



United States Government and Politics

Course Summary:

The AP® United States Government and Politics course provides high school students with college-level instruction in using disciplinary practices to examine key ideas, institutions, and behaviors in American government. The student will look critically at the fundamental beliefs and philosophies that shaped American government and how those ideas have been interpreted and applied throughout history. The student will develop a deep understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the American political system—both its formal and informal processes and procedures. In addition, the student will examine specific governmental institutions, policies, interactions, and behaviors within the political system. Through study of each of these areas, the student will hone reasoning skills by developing evidence-based arguments, interpreting various types of data, and analyzing key documents, including foundational documents and Supreme Court decisions. This course effectively prepares the student for the AP United States Government and Politics exam by providing practice in the skills necessary to draw reasoned conclusions in both multiple-choice and constructed-response formats.

Course Outline

1. Course Overview

1. Getting Started in AP U.S. Government and Politics

- Analyze the structure and content of the AP U.S. Government and Politics course
- Identify course expectations and how to be successful in the course
- Identify the materials you will use
- Determine a plan for preparing for the AP exam

2. Foundations of Democracy

1. Foundational Ideas

- Describe the central ideas of the limited government in the United States
- Explain how the central ideas of the limited government in the United States are reflected in the Declaration of Independence
- Identify how the central ideas of the limited government in the United States are still central to debates about government power today

2. The Government That Failed

- Describe the government established by the Articles of Confederation and the balance between state and national powers under this government
- Summarize the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation
- Explain the three theoretical models of representative government
- Describe the goals of the Philadelphia Convention and the Constitution as reflected in the Preamble to the Constitution

3. Negotiations and Compromise

- Describe the negotiations and compromises at the Constitutional Convention that balanced power between small states and larger states

- Analyze the impact of slavery on the balance of regional power in the Constitution
 - Explain the purpose of the amendment process as outlined in Article V, including the multiple points of origination for constitutional amendments
 - Draw connections between unresolved debates at the Constitutional Convention and current political debates
4. Separating the Powers
- Explain the basic roles and functions of each branch of government
 - Describe the system of checks and balances established in the Constitution for the federal government
 - Explain how checks and balances among the separate branches of government protect the freedom and will of the people in the U.S. government
 - Describe the impact that separated powers and checks and balances have on the policymaking process
 - Analyze historic and contemporary examples of checks and balances
5. Protecting Individual Liberties
- Describe the debate over the ratification of the Constitution
 - Summarize the arguments against ratification of the Constitution as expressed by the Anti-Federalists
 - Describe the process that led to the addition of the Bill of Rights
6. Factions in Democracy
- Summarize the arguments in favor of a powerful, centralized government as expressed in Federalist, no. 10
 - Compare the arguments in Brutus I and Federalist, no. 10, considering the models of representative democracy
 - Analyze how modern institutions and political behavior reflect the tensions between models of democracy
7. Balancing State and Federal Power
- Summarize the enumerated powers and unenumerated powers of the federal government
 - Describe powers reserved for the states under the U.S. Constitution
 - Explain how the powers of the federal government and state governments often intersect and overlap
8. A Shifting Balance
- Compare different interpretations of how power should be balanced between the national and state governments, particularly interpretations of the necessary and proper clause, the interstate commerce clause, and the Tenth Amendment
 - Analyze the changing interpretation of the balance of power between the national and state governments based on Supreme Court cases, including *McCulloch v. Maryland* and *United States v. Lopez*
9. Unit Review
- Explain how the ideas that form the basis of limited government in the United States are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution
 - Explain the models of representative democracy and how they are visible in political institutions, politics, events, and debates
 - Analyze the factors that contributed to the development of the U.S. Constitution, including the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, the role of compromise during the Constitutional Convention, and the ratification debate

- Assess how the Constitution protects the freedom and will of the people of the United States through separation of powers and checks and balances
- Examine the different interpretations of how power should be balanced between the national and state governments

10. Unit Test

- Explain how the ideas that form the basis of limited government in the United States are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution
- Explain the models of representative democracy and how they are visible in political institutions, politics, events, and debates
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3. Interaction Among Branches

1. The Federal Bureaucracy

- Describe how the federal government relies on bureaucracy to carry out its responsibilities
- Explain how the federal bureaucracy uses its authority to pass legislation and implement political changes
- Analyze how the federal bureaucracy works to maintain the separation of powers as established in the U.S. Constitution

2. Congress: Structure, Powers, and Functions

- Summarize the organization, processes, and powers of the two houses of the legislative branch
- Analyze how the structure and operation of the legislative branch demonstrates the republican ideal in the U.S. government

3. Checks and Balances on the Legislative Branch

- Analyze the limitations of the legislative branch's power
- Describe the interactions between the legislative branch and the other two branches of the federal government
- Analyze how the federal bureaucracy works to maintain the separation of powers as established in the U.S. Constitution

4. Elections and Political Parties

- Describe how elections influence congressional structure and behavior
- Summarize the history and role of political parties in the United States
- Analyze the methods that can be used to influence election results

5. President and Congress

- Analyze how confrontations arise between the president's agenda and that of Congress
- Explain how the president and the executive branch agencies work together to carry out the goals of the administration
- Identify how Congress is empowered to hold the executive branch accountable

6. The President's Powers

- Analyze how the president brings about policy changes
- Explain how presidential power is interpreted and can change
- Describe how the president's relationship with the electorate is influenced by communication technology

7. The Judicial Branch and Judicial Review

- Explain what judicial review is and how it can curb the power of other governmental powers
- Evaluate how judicial review and lifetime appointments are reasons to debate the extent of the Supreme Court's authority
- Explain how the legislative and executive branches can limit the power of the Supreme Court

8. Unit Review

- Analyze the structure and powers of the legislative branch and the law-making process
- Analyze how each branch of government provides oversight and limits the powers of other branches
- Assess how the president can implement a policy agenda, the role of communication technology, potential conflicts with Congress, and the justifications for using formal and informal presidential powers
- Evaluate the principle of judicial review and the political discussion about the Supreme Court's power
- Explain the discretionary and rule-making authority of the federal bureaucracy to carry out the government's responsibilities

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4. **Civil Liberties and Rights**

1. The Bill of Rights

- Define the purpose of the Bill of Rights
- Describe the civil liberties and rights protected in the Bill of Rights
- Explain why the application of the Bill of Rights is continuously interpreted by the courts

2. Freedoms and Limitations

- Define the purpose of the freedoms as granted in the Bill of Rights and how the equal protection clause has been used to support expanded notions of equality
- Describe the two types of religious freedom as defined by the courts
- Describe the limitations on freedom of speech as defined by the courts
- Analyze how the Supreme Court's interpretation of the First and Second Amendments is rooted in the notion of individual liberty

3. Selective Incorporation

- Explain the doctrine of selective incorporation and its implications for extending protections to the states
- Describe how the Bill of Rights has been used to expand the rights of people accused of committing crime
- Explain the right to privacy as defined in *Roe v. Wade*

4. Due Process and Equal Rights

- Explain the concept of due process and how it limits the power of the states
 - Describe the purpose and interpretation of the equal protection clause
 - Explain the doctrine of separate but equal and the manner in which it was overthrown
5. Rights of the Accused
- Describe how the protections in the Fourth Amendment have been applied through the due process clause
 - Describe the significance of an accused person's due process rights as protected by the Fifth and Sixth Amendments, including the Miranda rule, the protection from unreasonable searches and seizures, and the right to an attorney
6. Social Movements
- Explain how the civil rights movement led to the women's liberation movement
 - Identify how the 1964 Civil Rights Act assisted with women's liberation
 - Explain how feminists used the equal protection clause to advance the rights of women
7. Government Responses
- Identify the reasons for the emergence of affirmative action
 - Describe how democracy and civil rights are interconnected
 - Explain how the U.S. government has responded to social movements
8. Balancing Individual Freedom with Public Safety
- Describe Supreme Court decisions that have attempted to balance claims of individual freedom with laws designed to ensure public safety
 - Explain how the federal and state governments have worked to balance concerns about public safety with individual rights in the Second and Fourth Amendments
9. Unit Review
- Explain the rights protected in the Bill of Rights and how the Constitution protects civil liberties
 - Examine how interpretations of the protections within the Bill of Rights have changed over time
 - Analyze the doctrine of selective incorporation and how the protections in constitutional amendments have been applied to the states
 - Assess how the interpretation and application of the due process clause in the Fourteenth Amendment has limited states from infringing upon individual rights
 - Assess how the equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment has influenced policy changes in response to social movements, including the restriction and protection of minority rights
10. Unit Test
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- Assess how the equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment has influenced policy changes in response to social movements, including the restriction and protection of minority rights

5. Mid-Semester Check

1. Mid-Semester Review: How the Government Works
 - Review the ideas and documents that were foundational in the establishment of the U.S. government
 - Review the structure and powers of each of the three branches of the U.S. federal government, and how they interact with each other and the people
 - Review the rights and protections the U.S. government extends to citizens, and the limitations of those rights
2. Take a Mid-Semester Check
 - Explain the core values and fundamental political philosophies underpinning the American government
 - Examine the structure of the American government, how powers are divided and shared, and how the interactions between different branches of government influence policy

6. American Political Culture and Beliefs

1. American Political Culture
 - Summarize the core values of U.S. citizens, including individualism, equality of opportunity, free enterprise, rule of law, and limited government
 - Explain the different interpretations of core values
 - Define American political culture
2. Political Socialization
 - Describe the process of political socialization
 - Explain how culture influences political attitudes
 - Summarize how globalization has impacted U.S. political culture
3. Democratic and Republican Parties
 - Describe the ideological positions of the Democratic Party
 - Describe the ideological positions of the Republican Party
 - Explain how U.S. political culture influences public policy
4. Views on the Marketplace
 - Describe liberal ideologies' views on governmental regulation of the marketplace
 - Describe conservative ideologies' views on governmental regulation of the marketplace
 - Describe libertarian ideologies' views on governmental regulation of the marketplace
 - Explain why political ideologies vary on the government's role in the marketplace
5. Views on Social Issues
 - Describe liberal ideologies' views on government involvement in social issues
 - Describe conservative ideologies' views on government involvement in social issues
 - Describe libertarian ideologies' views on government involvement in social issues
 - Explain how political ideologies impact public policies regarding social issues
6. Scientific Polls
 - Describe how public opinion data is gathered through polls
 - Explain the impact of public opinion data on elections and policy debates
7. Evaluating Poll Data and the Media
 - Describe the reliability and veracity of public opinion data

- Analyze how the media impacts U.S. political culture

8. Unit Review

- Examine the cultural factors that shape how individuals and communities interpret core political values
- Analyze how differing interpretations of key political values impact the relationships among citizens and between citizens and the government
- Assess the elements of a scientific poll as well as the quality and credibility of public opinion polling data
- Examine varying political ideologies and their views toward the government's role in market regulation and social issues
- Evaluate how public policies reflect the values, attitudes, and beliefs of different political ideologies

9. Unit Test

7. **Political Participation**

1. Voting Rights and Behavior

- Describe how the U.S. Constitution protects voting rights
- Describe how U.S. laws, including the Voting Rights Act, protect voting rights
- Explain the rational-choice voting, retrospective voting, prospective voting, and party-line voting models of behavior

2. Voter Turnout

- Compare and contrast political models explaining voting behavior
- Explain how structural barriers affect voter turnout, including state voter registration laws and voting procedures
- Explain how types of elections affect voter turnout, including mid-term and general elections
- Summarize factors influencing voter participation and choice

3. Linkage Institutions

- Define linkage institutions
- Explain how political parties, interest groups, elections, and media are linkage institutions
- Analyze the function of political parties for the electorate and government

4. Political Parties and Voting

- Explain the role of parties in candidate-centered campaigns and candidate nomination
- Describe how parties modify policies and messaging to appeal to various voters
- Analyze how party structure has been affected by campaign finance law, changes in communication, and data-management technology
- Explain the structural barriers of the winner-take-all voting system to third-party and independent candidates, compared with proportional voting systems
- Describe the effects of incorporating third-party agendas into major political party agendas

5. Interest Groups and Voting

- Define interest groups
- Analyze the benefits and drawbacks of interest groups
- Describe ways in which interest groups exert political influence
- Explain how the effects of unequal access to decision makers and the "free rider" problem influence elections and policy making

6. Influences on Policy and the Electoral College

- Explain how single-issue groups, ideological and social movements, and protest movements form and work to influence public policy

- Describe the role of interest groups, professional organizations, social movements, the military, and bureaucratic agencies in influencing policymaking at various stages and to varying degrees
 - Describe how elections and political parties relate to policy shifts and initiatives
 - Compare and contrast the Electoral College and the national popular vote for president
 - Analyze the questions the Electoral College raises about facilitating and impeding democracy
7. Campaigns and Voting
- Explain the factors that affect U.S. presidential and congressional elections
 - Describe the benefits and drawbacks of professional consultants, rising costs, longer durations, and the influence of social media in and on political campaigns
 - Explain how laws about campaign finance relate to the debate about money and free speech
8. Media and Voting
- Describe how changes in traditional news media and technologies have influenced how citizens acquire political information
 - Explain how the media uses polling results and the impact of polling on elections
 - Describe the ways in which media coverage, analysis, and commentary influence political participation
 - Analyze debates on media bias
 - Summarize the media factors influencing the nature of democratic debate and level of political knowledge
9. Unit Review
- Analyze the linkage institutions that facilitate citizens' participation in government, including the media, political parties, interest groups, and social movements
 - Analyze the factors that facilitate and deter voter participation in elections
 - Analyze the election process, including campaign organizations, finance, and strategies
 - Evaluate the positive and negative impacts of modern campaigns on the election process
10. Unit Test
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 - Evaluate the positive and negative impacts of modern campaigns on the election process

8. Course Review and Full-Length Practice Exam

1. Course Review: How the Government Works

- Review the central ideas of the limited government in the United States
- Review the basic roles and functions of each branch of government
- Review the system of checks and balances established in the Constitution for the federal government
- Review how the federal bureaucracy uses its authority to pass legislation and implement political changes

2. Course Review: Rights and Liberties
 - Review the civil liberties and rights protected in the Bill of Rights
 - Review the doctrine of selective incorporation and its implications for extending protections to the states
 - Review the concept of due process and how it limits the power of the state
 - Review how democracy and civil rights are interconnected
3. Course Review: Political Beliefs
 - Review the core values of U.S. citizens, including individualism, equality of opportunity, free enterprise, rule of law, and limited government
 - Review how U.S. political culture influences public policy
 - Review how the media impacts U.S. political culture
4. Course Review: By the People
 - Review how the U.S. Constitution protects voting rights
 - Review factors influencing voter participation and choice
 - Review ways in which interest groups exert political influence
5. Full-Length Practice Exam
 - Explain the core values and fundamental political philosophies underpinning the American government
 - Analyze foundational documents, significant Supreme Court decisions, and political data
 - Assess the cultural factors and institutions that both aid and inhibit people's participation in the government
 - Analyze the structure of the American government, how powers are divided and shared, and how the interactions between different branches of government influence policy
9. **Semester Project: From Bill to Law**
 1. Choosing a Law
 - Review a selection of recent laws
 - Identify laws that relate to research interests
 2. Researching the Law
 - Identify research questions to investigate
 - Analyze appropriate primary and secondary resources to conduct research
 - Identify relationships among legal and political documents to organize research
 - Create a bibliography of resources
 3. The Law-Making Process
 - Analyze the law-making process
 - Identify obstacles to a bill becoming a law
 - Describe the process of specific legislation becoming a law
 4. Outlining the Essay
 - Create an outline of an argumentative essay
 - Create an outline of a presentation based on an argumentative essay
 - Identify specific and relevant evidence to support the essay and presentation
 5. Creating the Essay and Presentation
 - Analyze events and ideas in the law-making process in order to formulate a cohesive narrative
 - Write an argumentative essay, including a thesis, about whether the law-making process is too easy or too difficult
 - Create a presentation based on the argumentative essay
 6. Submit the Essay and Presentation
 - Identify typographical, grammatical, and content errors in the essay and presentation

- Revise and submit the essay and presentation

10. Semester Exam

1. Semester Exam

- Explain the core values and fundamental political philosophies underpinning the American government
- Analyze foundational documents, significant Supreme Court decisions, and political data
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- Analyze the structure of the American government, how powers are divided and shared, and how the interactions between different branches of government influence policy