

**AP US Government and Politics  
Course Syllabus and Readings**

**2008-09**

**Mr. Hansbury**

**Course Description & Objectives:**

AP US Government is an elective course for seniors that prepares you to take the AP Government exam in May. The course covers the constitutional underpinnings of our government; political beliefs and behaviors; political parties and interest groups; institutions and national government; public policy, and civil rights and civil liberties. Students are expected to use specific information to evaluate general propositions about government and politics.

AP Government is a structured, demanding college level course. Students are required not only to read thoroughly the college text but also to augment this material through research and reading of supplemental articles and then critically applying the findings to the political nature of current governmental policies and analyze the ramifications of these policies. One of the primary objectives of this course is to expose students to all areas of information covered on the AP Government exam. Thus it is imperative that a high level academic environment exist and that the student be dedicated to learning, is highly motivated and is willing to put forth the time and effort required for a course at the is level.

**Texts:**

Government in America by Edward, Wattenberg and Lineberry, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Education, 2004

American Government Readings and Cases by Peter Woll. 16<sup>th</sup> ed  
New York: Pearson Longman, 2006

**Other Materials:**

Preparing for the US Government AP Exam with Government in America by Edwards et al. New York: Pearson Education, 2004. Daily articles from Washington Post, NY Times, National Journal or other sources. Numerous website assignments and appropriate video footage.

**Unit I: Introduction To Government in America**

**Content Goals:**

- Identify key revolutionary themes that shaped the development of American Constitutionalism

**Required Reading:** Edwards Chapter 1 (Pages 2-25)

Daily Topics  
For lecture &  
discussion

Events Shaping Contemporary American Politics, What is Politics, The American Political System, Theories on American Democracy (Elite Theory, Pluralist Theory, Hyperpluralism). How should we govern? What should government do? What is a linkage institution?

Discussion: Does the Federal government do too much? Why or Why not?

Evaluations:

Essay Due: Contrast conservative and liberal views on the scope and role of government in modern society.

Study Guide Chapter 1, Quiz (Vocabulary) and Unit Exam. Students are asked to answer a question from earlier College Board Free Response Essays prior to nearly every exam and then class reviews it using college board rubric

## **Unit II: Constitutional Foundations and Underpinnings: Content Goals:**

- Identify key revolutionary themes that shaped the development of American Constitutionalism
- Discuss the importance of the Articles of Confederation and state constitutions on the evolution of the American Constitution
- Explain the purposes and topics of the Articles of Confederation and the importance of the elastic and supremacy clauses
- Discuss the purposes for the Bill of Rights and be able to outline the subsequent amendments

**Required Reading:** Edwards Chapters 2 & 3 (Pages 26-93)

Declaration of Independence (Edwards Pages 697-698)

John Locke, "Second Treatise...Government" (Woll p.4)- Class Discussion

James Madison, "Federalist 47, 48 & 51" (Woll p. 41-45)

M. Grodskins, "The Federal System" (Woll p. 84-88)

John Roche, "Democratic Reform Caucus" (Woll p.10-29)

Daily Lecture

Topics:  
Political

Origins of the U.S. Constitution, Key Historical and

Events Leading to the Constitutional Convention, Struggle for Ratification, Why Federalism?, The Federal System at Work, and Federalism Today. Core conflicts at Convention. Using Supreme Court cases to explain the evolution of federalism in the U.S. Contemporary views of federalism today.

Evaluation:

Essay: What does “original intent” mean and describe how it is a source of conflict in judicial circles today.

Current Events Journal on Federalism – Students will collect a series of articles from periodicals that illustrate the principle of Federalism today. Students will write a summary of the debate over federalism today based on these journal articles.

Study Guide 2 & 3, Quiz (2 & 3 Vocabulary), and Unit II Exam.

### **Unit III: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights:**

#### **Content Goals:**

- Discuss the importance of the doctrine of incorporation and its influence on political and legal decisions
- Describe major cases that have led to the incorporation of the first, Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Amendments
- Analyze the impact of the exclusionary rule on the legal system
- Describe the Civil Rights Amendments and their impact on ethnic and racial minorities in America
- Explain how litigation and legislation assisted the Civil Rights movement in its quest for racial equality

**Required Reading:** Edwards Chapters 4 & 5 (Pages 94-169)  
Bill of Rights and Fourteenth Amendment

**Engel V. Vitale (Woll p. 136) Student Presentation**

**Roe V. Wade (Woll p. 146) Student Presentation**  
**Zelman V. Simmons-Harris (Woll p. 143) Student Presentation**

Daily Lecture  
Topics:  
Rights (Free

Bill of Rights, Incorporation Doctrine, 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment

Exercise Clause, Establishment Clause, Expression), Due Process (Search & Seizure, Rights of Accused, Privacy), Equal Protection, Affirmative Action

View clips from “Eyes on the Prize” Has America changed?”  
Discussion topic.

Evaluation:

Current Events Journal on Expression, Religion, Due Process; Students begin compiling a list of pertinent SC decisions and are required to explain those cases assigned to them. Particular attention is paid to cases decided within the last year by the SC. Court Case Evaluations (using Findlaw.com and Oyez.com); Study Guide Chapters 4 & 5, Reading Quizzes (4 & 5), Court Cases Quiz (4 & 5); Unit III Exam. Essay – Select one of the following SC cases and identify the two parties in the case, discuss the Court’s ruling, and then assess the impact on policy making or citizens rights in the U.S.

## UNIT IV: Socialization, Parties and Interest Groups

### Content Goals:

- Explain the historical development of the two party system in American politics
- Identify the major functions and structures of American political parties
- Explain party loyalty and membership and be able to analyze when realignment might occur  
Describe the demographics of voters as opposed to non-voters within the American electorate.

**Required Reading:** Edwards Chapters 6 (pgs. 172-290, 8 (pgs.234-261) & 11 (pgs.322-350)  
D. Mayhew, “Divided We Govern” – (Woll p.182)  
V.O. Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections” (Woll p.190)  
B. Berelson, “Democratic Practice and Theory” (Woll p.207)

Daily Lecture

Topics:

Political Socializations, Political Participation, Public Opinion and Polling, Political Ideology, The Two Party System, Political Party Platforms (focus on Republican v. Democrat), Third Party Politics  
Nature and Organization of Interest Groups, Interest Group success and failures

Students respond to a series of questions at various on-line sites to determine their own political ideology and assess where their answers place them on the political spectrum.

Evaluation:

Study Guide Chapters 6,8,11,  
Student Presentations on the Interest Group they were assigned explaining the influence their group has on various parts of government and why.  
Quizzes (chapters 6,8,and 11, Unit Exams,  
Unit Essay – **Using a Table** that shows party identification in the U.S. 1952-2000,  
explain a trend you see and give **two** reasons for this trend.

## **Unit V: Campaigns, Elections and the Media**

### **Content Goals:**

- Trace the development of mass media and the way in which presidents have used the media in different periods of our history.
- Examine and analyze the charge that the media have a liberal bias
- Explain the differences between the two types of campaigns in American politics – nomination campaigns and election campaigns
- Describe the growth of PACs and their impact on modern campaigning

Required Reading: Edwards, Chapters 7, 9, and 10,

Topics: Nominations, Elections, Electoral College, Campaign Strategy,

Campaign Finance, Expansion of Suffrage, Voting rates, Media influence

View HBO film “Travels With George”

Collection of readings on 2000 and 2004 Presidential Election and role of Electoral College. Essay due on whether College should be replaced by Popular vote. Respond to arguments for and against proposal.

Evaluations: Study Guide Chapters 7, 9, & 10; Unit Essay and Unit Exam  
Free response question using table of results from 2000 election to depict voting behaviors by various groups and explain impact the behavior of different groups had on the outcome of the election .

**TOPIC AREA: American Policy Making & Governing Institutions**

## Unit VI: Congress

**Required Reading:** Edwards Chapter 12 (Pages 352-389)

**M. Fiorina “The Rise of the Washington Establishment” (Woll p. 352)- Student Presentation**

**R. Fenno “If...How Come...So Much” (Woll p. 382)- Student Presentation**

**L. Sabato “The Misplaced Obsession With PAC’S” (Woll p. 260)- Student Presentation**

Describe the committee system in the House and the Senate and how it affects the passage of legislation

Discuss the demographics of the House and Senate and how this relates to the ideas of representation in the American system

Describe the route a bill must take to be enacted into law

Topics for  
Lectures  
Representen-

Congress structure and function, Incumbency, Gerrymandering,  
Process by which a bill can become a law. Who are are

atives and Senators? The nature of Congressional elections, The role that money now plays in Congressional politics, how Congress is organized, and the system of committees and subcommittees.

Evaluation:

National Practice Exam 1, Study Guide Chapter 12, Current Events Journal on Congress and proposed laws, Unit Essay and the Unit Exam.

Respond to presentation by aide from local Congressman’s office. Essay due: Does the committee system in Congress do more harm than good? List **three** advantages and disadvantages of the committee system in Congress in your answer.

## Unit VII: The Presidency and the Bureaucracy

- Explain the historical development of the two party system in American politics
  - Identify the major functions and structures of American political parties
  - Explain party loyalty and membership and be able to analyze when realignment might occur
- Describe the demographics of voters as opposed to non-voters within the American electorate

**Required Reading:** Edwards Chapter 13,14,15 (Pages 392-499)  
A. Hamilton, “Federalist #70 (Woll p.272)  
R. Neustadt, “Presidential Power” (Woll p. 280)- Student Presentation  
P. Woll “Constitutional Democracy and Bureaucratic Power” (Woll p. 329)- Student Presentation  
Bush v. Gore (2000), Woll p. 424- Student Presentation

### **Presentation by speaker from a nearby federal agency – Discuss career appointments v. political appointments to the federal bureaucracy**

Lecture

Topics:

Presidential Power Sources, Politics of the Shared Powers (Presidential/Congressional), Structure and Function of the Executive Branch, Bureaucratic Policy Making, Bureaucratic Control by each Branch. War Powers of the Presidency – Examine recent Supreme Court decisions involving the power of the Presidency  
The Iron Triangle. – its implications for policy making

Collect editorial cartoons whose subject is the federal bureaucracy and write comments on the message and its accuracy.

Evaluation:

Current Events Journal on the Presidency and Decision Making  
Study Guide Chapters 13 and 15, Unit Essay and Unit Exam.

Each student is assigned a Federal agency to research. In both a written and oral presentation, they are to explain the role their agency plays, what kind of a budget they have, what interest groups are concerned with the agency’s activities and how do they try to influence this part of the federal bureaucracy. Student presentations are required on the assigned Federal agency. Each student will give a five minute summary to the class based on their paper.

## Unit VIII: The Judiciary

- Identify the major participants in the judicial system and explain their functions and responsibilities
- Differentiate between original and appellate jurisdiction and between civil and criminal law.
- Analyze the importance of the Supreme Court under Marshall, Taney, Warren and Rhenquist.
- Analyze the effect of restraint or activism on the decisions of the Court
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### Required Reading:

Edwards, Chapter 16 (pgs. 502-536)  
J. Roche, "Judicial Self-Restraint" (Woll p.418)  
West Wing – "The Supremes" episode # 107  
Various current Supreme Court arguments and decisions as described in the Times or Post.

### Daily Lecture

#### Topics:

Structure and Function of Federal and State Courts,  
Operation of the Supreme Court, the Politics of Judicial Selection, Courts and Policy Agenda  
Influences on judicial decision making  
The new Roberts's Court – various articles commenting on impact new justices will have on constitutional issues that the Court will face.

**Guided tour of First District Federal Court of Appeals and Federal District Court in Boston.** Sit in on Court session.

### Evaluation:

Essay on issues revolving around President's Supreme Court nominations. "The selection of Supreme Court Justices is a complex matter involving many participants. Explain this process AND discuss the various motivations That lie behind judicial appointments."

Study Guide Chapter 16  
National Practice Exam, Unit Exam  
Review required list of Supreme Court decisions

## Unit IX: Public Policy

- Analyze inequalities in health and healthcare in America from the standpoint of *access* to quality care.
- Compare the role of government in medical care in the United States with that of other comparable countries.
- Understand how the instruments of foreign policy differ from those of domestic policy.
- Identify the primary policymakers involved in foreign policy decision making
- Delineate the major institutions of the U.S. national security establishments
- Explain how the President and Congress share constitutional authority over foreign and defense policy

### Required Reading:

Edwards, Chapters 17-20.(These chapters cover Foreign and Defense Policy, Health Care, Economic Policy, Environmental Policy, Social Welfare Policy)

### Topics:

Make a timeline of some of the most important foreign policy events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Note the important political actors and describe the consequences of each event.

Social Security and Medicare are badly in need of reform if they are to continue for future generations. For each program, identify the problem it is facing and explain one possible solution to that problem.

### Evaluation:

Group Presentations written and oral of assigned policy area. This must include:  
Background Information  
Major players in this policy area

Major policy initiatives  
Current issues in the policy area

Take home essay –In foreign affairs power and responsibility have shifted during the past 50 years. Discuss the roles that BOTH of the following entities play in foreign policy, cite how and why those roles have changed.

- The President
- Multinational corporations

**View public opinion table** on how the public and the elite see foreign policy, 1999. Analyze

## **AP Test Review exercises**