

## **Course Title: AP Government and Politics; United States Comparative**

**Meeting Times and Course Description:** AP Government and Politics is a yearlong (36 week) course intended for 12<sup>th</sup> graders. It is equivalent to a one semester introductory college course in U.S. Government and Politics. Our school utilizes a block schedule, with classes meeting every other day. This class meets on “A” Days, 2-3 times per week, for a period of 90 minutes. The class is divided into four quarters, lasting nine weeks per quarter.

The course provides a learning experience that incorporates:

- Studying general concepts used to interpret U. S. politics
- Analyzing specific examples that explore the general concepts
- Understanding the various institutions, groups, beliefs, and ideas that form U.S. Politics
- Introducing a variety of theoretical viewpoints and explanations for behaviors and outcomes in the U. S. political arena

The pace of the course is rapid, and students must take responsibility for much of the learning process. They are expected to perform at a higher level than their peers in the one semester course. The level of reading is more in-depth, more analytical, and should result in greater comprehension. Writing skills should also be on a higher plane. Targeting expectations of the AP exam, students must write clear, concise answers that show analytical thinking has occurred. Grammar and syntax should also be of a superior nature.

**Course Purpose and Goals:** AP Government and Politics is designed to give students the opportunity to take a challenging class equivalent to a freshman college course. Unlike the standard U.S. government semester course, AP Government and Politics requires a yearlong commitment by the student. Students in the class are expected to take the AP exam in May; exam participation earns students a “weighted” AP grade in calculating their cumulative G.P.A.

While a student in this class is awarded a weighted grade if he/she takes the Advanced Placement Test in the spring, the true objective of this class is to earn college credit. For that reason, the class is taught as if students were college freshmen. Students prepare for what is a very difficult examination through repetitive assessments, and working on the writing process. With regard to materials, a student in the class is expected to bring a student’s tools: a textbook, a notebook, and a means to write. Lectures are given daily. There are group assignments and discussions almost every period.

**Goals:** Upon completion of the course students will be able to:

- Identify important facts, concepts and theories relating to U.S. government and politics
- Recognize typical patterns of political processes, behaviors and their consequences
- Analyze and interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics

The following required topics are also covered in the course. They comprise the six units used to organize and divide the course.

- Constitutional Underpinnings of the US Government
- Political Beliefs and Behaviors
- Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media

- Institutions of National Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy and the Federal Courts
- Public Policy
- Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

**Course Format and Policies:** This school system calculates weighted grades for students who complete and take the requisite exam of an Advanced Placement (AP) Course.

Due to the rigorous nature of the course, additional research projects are limited.. Students are advised to read newspapers and news magazines, and watch news broadcasts as much as possible to stay abreast of the political scene.

**Textbooks, Materials and other Resources:**

Required Text:

O'Connor, Karen & Sabato, Larry J. *American Government: Roots and Reform*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.

Supplementary Materials:

*America in Black & White: The Secret Game*. ABC News Nightline. Zenger Media. 1997.

*American Government, Part 1 & 2*. Standard Deviants. DVD. Cerebellum Corporation. 1999.

*Encyclopedia of the 20th Century: Days that Shook the World, 1900-1999*. DVD Collection. Madacy Entertainment Group: St. Laurent, Quebec, Canada. 2003.

*Executive Branch of Government*. Videocassette. Monmouth Junction, NJ: Cambridge Educational, 2003.

*Fahrenheit 9/11*. Director: Michael Moore. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment. 2004.

*First Monday in October*. Director: Ronald Neame. Performers: Walter Matthau, Jill Clayburgh, Barnard Hughes. Paramount Pictures. 1981.

*Journeys With George*. Director: Alexandra Pelosi and Aaron Lubarsky. Performers: George W. Bush, R.G. Ratcliffe. HBO Home Video (2003)

Miller, Roger LeRoy. *West's American Government*. 2nd Ed. Cincinnati, O: West Educational Publishing. 1998.

O'Connor, Karen & Sabato, Larry J. *American Government: Continuity and Change*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc. 2004.

*"POTUS" The West Wing*. By Aaron Sorkin. Dir. Bryan Gordon. Perf. Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, Bradley Whitford, and Rob Lowe. NBC. 9 September 1999.

Remini, Robert V. *The House: The History of the House of Representatives*. New York, NY: Smithsonian Books. 2006.

Schmidt, Steffen, Shelley, Mack C. & Bardes, Barbara A. *American Government and Politics Today*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Publishing. 2003.

Schwartz, Bernard. *A History of the Supreme Court*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 1993.

Smith, Hedrick. *The Power Game: How Washington Works*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. 1996.

"*The Stackhouse Filibuster*." *The West Wing*. By Aaron Sorkin. Dir. Bryan Gordon. Perf. Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, Bradley Whitford, and Rob Lowe. NBC. 14 March 2001.

*The Supreme Court of the United States*. Videocassette. York Associates Television, Inc., 1996.

*The Supreme Court Today*. Videocassette. C-Span Archives. 1997.

*The War Room*. Director: D.A. Pennebaker. Performers: James Carville, George Stephanopoulos. Lions Gate Studios. (1994)

In addition to the listed materials, each day begins with a sponge activity called Words of the Day designed to expand student vocabulary. Students research and define in their own words one or two words or phrases that have importance to the day's material. These words then become available material for assessments.

**Course Content:** Using the suggested outline, the course has six units. Time spent on any one unit is dependent on coverage given the unit in past AP exams and the mastery students achieve. If the class does not understand the material, additional time is allocated to go over the troublesome areas again.

Students prepare for a very difficult examination through repetitive assessments and work on the writing process. Lectures and discussions occur daily, and there are individual writing assignments with every chapter. Each class period includes a short multiple choice quiz to check homework, i.e. reading, using locally generated questions. An attempt is made to use the different types of questions that a student will find on the AP examination, i.e. reverse or negative answers, or multiple correct answers.

The tentative schedule for the six units of the course follows:

UNIT ONE: (5 weeks) Constitutional Underpinnings of the US Government.  
*American Government Institutions and Policies*, Chapters 1-4 and Appendix, pp A4-A20.

Unit one covers theoretical foundations of government: theories of state/nations and their formation along with a discussion of different types of governments. There is a historical discussion of the colonial period in U.S. History to show how our current government came about. The class reads the U.S. Constitution and a number of the Federalist Papers that arose

because of the Constitution. As recommended, students will become familiar with a variety of theories relevant to the study of government.

Resource and Supplementary Materials:

*American Government, Part 1, Sections I-IV.* Standard Deviants. DVD. Cerebellum Corporation. 1999.

*The Federalist Papers, No. 10*

*The Federalist Papers, No. 51*

Big Six Research Project: "A Constitutional Broadside"

UNIT TWO: (4 weeks) Political Beliefs and Behaviors

*American Government Institutions and Policies*, Chapters 4-6, 8.

Unit two investigates how political beliefs are developed. Students learn whether they are "liberal" or "conservative." We look at the role of family, peers, and schools in the movement toward political identity using various surveys to develop an understanding of our place on the political spectrum. Stressing the cross-curricular nature of statistics, we look at polling and its effectiveness. Students must understand how beliefs are formed, the impact of those beliefs, and the conflicts they cause have on political activities.

Resource and Supplementary Materials:

*Journeys With George.* Director: Alexandra Pelosi and Aaron Lubarsky. Performers: George W. Bush, R.G. Ratcliffe. HBO Home Video (2003)

"*POTUS*" *The West Wing.* By Aaron Sorkin. Dir. Bryan Gordon. Perf. Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, Bradley Whitford, and Rob Lowe. NBC. 9 September 1999.

*The War Room.* Director: D.A. Pennebaker. Performers: James Carville, George Stephanopoulos. Lions Gate Studios. (1994)

Big Six Research Project: "Political Beliefs"

UNIT THREE: (5 Weeks) Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media

*American Government Institutions and Policies*, Chapters 7, 9-10.

Unit three looks at groups, and how one forms connections. The electoral process is used to illustrate this unit. As pointed out in the AP Course Description Book for May 2006, May 2007, the media is a major force in our political arena. Thus the role of media with regard to political parties and interest groups is stressed in the unit.

Resource and Supplementary Materials:

*The War Room.* Director: D.A. Pennebaker. Performers: James Carville, George Stephanopoulos. Lions Gate Studios. (1994)

*Fahrenheit 9/11.* Dir. Michael Moore. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment. 2004.

*The Federalist Papers, No. 10*

Big Six Research Project: "Just Vote"

UNIT FOUR: (7 Weeks) Institutions of National Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy and the Federal Courts

*American Government Institutions and Policies*, Chapters 11-14.

Because it deals with the way in which our country is governed, and material related to these subjects make up the largest section of the AP exam, unit four is given the greatest amount

of time. Each chapter is treated like a mini-unit: the legislature, the executive, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary. Each is examined, historically and procedurally to show each branch's day to day procedures lead to the formation of national policy. As recommended in the course description book, the connections between the institutions of government and parties, interest groups, and the media are developed.

Resource and Supplementary Materials:

- American Government, Part 2*. Standard Deviants. DVD. Cerebellum Corporation. 1999.
- Remini, Robert V. *The House: The History of the House of Representatives*. New York, NY: Smithsonian Books. 2006.
- Smith, Hedrick. *The Power Game: How Washington Works*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. 1996.
- "*The Stackhouse Filibuster*." *The West Wing*. By Aaron Sorkin. Dir. Bryan Gordon. Perf. Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, Bradley Whitford, and Rob Lowe. NBC. 14 March 2001.
- The Supreme Court of the United States*. Videocassette. York Associates Television, Inc., 1996.
- The Supreme Court Today*. Videocassette. C-Span Archives. 1997.
- Handout: Key Legislation to Know
- Handout: Important Court Cases to Remember
- Big Six Research Project: "The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden"  
"A Century of Lawmaking For a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875."

UNIT FIVE: (4 Weeks) Public Policy

*American Government Institutions and Policies*, Chapters 15-17, 19-21.

Unit five is concerned with elements of activity. How does the government create a budget? Why do certain governments get the support of the people? How does the public interest impact on things like environmental policy, or social issues? The general topic of study is the creation of government policy in various areas. The two areas of greatest interest in this unit are economic policy and military and foreign relations.

Resource and Supplementary Materials:

- Encyclopedia of the 20th Century: Days that Shook the World, 1900-1999*. DVD Collection. Madacy Entertainment Group: St. Laurent, Quebec, Canada. 2003.
- Smith, Hedrick. *The Power Game: How Washington Works*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. 1996.
- Handouts: Federal Expenditures  
Government Spending  
Federal Surpluses and Deficits  
Social Security Spending
- Big Six Research Project: "Places in the News"

UNIT SIX: (4 Weeks) Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

*American Government Institutions and Policies*, Chapters 18-19.

The last unit revisits the Constitution, in particular, the Bill of Rights. The primary focus is the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments, and their pertinence to civil liberties.

Decisions of the Supreme Court form the basis for much of the discussion in this unit. To reinforce the idea that the constitution does have a relevance to high school students, decisions which deal specifically with high school are highlighted. “For example, students (will) understand the legal, social, and political evolution following the Supreme Court’s decisions regarding racial segregation.” (*Government & Politics*, 8)

Resource and Supplementary Materials:

*America in Black & White: The Secret Game*. ABC News Nightline. Zenger Media. 1997.  
*American Government, Part 1, Sections V and VI*. Standard Deviants. DVD. Cerebellum Corporation. 1999.

*Brown v. Board of Education*

*Dred Scott v. Sanford*

*First Monday in October*. Director: Ronald Neame. Performers: Walter Matthau, Jill Clayburgh, Barnard Hughes. Paramount Pictures. 1981.

Handouts: Blacks, Hispanic, and Women Legislators

Important Court Cases to Remember

Big Six Research Project: “From Jim Crow to Linda Brown”

Each unit culminates with an assessment modeled along the lines of the AP examination. There is a multiple choice section, and there is a directed writing portion intended to assess student ability to read, interpret, and answer questions in a textual format. Vocabulary is also assessed in various ways.

**Assignments and assessments:** Each unit generates regular homework assignments. Generally speaking, this is a reading selection which is then assessed. Written homework is assigned. These draw on textbook materials and other sources. Students receive a calendar listing tentative assignments for the week and month.

The first four units make up the first semester. The fifth and sixth units are completed in the third quarter. This allows at least three weeks of review in preparation for the examination. Following the examination we will research how the government impacts other parts of society.

Grades are based on several elements. These include class work, homework, presentations, research projects, writing assignments, and all assessments. There are six unit examinations which are strenuous. They must be demanding if they are to prepare students for the AP examination. Unit exams are modeled on the AP examination for two reasons: to give the student familiarity with the format and to lessen test anxiety in May. Other research projects used in the course are limited in scope.

There are regular quizzes and written homework assignments that make use of textbook supplements. They require the student to do research, extend his/her vocabulary, and write well thought out, grammatically correct sentences. Writing exercises conducted in class duplicate the AP exam. They are timed to simulate the AP examination. Cooperative work exercises foster partisanship. There are daily discussions of current events and study subject. Reading quizzes, classroom preparation and participation, and the homework assignments make up approximately 1/3 of a student’s grade. Examinations make up the remainder.

Extensive use of the internet and mass media as primary sources of instruction is encouraged as a means to foster student ability to analyze and interpret information. Students are also encouraged to engage in student government as a means of gaining first hand experience.

The grading policy in AP Government adheres to the system grade policy.

Grading Scale:

90 - 100 = A

80 - 89 = B

70 - 79 = C

60 - 69 = D

59 or below = F

Weighted grade policy: Weighted grades are calculated for students completing and taking the requisite exam of an AP course.

Unweighted Scale A=4    Weighted Scale A=5

Unweighted Scale B=3    Weighted Scale B=4

Unweighted Scale C=2    Weighted Scale C=3

Unweighted Scale D=1    Weighted Scale D=2

Unweighted Scale F=0    Weighted Scale F=0

**Special Information relevant to specific AP Courses:** Much of the material covered in the course has a relevance to current events. Students must realize that it is imperative to keep abreast of the news. Daily reading of newspapers, viewing of news programs, and use of pertinent internet sites is strongly suggested. Without these students will find it extremely difficult to participate in class discussions or draw parallels to the material under study.

**Support Services:** Extra-curricular participation in student government and groups like Model United Nations, and homework club is encouraged as a means of fostering understanding in the government process. Students in courses like AVID are encouraged to engage in courses that will challenge and extend them. Those students who have problems and desire assistance can make use of regularly scheduled seminars for extra instruction or tutoring. I also make myself available in the morning before school, at lunch, and in the afternoon after school. Cross curricular partnerships working with my peers in both AP and regular classes is another means of supporting the goals of the AP program.