

U.S. Government & Politics

2008-2009 Syllabus

Overview

U.S. Government & Politics is an introduction to American Government, a thorough understanding of the institutions of government (such as the Presidency), how opinions, interests, and organizations impact government, and the politics of public policy. Because 2008 is a presidential election year, we will be paying close attention to the electoral process. *U.S. Government & Politics* will teach the basic structures and processes of the American political system.

The Curriculum will include the following topics:

1. The American System: studying government, the Constitution, Federalism, American Political Structure
2. Institutions of Government: Congress, Presidency, Bureaucracy, Judiciary
3. Opinions, Interests, and Organizations: public opinion, political participation, political parties, elections and campaigns, interest groups, the media
4. Politics of Public Policy: policy making process, social welfare, civil rights and liberties, foreign and military policy, environmental policy

During the course, students will improve skills in the following areas:

- Reading comprehension and analysis
- Reading statistics and surveys correctly; occasionally creating surveys and charts
- Answering the document based question (a common social-studies method of testing)
- Creative and critical thinking skills

A.P. Option

U.S. Government & Politics will be available as an Advanced Placement (A.P.) course, pending verification of our school's ability to offer A.P. and offer the final A.P. exam in May. Taking this class as an A.P. course involves extra reading and study opportunities for the student; passing the final exam will render the student eligible for college credit, if their college accepts such a transfer. Most colleges require achieving a score of at least a 3 out of a 5 on the final A.P.

exam—and many have more rigorous requirements. You may want to investigate the policy of selected colleges on accepting A.P. coursework before choosing the Advanced Placement option.

Text

WILSON, JAMES Q., AND JOHN J. DILULIO JR. 2002. AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES. 8TH EDITION. BOSTON: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN.

Grading

- **Tests**—based on the chapter(s) covered; standard objective questions with essays modeled on the document based question
- **Presidential Election Project**—students will participate in the excitement of the last months of presidential campaigns and debates. Each student will be responsible for a project which traces one or both of the national party candidates in a digital or paper scrapbook format. (Very specific directions will be given in class.)
- **Homework:**
 - Reading Questions for each Chapter
 - IDs—completed as flash cards, which will enable studying for the exams
 - Chapter assignments/work sheets/ review guides as assigned
 - Occasional essays will be assigned
 - Lateness penalty: for each day an assignment is late there will be a deduction of 10 percentage points from the grade
- **EXAMS:**
 - First Semester—Week of December 17-19 (An exam schedule will be posted.)
 - Second Semester —Week of May 18-22
- **Grading Methodology**—all work is worth points based on the amount of effort required to complete the task. Tests will be worth around 100 points; homework worth between 10 and 25 points typically. The final grade will be a percentage grade calculated from the points earned divided by the total possible points.

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Class Organization: Units of Instruction

1. Political Culture, Public Opinion, and Political Participation: Chapters 4-6
2. Political Parties: Chapters 7
3. The Study of American Government and the Constitution: Chapter 2
4. Federalism: Chapter 3

5. Congress: Chapter 11
6. The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: Chapters 12-13
7. The Judiciary: Chapter 14
8. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights: Chapters 18-19
9. Policy Making: Chapter 15

For each unit, there will be the following graded assignments:

1. Reading questions based on the chapter in the text
2. ID's—these are basically “key terms” but should be written in ID style (directions on a separate handout) and on 3 X 5 cards.
3. Additional article to read and/or writing assignment. These will vary to keep it interesting.
4. Quiz or Test. At the end of each semester, we will have an exam over the semester's work. The exam in May will not be over the whole year but just since January. The AP Exam is over the whole course.

Additional A.P. Assignments

1. Keep all AP work well labeled so you can study efficiently for the AP Exam in May.
2. The Readings Book (noted below) is the *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. (3rd Edition.)
3. Your additional work is primarily reading and note taking in order to have good study materials for the AP Exam in May. There will be review material handed out for you to study on your own.
4. We will have a DBQ (Document Based Question) test in December as our midterm exam, and at least 2 review sessions prior to the May test. I will give you a practice DBQ for each unit.

Unit 1: Political Culture, Opinion, & Participation

- In the readings book, read p. 507, “Why Americans still don't vote.” Take good notes, and show them to me when you are done.
- Read “Politicians Don't Pander” in the Readings book p. 444 and make notes about the significant points.

- Pretend you're a pundit. Using any handy source (the internet will probably be the quickest way to get this information) look at the Exit Poll results from 2000, 2004, and 2006. Write down ten results from one, both, or all of the polls that indicate something interesting about the relative strength of the parties. Conclude with your recommendations to Senators McCain and Obama 2008 based on this data.

Unit 2: Political Parties

- Make a list of arguments for a stronger party system and a list of reasons why the party system has been declining.
- Read "The Rise of the Southern Republicans" by Earl and Merle Black in the Readings book, p. 604. Take notes.
- Read "The Party's Over" by David Broder. Take good notes.

Unit 3: Elections and Campaigns

- Read "Stormy Weather" by Dante Scala (Xeroxed copy) and take notes on how and why the NH primary is influential.
- Read "Going Negative" By Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar in the Readings Book p. 557 and take notes
- Add 10 pieces to your Election 2008 scrapbook!

Unit 4: The Media

- Read Read "Feeding Frenzy" by Larry Sabato in the Readings Book p. 642; Take notes summarizing the main points and some pertinent examples.
- Read through "The White House Staff: The Advance Office" in the Readings Book, p. 581-592. For this article, it is not so important that you remember each detail; just that you get a general picture of what the advance office has to do.
- Write a list of arguments based on a pro- or con- answer to this proposition: The Media has a liberal bias. Get started by looking at several internet sites:
 1. Facts.org
 2. <http://pewresearch.org/topics/newsmedia/>

3. <http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/>
4. <http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>

- Write a list of the argument for your side. Include specific examples.

Unit 5: Interest Groups

- Read “The Lobbyists” by Jeffrey Birnbaum in the Readings Book p. 474; Take notes.
- Read the Xeroxed copy of “Can I Lobby You” from the Washington Post. Take notes.

Unit 6: The Study of American Government and the Constitution

- Read the Richard Hofstadter article in the Readings Book p. 59. Answer the reading questions 1- 6 on Hofstadter’s article
- Read the excerpts from Federalists 10 and 51 (handouts). Take good notes.
- Start learning the material on the Constitution from the handouts on Checks and Balances and the Division of powers between the state and national governments.
- Practice DBQ questions and study for the exam, the week of December 15-19.