United States. Students will be expected to keep up with a heavy load of reading assignments from several sources. The course covers a number of key concepts required by the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Framework. Throughout the course, current political events will be tied into discussion and assignments to enhance student understanding of class material. The primary purpose of the course is to prepare students for the AP Exam. Assignments and tests are designed based on AP Exam requirements and format.

Primary Text
[CR16] — Students and teachers have access to a college-level U.S. government and politics textbook.

Supplementary Materials
Case summaries from www.oyez.org. These case summaries include the 15 required Supreme Court cases. [CR15: Supreme Court Cases]
[CR15] — Students are provided opportunities to analyze the 15 required Supreme Court cases as described in the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Framework and connect them to other non-required landmark cases. All nine required foundational documents are incorporated into the course, accessed from links on the instructor website, and the interactive US Constitution is accessed at www.constitutioncenter.org.
[CR10: foundational documents]
[CR10] — The course provides opportunities to analyze and interpret qualitative sources (primary and secondary sources including the nine required foundational documents) to explain how they relate to political concepts. Other materials used in the course will come from sources such as newspapers, magazines, and the internet.

Important Websites
AP Government Resources – Constitution Center website
College Board – AP United States Government and Politics course overview on Advances in AP website

Grading
Grades will be determined by a number of assignments including tests, quizzes, essays, lab projects, lecture questions, current events commentary, homework and final exam.
The following grading scale will be used for the course:
A 100 – 90%
B 89 – 80%
C 79 – 70%
D 69 – 60%
F 59 – 0%

Methods of Instruction, Expectations, and Advice
The course will be a mix of direct instruction and independent learning. In all units, students will have pre-reading assignments, cold call lecture questions over the reading and other information that will be covered. Exams will be based on knowing and applying information that is found within unit information, either presented in lecture or included in the reading. Guided readings, Vocabulary and Reviews will be completed in class or as homework, and reviewed in class. Students will be encouraged to stay engaged, ask questions, and complete all assignments as they are covered in class to build understanding (take
notes on the notes). All assignments will be handed out in class, and most assignments and presentations can also be found on the class website.

Some class time will also be given to allow students to work on readings, essays, and projects. Students will be expected to make good use of class time for individual and group assignments. Many assignments will be started in class and finished as homework. There will almost always be a portion of class dedicated to discussion of a reading on the day an assignment is due. Students will be chosen at random for cold call questions, but are not assessed otherwise based on participation in lectures; but making comments and asking questions will help build understanding, critical thinking, and make class much more interesting. The same can be said for the discussion of current events during class time. Students are encouraged to pay attention to the news on a day-to-day basis, complete a weekly commentary on a political news article, and actively participate in class discussions concerning the American political system and other items in the news. Like anything else in life, effort and enthusiasm will go a long way in the course!
Assignments
The following is a sampling of the types of assignments that will be given throughout the course.

- **Reading Responses** – Students will be given many reading assignments throughout the course. A frequent assignment will be to give an oral and sometimes written response to a reading as prompted by the teacher. This will typically include summarizing, checking for understanding, and personal thoughts and analysis of the reading.
- **Current Political Events Analysis** – Students will be assigned to read newspapers and watch television programs dealing with current political events. Assignments will be given to discuss and share opinions on the events as well as make connections with class material.
- **Projects/Presentations** – Students will complete several assignments that involve researching various topics. On several projects, students will also be required to give a presentation on their topic.
- **Election Assignments** – Students will do assignments based on elections depending on the year and the elections taking place. This will include taking sides on candidates and issues, debating, and voting.
- **Graphs, Charts and Maps** – Students will frequently receive statistical information in the form of graphs, charts, and maps. Assignments and tests will ask students to interpret the information or create graphical information based on data.
- **Tests** – Students will take exams throughout the year, at the conclusion of major topics and units. Tests will include multiple-choice and essay questions similar to what students will see on the AP Exam. Class time will be used to learn strategies to succeed on various question types that will be found on class tests and the AP Exam.

Course Units
I. Foundations of American Democracy
II. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
III. American Political Ideologies and Beliefs
IV. Political Participation
V. Interactions among Branches of Government

Skills and Practices
- Describe and explain constitutional and political institutions, principles, processes, models, and beliefs.
- Explain connections among political behavior, political institutions, beliefs, and cultural factors.
- Read, analyze, and interpret quantitative data to draw conclusions about political principles, processes, behavior, and outcomes.
- Read, analyze, and interpret qualitative sources.
- Develop an argument about political principles, processes, behaviors, and outcomes.

Course Plan
Unit I: Foundations of American Democracy
Primary Sources: *Federalist No. 10, Brutus No. 1*, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, *Federalist No. 51."

Key Concepts: [CR1]
- Founding Ideas – Limited government, natural rights, popular sovereignty, republicanism, social contract
- Balance Between Governmental Power and Protection of Individual Freedom
- Constitutional Framing and Ratification – Articles of Confederation/weaknesses, anti-federalist/federalist perspective, key compromises, amendment process
- Federalism
• Separation of Powers and the Checks and Balances
• Present Day Constitutional Issues in Policy Making

[CR1] — The course includes the Foundations of American Democracy Unit and addresses all related big ideas (BIs) and enduring understandings (EUs).

Cases: McCulloch v. Maryland, U.S. v. Lopez

Video: Patriot Act
Graphic: How Politics Has Changed, The Rules of Politics

Sample Assignments:
• On an exam, students will name, describe, and explain the role of each branch of government.[CR13]
• Students will investigate the extent to which states vary in their public policies. By comparing the specific aspects of policies passed to address issue areas (e.g., mobile phone use while driving, legal use of marijuana, death penalty, children’s access to health care), students will consider the role of states as “laboratories of democracy” and more clearly understand the regional, cultural, and political differences reflected through federalism. [CR6]
• Students will read Federalist No. 10 and Federalist No. 51, respond to a number of prompts from the reading, and take part in a class discussion about the major arguments made by James Madison in the reading. The prompts will include the following:
  o Why does Madison believe in separate branches (departments) of government? How would the system described by Madison keep one branch from overtaking another? How did Madison view human nature?
  o What is the “double security…to the rights of the people”?
  o According to Madison, in what type of republic is liberty most safe? Explain. [CR10: activity]
• Students will participate in a “Fishbowl” min-debate and a class debate, which consider the fundamental tensions between effective national policy and state or local control over implementation of public policy. Students will identify contemporary public policies where the goals of the national government conflict with the interests of state governments. Students will discuss their policies in class and will follow up the discussion with an essay summarizing the major conflict between national and state priorities on their selected policies. [CR12]
• Students will be participate in a debate regarding who should determine limitations on abortion, arguing for State vs. Marblecake vs. Federal control. Students will relate this required case to over connected cases and to the broader issue of privacy, and may also connect it to other foundational issues, such as commerce. [CR10: activity]
• Students will participate in a lower court simulation, in which a Muslim was suspected of terrorism and a warrantless search was executed [CR10: activity]
• Early in the school year, students will be introduced to an applied civics project that will include presentations that occur after the winter break. We will have several assignments throughout the semester, including an initial plan submitted for approval, and progress checks every three weeks. Students will be given a rubric with general requirements, and a number of options to complete the assignment. Options could include, but are not limited to:
  o Community service related to a public policy issue
  o Attendance/participation in local government meetings (school board, city, county)
  o Volunteering with campaigns
  o Working with an activist group
  o Working with a local party organization
Creating a campaign/movement related to a policy issue
The final product includes student presentations, done through a “poster session” (to be explained in detail when the assignment is handed out) in January, and a reflective essay on the lessons learned from this applied civics project. [CR14]

[CR6] — The course integrates public policy within each unit.
[CR10] — The course provides opportunities to analyze and interpret qualitative sources (primary and secondary sources including the nine required foundational documents) to explain how they relate to political concepts.
[CR12] — The course provides opportunities to apply course concepts and Supreme Court decisions in real-world contexts or scenarios.
[CR13] — The course provides opportunities to develop an argument in the form of an essay, supported by relevant evidence, about a concept described in the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Framework.
[CR14] — Students are provided with an opportunity to engage in a political science research or applied civics project tied to the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Framework that culminates in a presentation of findings.

Unit II: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
American Government textbook: Chapter 5 - Civil Liberties, Chapter 6 - Civil Rights
Primary Sources: “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (Martin Luther King, Jr.), Federalist No. 10, Brutus No. 1, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, Federalist No. 51.

Key Concepts: [CR3]
• First Amendment – Establishment clause, free exercise clause, limits on expression, free speech/press v. social order/security
• Rights of the Accused – Self-incrimination, search and seizure, exclusionary rule and exceptions, trial rights
• The Incorporation Doctrine – Fourteenth Amendment/due process, free speech, right to counsel, right to privacy, selective incorporation
• Civil Rights – Fourteenth Amendment/equal protection, school segregation, civil rights in Congress, social movements, affirmative action
[CR3] — The course includes the Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Unit and addresses all related big ideas (BIs) and enduring understandings (EUs).


Video: Excerpt, People v. Larry Flynt, Ian van Ornum (Youtube)
Graphic: Civil Liberties Crib sheet, Falwell Ad
Reading: DC Handgun case, Landmark Case Summaries

Sample Assignments:
• Students will be assigned the DC v Heller case, will create a brief of the case, and answer questions that relate this required case to the broader issue involved, connecting it to other non-required, contemporary Supreme Court cases addressing a similar issue. This will be followed by a “fishbowl” debate between groups of students regarding how to resolve an issue when rights come into conflict. [CR7][CR15: activity]
• Students will participate in a lower court simulation, in which a Muslim was suspected of terrorism and a warrantless search was executed. [CR10: activity]
• Students will read the Landmark Cases Summary and complete a worksheet brief for each case. Students will be required to memorize a short impact of each case and complete a matching quiz. [CR12]

[CR7] — The course addresses the big ideas by connecting enduring understandings across one or more units.
[CR10] — The course provides opportunities to analyze and interpret qualitative sources (primary and secondary sources including the nine required foundational documents) to explain how they relate to political concepts.
[CR12] — The course provides opportunities to apply course concepts and Supreme Court decisions in real-world contexts or scenarios.
[CR15] — Students are provided opportunities to analyze the 15 required Supreme Court cases as described in the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Framework and connect them to other non-required landmark cases.

Unit III: American Political Ideologies and Beliefs

*American Government* textbook: Chapter 4 - American Political Culture, Chapter 18 - Economic Policy, Chapter 7 - Public Opinion

**Key Concepts:** [CR4] [CR7]
- Development of Political Beliefs
- Measurement and Use of Public Opinion in Politics
- Ideology and Its Effects on Policy Debate and Outcomes

[CR4] — The course includes the American Political Ideologies and Beliefs Unit and addresses all related big ideas (BIs) and enduring understandings (EUs).
[CR7] — The course addresses the big ideas by connecting enduring understandings across one or more units.

**Graphic:** Wordles from Republican and Democratic Acceptance Speeches
**Reading:** Political Ideology Survey

**Sample Assignments:**
- Students will use the official party platforms of the two major political parties to compare social and economic policies. A graphic organizer will be created to highlight major differences between Democratic and Republican policy preferences. [CR6]
- Market Segmentation Activity: Students will investigate different political segments of society using PRIZM market segments. [CR9]
- The class will explore the interactive graphic “historical electoral college map” at Archives.gov which charts state Electoral College results from 1964 to the present. Students will respond to a number of questions and prompts relating to the graphics. Questions will deal with a number of issues including major historical shifts in support and the impact of third parties. [CR11]
- Students will create and implement a poll of a scientific cross-section of fellow students on a political topic, chosen from a list. They will formulate the results in a chart and present to the class. [CR8][CR9]
- Students will read an article by Milton Friedman and employ the tools of Fiscal and Monetary policy in a hypothetical recession to solve the financial crisis. The exercise will be followed by an essay around the actions following the 2008-9 Recession. [CR6]

[CR6] — The course integrates public policy within each unit.
[CR7] — The course addresses the big ideas by connecting enduring understandings across one or more units.
[CR8] — The course provides opportunities to analyze and compare political concepts.
The course provides opportunities to analyze and interpret quantitative data to explain what the data implies or illustrates about political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors.

**Unit IV: Political Participation**

*American Government* textbook: Chapter 8 - Political Participation, Chapter 9 - Political Parties, Chapter 10 - Elections and Campaigns, Chapter 11 - Interest Groups, Chapter 12 - The Media

**Key Concepts:** [CR5]
- Media – New technology/social media, bias, diversity of sources, credibility
- Parties – Activities, leadership structure, weakened role, two-party system
- Interest Groups – Major roles, multiple access points, PACs, competition/pluralism
- Voting – Amendments, laws, barriers, factors in voter behavior
- Elections/Campaigns – Types, finance laws and cases, electoral college

[CR5] — The course includes the Political Participation Unit and addresses all related big ideas (BIs) and enduring understandings (EUs).

**Cases:** Buckley v. Valeo, Citizens United v. FEC, McCutcheon v. FEC.

**Video:** Ads for MoveOn, Swiftboat Vets, free enterprise fund, program for America; Big Think: Thoughts about third parties by Lee Hamilton; Religious right: Then and Now; Interview with Bill Moyers.

**Graphic:** 50 Parties; Party Platforms 2012-16; Dark Money Shadow infographic.

**Reading:** Pew Research: Party Affiliation; Wilson Quarterly “There’s no 50-50 split in America;” The Practical Consequences of McCutcheon; Why Americans Hate the Media.

**Sample Assignments:**
- Students will study party platforms and write an essay describing three components of each platform for the two major parties, and explaining the relationship between the platforms and the voting patterns of members in each party. [CR8]
- Students will look up campaign financing information from the 2012 and 2016 presidential races and fill in a graphic organizer. Categories will include hard money, party expenditures, independent expenditures, and large individual donations to independent groups. The class will also respond to a number of prompts in writing, analyzing the spending and drawing conclusions based on the data. The following websites will be used for the assignment: [CR9]
- Students will complete a WWNorton online candidate simulation in which they are required to maneuver through the candidate fundraising process and securing votes in order to get elected. [CR12]
- Students will participate in a Lobby Simulation in which students start with a “Healthy Forests” bill and take roles as congressmen, paid lobbyists and industry/association executives, marking up the bill and considering the end version. Congressmen will be charged with collecting enough money to get re-elected, Lobbyists and executives will be given various amounts of money. The party that controls the chamber after the election will win a prize. [CR12]

[CR8] — The course provides opportunities to analyze and compare political concepts.
[CR9] — The course provides opportunities to analyze and interpret quantitative data to explain what the data implies or illustrates about political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors.
[CR12] — The course provides opportunities to apply course concepts and Supreme Court decisions in real-world contexts or scenarios.
Unit V: Interactions Among Branches of Government

*American Government* textbook: Chapter 13 - Congress, Chapter 14 - The Presidency, Chapter 15 - The Bureaucracy, Chapter 16 - The Judiciary, Chapter 17 - Domestic Policy, Chapter 19 - Social Welfare Policy, Chapter 20 - Foreign and Military Policy, Chapter 21 Environmental Policy

Primary Sources: *Federalist No. 70, Federalist No. 78.*

**Key Concepts:** [CR2]
- Legislative Branch – Enumerated powers, implied powers, House/Senate differences, lawmaking Process, influences on legislative behavior, oversight
- Executive Branch – Formal powers, informal powers, checks on/from Congress, communication, execution of laws
- Judicial Branch – Judicial review, role of precedent, issues with life tenure, checks on the Court, activism/restraint
- The Bureaucracy – Role of departments/agencies, hiring/promotion, discretionary authority, checks and balances/multiple masters

[CR2] — The course includes the Interactions Among Branches of Government Unit and addresses all related big ideas (BIs) and enduring understandings (EUs).

**Cases:** Baker v. Carr, Shaw v. Reno, Marbury v. Madison

**Video:** 60 Minutes Interview with Justices Breyer and Ginsburg; Schoolhouse Rock, “I’m a Bill;” Mr. Smith Goes to Washington; The Cheney Plan; Presidential Succession Song (Youtube); Bureaucrats on an Escalator; Land of Confusion music video; GMO Controversies;

**Graphic:** Oregon Congressional Districts; Affordable Care Act; Policy Classification Table;

**Reading:** Congress for Kids Packet; We The People: Presidency; Order of Presidential Succession; Max Weber on Bureaucracy; Ike’s Farewell; Regulatory Policy Model; Nader’s Raiders; Regulatory Agencies; Soviet Cola (Youtube); Social Security/Medicare solutions; A Brief History of American Foreign Policy (Constitutional Rights Foundation);

**Sample Assignments:**
- On an exam, students will list, explain, and give examples of enumerated and implied powers of Congress.[CR2]
- Students are provided with two readings on the power of the presidency, one of which argues that the president acts as the “steward of the people” and should expand power beyond the specific grants of presidential power in Article II, and the other argues that the president should simply follow the Constitution and exercise only that authority specifically granted in Article II. In groups, they analyze the two arguments. Students then write a thesis statement taking one position or another on presidential power. They will engage in a “fishbowl” debate with audience questions. Students will incorporate these steps in an essay that they complete individually. [CR13]
- Students will use recent articles from credible sources to explain various examples of gerrymandering to their classmates. The assignment will include article summaries and opinions about the practice, and a class discussion about the causes and role of the redistricting schemes. Issues covered will include demographic trends involved in drawing lines (packing of urban areas), racial gerrymandering and civil rights questions, and the impact of safe districts on electoral results and the composition of the House of Representatives. They will use a class map to “gerrymander” the class into protected districts for boys and girls. This activity will be in conjunction with study of the most recent Supreme Court cases involving Wisconsin, Maryland and North Carolina. [CR8]
- After a brief introduction to strict and loose constructionism, students will watch a 60 Minutes clip of the late Supreme Court Justice Scalia explaining and defending the doctrine of originalism, and Justice
Ginsberg explaining her activist perspective. Students will then be assigned to read and respond to “What Am I? A Potted Plant?” by Judge Richard A. Posner. In a written response, students will do the following:

- Define activism and strict constructionism
- Explain Posner’s main argument
- Explain historical examples of activism/policy making (according to the author)
- Give an opinion on whether the student agrees or disagrees with Posner

• On an exam, students will describe and compare the House of Representatives and Senate. This will include organization, role of leadership, powers, and other differences between the two chambers.

• Students will watch the video “I’m a Bill,” read an article about the bill process and participate in a contest to put in order the steps required for a bill to become law.

• Students will participate in a short congressional committee simulation, and write an essay relating congressional committee work to issue networks and iron triangles.

• Students will work in small groups to develop a plan to address the federal debt. Students are provided with the federal budget for the most recent three years provided by the Office of Management and Budget. Groups will research a number of topics involving government revenue and spending. Students will develop a plan to control/reduce the deficit and a presentation explaining the details. In the presentation, they will also address the counterarguments to their plans and political obstacles to creating the policy. Students must illustrate how their plans achieve the goal of deficit and debt reduction and assess the likely political consequences coming from the plans.

• Students will watch the Land of Confusion video and relate the scenes to foreign and military policy and the military industrial complex.

• Students will engage in a power grab competition, where one branch of government seeks to violate a provision of the Constitution. The other branches have to determine how to check the violator with a Constitutional citation (This exercise will be repeated for Executive and Judicial chapters as well).

• The course includes the Interactions Among Branches of Government Unit and addresses all related big ideas (BIs) and enduring understandings (EUs).

• The course addresses the big ideas by connecting enduring understandings across one or more units.

• The course provides opportunities to analyze and compare political concepts.

• The course provides opportunities to analyze and interpret quantitative data to explain what the data implies or illustrates about political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors.

• The course provides opportunities to apply course concepts and Supreme Court decisions in real-world contexts or scenarios.

• The course provides opportunities to develop an argument in the form of an essay, supported by relevant evidence, about a concept described in the AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Framework.