

# AP® UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS COURSE SYLLABUS

## TEXTBOOK INFORMATION

- Edwards, Wattenbery, Lineberry. *Government in America*, 10th Edition. New York: Longman Publishers, 2002.
- Text web site [http://ablongman.com/long\\_edwards\\_ga12/](http://ablongman.com/long_edwards_ga12/)
- Wilson and Dilulio. *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 8th Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.

## SUPPLEMENTAL READERS

- Woll, Peter. *American Government Readings and Cases*, 13th Edition. New York: Longman, 1999.
- Levine, Herbert. *Point Counterpoint, Readings in American Government*, 7th edition. Thomson Wadsworth, 2004.
- Berkin, Carol. *A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution*, New York: Harcourt, 2002. Print
- U.S. Constitution
- Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (excerpts)
- *Washington Post*
- *New York Times*
- *The Economist*
- *The Christian Science Monitor*
- *Congressional Quarterly*
- *The Federalist Papers*

## MAJOR GOALS:

Welcome to AP® U.S. Government and Politics. It is our hope that this course will create a lifelong interest in being an informed citizen and participant in the political process. The course is taught with a variety of strategies and activities that appeal to all learning styles. The end result of the course is for you to take the AP® National Exam Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 8am. This syllabus is designed to help you understand what it will take for you to be successful in this class and on the AP® Exam.

## STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS:

The course is the equivalent of a college course taught by a college professor. College level textbooks and readings are essential. However, a textbook is not enough. For students to do well on the AP® National Exam, students must be prepared to use current examples and applications that may not be in the textbook. This *requires* that students have access to current political news. Students will be held accountable for understanding current national political issues and should allocate time every week to read and study the current political news stories.

## READING ANALYSIS:

Each student must keep up with the outside reading assignments. The students will be evaluated in a number of ways to ensure that they are keeping up with the text and supplemental reader assignments. The students will have quizzes, essays, presentations and critical analysis activities on assigned readings. Students will be expected to discuss and ANALYZE the assigned reading materials.

### **GRAPHS, MAPS, AND CHARTS:**

Students are tested within each unit on their understanding of quantitative and visually presented information (maps, graphs, and charts). They will analyze and interpret exit polls, public opinion polls, and charts and graphs of electoral outcomes and political participation. They will also interpret charts showing the role of money in politics using contemporary news and internet coverage of elections and campaigns.

### **COMMITTEES/GROUPS:**

Collaborative learning will be used on a regular basis in the class. The collaborative learning groups will allow the students to experience more sample AP® questions and a variety of relevant current events. Group work will not make up the majority of the grade for the class, but will influence the grade. All students in a group will receive the same grade on group quizzes and assignments. The teacher will decide the method for selecting groups and it is imperative that immediate email or telephone contact be established among group members. Problems with an individual in the group should be addressed by the group members first, and then discussed with the teacher in private.

### **PRACTICE EXAMS:**

All major exams will be given in AP® format, incorporating both multiple choice and free response questions. Throughout the semester, students will practice for the AP® test by taking released tests from the College Board website.

### **GRADING POLICIES:**

- a. We will adhere strictly to all district policies in respect to grading, makeup work, attendance, and progress reports. This information can be found in the student handbook.
- b. It is the **student's** responsibility to obtain makeup work and assignments when absent.  
The *student* must also schedule makeup exams with the teacher. If a student is absent, they should check with their group members to see what assignments they missed and pick up the work before or after class from the teacher. Makeup assignments may not be exactly the same as the assignment given in class, so it is important to check with the teacher.
- c. All late work submitted will be penalized one letter grade (10%) for each day it is late. Any assignment more than three days late will not be accepted for credit. If a student is absent, makeup work completed promptly by students in accordance with district guidelines will not be penalized.
- d. Two or three major exams will be given every six weeks. The exams will be a combination of multiple choice and essay questions. The makeup exams will not necessarily be the same format as the regular scheduled exams; makeups may be all essay. Students who are absent should schedule makeup exams with the teacher.
- e. Cheating will not be tolerated. Students will receive a "0" on any assignment or test on which they cheat. They will be reported to the administration for further disciplinary action.

## **UNITS TO BE COVERED:**

1. Introduction to Government (institutions of government, democratic theory and policymaking)
2. Constitutional Foundations and Principles (founding documents, Articles of Confederation, Constitution Convention)
3. Federalism (types of federalism and federalism today)
4. Political Parties, Elections and Interest Groups
5. Congress
6. The Presidency and the Bureaucracy
7. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
8. The Judiciary
9. Overview of Media and Policymaking

## **TOPIC OUTLINES:**

**(THIS INCLUDES THE PERCENTAGE OF THE NATIONAL EXAM WHICH COMES FROM EACH TOPIC.)**

### **I. Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government (5-15%)**

The study of modern politics in the United States requires students to examine the kind of government established by the Constitution, paying 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 an awareness of the ideological and philosophical traditions on which the framers drew. Such understanding addresses specific concerns of the framers: e.g., Why did Madison fear factions? What were the reasons for the swift adoption of the Bill of Rights? Familiarity with the Supreme Court's interpretation of key provisions of the Constitution will aid student understanding of theoretical and practical features of federalism and the separation of powers. Students should be familiar with a variety of theoretical perspectives relating to the Constitution, such as democratic theory, theories of republican government, pluralism, and elitism.

- A. Considerations that influenced the formulation and adoption of the Constitution
- B. Separation of powers
- C. Federalism
- D. Theories of democratic government

\*Readings: Edwards, Chapters 2 and 3; Wilson, Chapters 2 and 3; U.S. Constitution; Federalist #10 and #51; Locke's *Second Treatise* (excerpts)

### **II. Political Beliefs and Behaviors (10-20%)**

Individual citizens hold a variety of beliefs about their government, its leaders, and the U.S. political system in general; taken together, these beliefs form the foundation of U.S. political culture. It is important for students to understand how these beliefs are formed, how they evolve, and the processes by which they are transmitted. 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. Understanding the ways in which political culture affects and informs political participation is also critical. For example, students should know that individuals often engage in multiple forms of political participation, including voting, protest, and mass movements. Students should understand both why individuals engage in various forms of political participation and

how that participation affects the political system. Finally, it is essential that students understand what leads citizens to differ from one another in their political beliefs and behaviors, and the political consequences of these differences. To understand these differences, students should focus on the different views that people hold of the political process, the demographic features of the American population, and the belief and behavior systems held by specific ethnic, minority, and other groups.

- A. Beliefs that citizens hold about their governments and its leaders
- B. Processes by which citizens learn about politics
- C. The nature, sources, and consequences of public opinion
- D. The ways in which citizens vote and otherwise participate in political life
- E. Factors that influence citizens to differ from one another in terms of political beliefs and behaviors

\*Readings: Edwards, Chapters 6 and 10, selected articles from *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *the Economist*

### **III. Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media (10-20%)**

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. Examination of issues of party reform and of campaign strategies and financing in the electronic age provides students with important perspectives. A study of elections, election laws, and election systems on the national and state levels will help students understand the nature of both party and individual voting behavior. Treatment of the development and the role of PACs in elections and the ideological and demographic differences between the two major parties, as well as third parties, form an important segment of this material. Students must also consider the political roles played by a variety of lobbying and interest groups. 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 study what interest groups do, how they do it, and how this affects both the political process and public policy. Why are certain segments of the population, such as farmers and the elderly, able to exert pressure on political institutions and actors in order to obtain favorable policies? The media has become a major force in U.S. politics. Students are expected to understand the role of the media in the political system. In addition, the impact of the media on public opinion, voter perceptions, campaign strategies, electoral outcomes, agenda development, and the images of officials and candidates should be explored and understood by students. Understanding the often symbiotic, and frequently conflictual, relationship between candidates, elected officials, and the media is also important.

- A. Political parties and elections
  - 1. Functions
  - 2. Organization
  - 3. Development
  - 4. Effects on the political process
  - 5. Electoral laws and systems
- B. Interest groups, including political action committees (PACs)

1. The range of interests represented
2. The activities of interest groups
3. The effects of interest groups on the political process
4. The unique characteristics and roles of PACs in the political process
5. The mass media
6. The functions and structures of the media
7. The impact of media on politics

\*Readings: Edwards, Chapters 7, 8, 9, 11; selected articles from *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *the Economist*

#### **IV. Institutions of National Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Federal Courts (35-45%)**

Students must become familiar with the organization and powers, both formal and informal, of the major political institutions in the United States—the Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the federal courts. The functions these institutions perform and do not perform, as well as the powers that they do and do not possess, are important. It is necessary for students to understand that power balances and relationships between these institutions may evolve gradually or change dramatically as a result of crises. Students are also expected to understand ties between the various branches of national government and political parties, interest groups, 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 recent and repeated struggles to adopt a national budget.

- A. The major formal and informal institutional arrangements of power
- B. Relationships among these four institutions, and varying balances of power
  1. create, examine, and analyze graphs comparing court decisions reflecting judicial restraint and judicial activism
  2. research statistics on women in Congress and the courts
  3. explore the system of checks and balances and how it effects shifting levels of power among the branches
- C. Linkages between institutions and the following:
  1. Public opinion and voters
    - a. analyze public opinion polls and election results
    - b. analyze exit polls and predict their impact on elections
  2. Interest groups
  3. Political parties
    - a. examine and analyze charts on political party formation
    - b. analyze and compare platforms of major political parties
  4. The media
  5. Sub-national governments

\*Readings: Edwards, Chapters 12, 13, 15, 16; selected articles from *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *the Economist*

#### **V. Public Policy (5-15%)**

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. The study of these will give students a clear understanding of the impact of federalism, interest groups, parties, and elections on policy processes and policy making in the federal context.

- A. Policy making in a federal system
- B. The formation of policy agendas: foreign and defense, economic, health care, environmental, social welfare. Student groups will prepare presentations with written and oral components on one of these specific areas of public policy.
- C. The role of institutions in the enactment of policy
- D. The role of the bureaucracy and the courts in policy implementation and interpretation
- E. Political institutions and federalism
- F. Federal budget policy: conduct Concord budget simulation
- G. Linkages between policy processes and the following:
  - 1. Political parties
  - 2. Interest groups
  - 3. Public opinion
  - 4. Elections
  - 5. Policy networks

\* Readings: Levine, Chapter 8; Edwards Chapters 14, 17, 18, 19, 20; Wilson, Chapter 16– Economic Policy, Chapter 17 – Social Welfare, Chapter 20 – Foreign and Military Policy, Chapter 21 – Environmental Policy; selected articles from *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *the Economist*

## **VI. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (5-15%)**

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

- A. The development of civil liberties and civil rights by judicial interpretation
- B. Knowledge of substantive rights and liberties
  - 1. examine and analyze the Bill of Rights
  - 2. analyze key Supreme Court cases that have impacted civil rights
- C. The impact of the Fourteenth Amendment on the constitutional development of rights and liberties.

\*Readings: Edwards, Chapters 4 and 5; Wilson, Chapter 18 – Civil Liberties and Chapter 19 – Civil Rights; U.S. Bill of Rights; Woll, readings 12, 16, 17, 19