



INCLUDES

- ✓ Course framework
- ✓ Instructional section
- ✓ Sample exam questions

AP[®] U.S. Government and Politics

COURSE AND EXAM DESCRIPTION

Effective
Fall 2023

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER



Endorsed by the
National Constitution Center



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The course framework within this course and exam description is a model of political and ideological balance. It will not only help students understand the U.S. Constitution and the political system but will also help them become informed citizens who are willing to preserve, protect, and defend the rights and liberties at the core of our nation's charter. That is why we are delighted to partner with College Board on a series of classroom lessons and materials that support instruction in AP U.S. Government and Politics and help bring balanced constitutional content to students across America.

AP COURSE AND EXAM DESCRIPTIONS ARE UPDATED PERIODICALLY

Please visit AP Central (apcentral.collegeboard.org) to determine whether a more recent course and exam description is available.

What AP® Stands For

Thousands of Advanced Placement teachers have contributed to the principles articulated here. These principles are not new; they are, rather, a reminder of how AP already works in classrooms nationwide. The following principles are designed to ensure that teachers' expertise is respected, required course content is understood, and that students are academically challenged and free to make up their own minds.

1. AP stands for clarity and transparency. Teachers and students deserve clear expectations. The Advanced Placement Program makes public its course frameworks and sample assessments. Confusion about what is permitted in the classroom disrupts teachers and students as they navigate demanding work.
2. AP is an unflinching encounter with evidence. AP courses enable students to develop as independent thinkers and to draw their own conclusions. Evidence and the scientific method are the starting place for conversations in AP courses.
3. AP opposes censorship. AP is animated by a deep respect for the intellectual freedom of teachers and students alike. If a school bans required topics from their AP courses, the AP Program removes the AP designation from that course and its inclusion in the AP Course Ledger provided to colleges and universities. For example, the concepts of evolution are at the heart of college biology, and a course that neglects such concepts does not pass muster as AP Biology.
4. AP opposes indoctrination. AP students are expected to analyze different perspectives from their own, and no points on an AP Exam are awarded for agreement with any specific viewpoint. AP students are not required to feel certain ways about themselves or the course content. AP courses instead develop students' abilities to assess the credibility of sources, draw conclusions, and make up their own minds.

As the AP English Literature course description states: "AP students are not expected or asked to subscribe to any one specific set of cultural or political values, but are expected to have the maturity to analyze perspectives different from their own and to question the meaning, purpose, or effect of such content within the literary work as a whole."

5. AP courses foster an open-minded approach to the histories and cultures of different peoples. The study of different nationalities, cultures, religions, races, and ethnicities is essential within a variety of academic disciplines. AP courses ground such studies in primary sources so that students can evaluate experiences and evidence for themselves.
6. Every AP student who engages with evidence is listened to and respected. Students are encouraged to evaluate arguments but not one another. AP classrooms respect diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. The perspectives and contributions of the full range of AP students are sought and considered. Respectful debate of ideas is cultivated and protected; personal attacks have no place in AP.
7. AP is a choice for parents and students. Parents and students freely choose to enroll in AP courses. Course descriptions are available online for parents and students to inform their choice. Parents do not define which college-level topics are suitable within AP courses; AP course and exam materials are crafted by committees of professors and other expert educators in each field. AP courses and exams are then further validated by the American Council on Education and studies that confirm the use of AP scores for college credits by thousands of colleges and universities nationwide.

The AP Program encourages educators to review these principles with parents and students so they know what to expect in an AP course. Advanced Placement is always a choice, and it should be an informed one. AP teachers should be given the confidence and clarity that once parents have enrolled their child in an AP course, they have agreed to a classroom experience that embodies these principles.

About the AP U.S. Government and Politics Course

AP U.S. Government and Politics provides a college-level, nonpartisan introduction to key political concepts, ideas, institutions, policies, interactions, roles, and behaviors that characterize the constitutional system and political culture of the United States. Students will study U.S. foundational documents, Supreme Court decisions, and other texts and visuals to gain an understanding of the relationships and interactions among political institutions, processes, and behaviors. Underpinning the required content of the course are several big ideas that allow students to create meaningful connections among concepts throughout the course.

Students will also engage in skill development that requires them to read and interpret data, make comparisons and applications, and develop evidence-based arguments. In addition, they will complete a political science research or applied civics project.

College Course Equivalent

AP U.S. Government and Politics is equivalent to an introductory college course in U.S. government.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisite courses for AP U.S. Government and Politics. Students should be able to read a college-level textbook and write grammatically correct, complete sentences.

Project Requirement

The required project adds a civic component to the course, engaging students in exploring how they can affect, and are affected by, government and politics throughout their lives. The project might have students collect data on a teacher-approved political science topic, participate in a community service activity, or observe and report on the policymaking process of a governing body. Students should plan a presentation that relates their experiences or findings to what they are learning in the course.

AP U.S. GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Course Framework

Preface

We offer this course framework for AP U.S. Government and Politics to the American public and education community. Dedicated teams of college professors and AP high school teachers have worked on this framework for years, gathering wide-ranging input and feedback from the public at large.

The committee members and AP Program staff worked with a special intensity and care. We realize that this course is more than just one more class period in a crowded school day; it must be a space in which students immerse themselves in the ideas and knowledge essential to our democracy.

AP U.S. Government and Politics offers students the opportunity to see how individuals and their ideas can shape the world in which they live; it invites them to explore central questions of liberty and justice in practice. The Supreme Court opinions explored in this course are not museum pieces but deeply felt expressions. They all represent real choices and decisions with enormous consequences. We aim for students to read them and discuss them with openness and insight.

The ideas at the heart of the American founding remain as vital and urgent as they were more than 200 years ago; it is our task as educators to make them vivid once more. As we reflect on this course, five principles become clear:

1. Command of the Constitution lies at the center of this course, the touchstone for informed citizenship and scholarship.
2. Students are not spectators but analysts; they must analyze the documents and debates that formed our republic and animate public life today.
3. Knowledge matters; we define a focused body of shared knowledge while leaving room for the variety of state standards and the imaginations of individual teachers.

4. We can't avoid difficult topics, but we can insist on a principled attention to the best arguments on both sides as students read and write.
5. Civic knowledge is every student's right and responsibility; we therefore have the obligation to make the best learning resources, such as the National Constitution Center's Interactive Constitution, freely available for all.

The aims of this course framework are timeless, and its roots are deeply embedded in the American experiment and the intellectual traditions that animated our founding.

Aristotle famously described humankind as a "political animal." He argued that a person who lives without a political life is incomplete and alone, like an isolated piece on a game board. For Aristotle, participation in civic life is necessary to live fully. In more modern times, President Eisenhower declared that "politics ought to be the part-time profession of every person who would protect the rights and privileges of free people and who would preserve what is good and fruitful in our national heritage."

We are grateful to the AP community of teachers and their colleagues in colleges across our country, whose shared devotion to students forged this course framework. A framework is only an outline of content and skills; the real craft is in the decisions that knowledgeable teachers make every day in the classroom as they develop their curriculum. We are confident that in the hands of AP teachers, this course framework will open doors of opportunity for students throughout their lives.

—From David Coleman, CEO,
College Board

Introduction

The AP U.S. Government and Politics course detailed in this framework reflects what political science teachers, professors, and researchers agree that a college-level government and politics course should teach students to do: analyze and interpret the Constitution, important political documents, and data to better understand the American national government and the political actors who interact with it.

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Course and Exam Description defines what representative colleges and universities typically expect students to know and be able to do in order to earn college credit or placement. Students practice the skills used by political scientists by studying data, political writings from the founding era to the present, the structure of the government as established by the Constitution, and constitutional interpretations handed down by the Supreme Court. Students will show mastery of these skills on the exam through a variety of means, including concept application, data analysis, Supreme Court case comparisons, and writing political science arguments.

Although the course framework is designed to provide a clear and detailed description of the course content and skills, it is not a curriculum. Teachers create their own curricula to meet the needs of their students and any state or local requirements.

The National Constitution Center and College Board

In partnership with the National Constitution Center, the AP Program has developed a series of classroom lessons and materials related to the U.S. Constitution. This series includes resources to support instruction in AP U.S. Government and Politics, AP Comparative Government and Politics, AP U.S. History, and AP English Language and Composition. These lessons and resources are available to AP teachers via the course homepages at AP Central and to all teachers through the National Constitution Center’s website.

Maintaining Political Balance

AP U.S. Government and Politics is a nonpartisan course and has been endorsed by the National Constitution Center as well as a range of conservative and liberal scholars for its political balance. The required readings are the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Articles of Confederation, representative Federalist Papers, Brutus No. 1, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” In addition, there are required Supreme Court cases. Additional readings and assignments that teachers select to supplement the course must, as a whole, maintain a political balance. It is expected and required that all AP-authorized courses maintain political balance through a nonpartisan curriculum.

Course Framework Components

Overview

This course framework provides a description of the what students should know and be able to do to qualify for college credit or placement.

The course framework includes two essential components:

1 COURSE SKILLS

The skills for this course are central to the study and practice of government and politics. Students should develop and apply the described skills on a regular basis over the span of the course.

2 COURSE CONTENT

The course content is organized into commonly taught units of study that provide a suggested sequence for the course. These units comprise the content and conceptual understandings that colleges and universities typically expect students to master to qualify for college credit and/or placement. The content is framed by big ideas, which are cross-cutting concepts that build conceptual understanding and spiral throughout the course.