

History and Social Sciences
Curriculum Overview

Course Description:
Advanced Placement United States Government and Politics

This course provides a framework for understanding the purposes, principles, and practices of American government as established in the United States Constitution. Students are expected to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how to exercise those rights and responsibilities in local, state, and national government.

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.

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.

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.

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

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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.

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.

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 subgovernments 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.

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.

Major Course Objectives:

When students have completed A.P. Government and Politics, they will better understand:

Students will identify, define, compare, and contrast ideas regarding the nature of government, politics, and civic life, and explain how these ideas have influenced contemporary political and legal systems. They will also explain the importance of government, politics, and civic engagement in a democratic republic, and demonstrate how citizens participate in civic and political life in their own communities. This will be conducted through a course of study which addresses the following curricular areas.

I. Constitutional Underpinnings of U.S. Government

II. Political Beliefs and Behaviors

III. Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media

IV. Institutions of National Government: Congress, Presidency, Bureaucracy, & Federal Courts

V. Public Policy

VI. Civil Rights & Civil Liberties

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Relationship to Massachusetts Frameworks for History and Social Sciences

Students will investigate the nature of government, politics, & citizenship, gain an understanding of the foundations of government in this nation, analyze the purposes, principles, and institutions of American government, assess the relationship of the United States with other nations of the world, and explore the roles of citizens of the community and of the nation. In doing so, students will

- distinguish among civic, political, & private life (USG 1.1)
- define *citizenship, politics, government* and give examples of how political solutions to public policy problems are generated through interaction of citizens and civic associations with their government (USG 1.2)
- describe the purposes & functions of government (USG 1.3)
- define and provide examples of different forms of government, including direct democracy, representative democracy, republic, monarchy, oligarchy, and autocracy (USG 1.4)
- explain how the rule of law, embodied in a constitution, limits government in order to protect the rights of individuals (USG 1.5)
- explain how a constitutional democracy provides majority rule with equal protection for the rights of individuals, including those in the minority, through limited government & the rule of law (USG 1.6)
- distinguish limited from unlimited government and provide examples of each (USG 1.7)
- explain how civil society contributes to the maintenance of limited government in a representative democracy or democratic republic such as the United States (USG 1.8)
- examine fundamental documents of the American political tradition to identify key ideas and principles regarding limited government & individual rights (USG 1.9)
- analyze and interpret the central ideas on government, individual rights, and the common good in the founding documents of the United States (USG 2.2)
- identify & explain elements of the social contract and natural rights theories in U.S. founding documents (USG 2.3)
- define & provide examples of foundational ideas of American government, including popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, republicanism, federalism, and individual rights, which are embedded in the founding documents (USG 2.4)
- define & provide examples of fundamental principles and values of American political & civic life, including liberty, the common good, justice, equality, tolerance, law & order, rights of individuals, diversity, civic unity, patriotism, constitutionalism, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy (USG 2.6)
- identify & explain historical and contemporary efforts to narrow discrepancies between foundational ideas and values of American democracy and realities of American political and civic life (USG 2.7)
- evaluate, take, & defend positions on issues concerning foundational ideas or values in tension or conflict (USG 2.8)
- compare & contrast ideas on government of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists during their debates on ratification of the U.S. Constitution (USG 2.9)
- analyze & explain ideas about liberty, equality, and justice in American society using foundational documents and contemporary documents (i.e. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech; *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*; etc.) (USG 2.10)
- compare and contrast governments that are unitary, confederate, and federal (USG 3.1)
- identify & describe provisions of the U.S. Constitution and the Massachusetts Constitution that define and distribute powers and authority of the federal or state government (USG 3.2)
- explain the constitutional principles of federalism, separation of powers among 3 branches of government, the system of checks and balances, republican government or representative democracy, and popular sovereignty – providing examples in the governments of the United States and of Massachusetts. (USG 3.3)
- explain the functions of the courts of law in the governments of the U.S. and the state of Massachusetts, with emphasis on the principles of judicial review and an independent jury (USG 3.4)

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- distinguish among enumerated and implied powers in the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions (USG 3.5)
- explain the functions and duties of executive branch departments or agencies in the governments of the U.S. and Massachusetts (USG 3.6)
- trace the evolution of political parties in the American governmental system & analyze their functions in elections and government at the national and state levels of the federal system (USG 3.7)
- explain the legal, fiscal, & operational relationships between federal and state and between state and local governments (USG 3.8)
- explain the formal process of how a bill becomes a law and define the terms ‘initiative’ and ‘referendum’ (USG 3.9)
- compare the core documents associated with the protection of individual rights, including the Bill of Rights, 14th Amendment, and Article I of the Massachusetts Constitution (USG 3.11)
- examine the influence of political parties, interest groups, grass roots organizations, lobbyists, public opinion, news media, and individual voters on national and state government (USG 3.12)
- analyze & evaluate decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court concerning constitutional principles of separation of powers and checks and balances (USG 3.13)
- analyze & evaluate decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court concerning constitutional principles of federalism (USG 3.14)
- analyze & evaluate decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court concerning constitutional principles of the rights of individuals (USG 5.7)
- describe and analyze how the U.S. and other nations interact via diplomacy, trade, treaties, alliances, and militarily (USG 4.1)
- analyze reasons for conflict among nation states (USG 4.2)
- identify and explain the powers and tools granted to the President by the U.S. Constitution to conduct U.S. foreign affairs (USG 4.3)
- examine the different forces that influence U.S. foreign policy (business, labor organizations, interest groups, ethnic organizations, etc.) (USG 4.5)
- explain the responsibilities of citizenship in the United States (USG 5.1)
- describe the role and behavior of citizens in public elections, local and state governments, and various political activities that may influence public policy decisions of government (USG 5.2)
- describe how citizens can monitor and influence local, state, and national governments as members of interest groups and political action committees (USG 5.3)
- research the political platforms of political parties and candidates for elective offices and explain how citizens in the U.S. participate in public elections as voters and supporters of candidates for public office (USG 5.4)

Assessment Tools

Success in A.P. Government and Politics will be assessed by the following methods:

- Classroom exams and quizzes
- Group exercises in election campaigns, mock trials, and lobbying
- Series of written position papers on issues and government roles
- Group research paper
- Individual “review of the literature” research paper
- Creation of PowerPoint slideshows
- Class Participation in debate and discussion

Materials and Resources:

American Government – Welch et al
American Government, Readings and Cases - Woll
American Political Dictionary – Plano and Greenberg
Critical Thinking and American Government – Brudney et al

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A.P. American Government - Conforti
A.P. American Government Vol. I - Conforti
A.P. American Government Vol. II - Conforti
A.P. American Government Vol. III – Conforti
Simulations in American Government – Brown & Conforti
Due Process – Hutchinson
Freedom of the Press – Hutchinson
Freedom of Speech – Hutchinson

Relationship to Scituate High School Students Expectations

Scituate High School students will have the opportunity in *Advanced Placement United States Government and Politics* to become:

- effective readers (1)
- effective writers (2)
- effective presenters (written, oral, visual) of their research, their interpretations, and solutions to historical problems (3)
- effective problem solvers (4)
- effective information gatherers/researchers (5)
- effective contributors to the community at large