

Bergen Community College
Division of Business, Social Sciences & Public Services
Department of Social Sciences

Departmental Policy Syllabus

POL-101 AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Basic Information about Course and Instructor

Semester and year:
Section Number:
Meeting Times and Locations:

Instructor:
Office Location:
Phone:
Departmental Secretary: [optional]
Office Hours:
Email Address:

Course Description

American Government is the study of the American national political system: the uses, options, patterns, and limitations of public power. The course examines the theoretical roots of government, the American adaptation of the Western political tradition, the Constitution, decision making structures, the role of the people in government, political parties and civil rights. Current problems are analyzed and discussed.
3 lectures, 3 credits
General Education Course – Social Science Elective

Student Learning Objectives

The purpose of the course is to analyze the relationships between basic political values, the U.S. Constitution, governmental structures and processes, problem solving and the exercise of power.

Key objectives of the course include enabling the student orally and in writing to:

1. identify and define basic **concepts** such as limited government, checks and balances, separation of power, federalism
2. identify and describe the basic provisions of the **U.S. Constitution**
3. trace the evolution of **power within the national government**, e.g., the modern growth of executive and judicial power
4. describe the roles of the public, **political parties and interest groups** in elections and the making of policy,
5. identify the **diverse interests** in the American polity: ethnic, racial, regional, economic, etc.
6. identify, research and analyze **key issues and controversies** in contemporary politics and
7. state and support his/her own views on key political issues logically, coherently and concisely.

In pursuit of the foregoing goals, the course is based on the reading and analysis of required texts, contemporary newspapers and other media sources. Students are given the opportunity and are encouraged to participate actively in class discussions; and students are required to do a substantial amount of expository and critical writing in response to the material presented in the course.

The Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in this course are intended to be aligned with as many of the college's Core Competencies and General Education Goals as possible. In addition, student progress in reaching the course's SLOs is to be assessed through a variety of assessment types (tools) and on the basis of a variety of assessment criteria. Assessment types may include any combination of classroom discussion, objective tests and examinations, essay tests, papers, short essays, book reports, student classroom presentations, etc., utilizing current (technological and traditional) techniques of social science research and writing.

Course Content

The course is intended to introduce students to the basic principles, values, structure and operation of the current U.S. **national government** and **political system**. Sample course syllabi can be viewed on the website of the American Political Science Association (APSA) at http://www.apsanet.org/content_3807.cfm. The topics included on the sample course syllabus (below) should be covered.

Special Features of the Course (if any) [to be designated by the instructor]

Along with traditional sources students are expected to **use the Internet** to access sources for their research on current issues.

Course Texts and/or Other Study Materials

A variety of suitable texts exist from major publishers. Choice of a textbook is a department-wide decision.

David B. Magleby, et al., *Government by the People, Brief, 6th, T/L Classroom Ed.*, Prentice-Hall.

Web Site: <http://www.prenhall.com/burns> is a course specific website linked to your text.

Other study materials are available such as *The New York Times*-Online: www.nytimes.com

Writing and Critical Thinking Requirement(s)

Because POL-101 is a General Education course, it requires students to complete a variety of critical thinking and writing assignments. These assignments may include class discussions and debates requiring the application of critical thinking skills, short in-class essays, out-of-class writing projects (journals, research papers, argument-analysis papers, book reviews, etc.), tests and examinations containing essay components, and so forth. Instructors will respond to and comment on students' writing in detail.

Sample Assignment: PORTFOLIO-ESSAY:

This written essay is designed to focus on one, relevant, current topic based on articles from current newspapers, especially the *New York Times* www.nytimes.com, and other computer accessible sources, such as Web sites. Besides getting students to become expert in one specific area of government and politics, the newspaper research will introduce the student to the wide range of issues, controversies and problems that affect us all. Basically, this assignment requires the student to **read the newspaper**, select and follow an approved **topic** as it develops during the first two months of the semester. Collect and **save the articles**, either by downloading them to your word processor or clipping them from the newspaper, and then organize them with a commentary (**essay**) explaining the development over the period and offering your own observations and conclusions. **Two articles and one paragraph will be handed in each week identifying and justifying your topic. Without the early research and topic**

approval the final essay will not be accepted. Due date: 11th week.

Grading Policy

A student's final grade for the course is based primarily on his or her performance on the required work for the course (writing assignments, examinations, class presentations, etc.) and on his or her overall mastery of the material covered in the course. A student's class participation may also be evaluated, and the grade thereon may be used as a factor in determining the student's final grade for the course.

Sample: Consistent with the Attendance Policy grades will be earned through a series of **three tests** (70%), a written **portfolio-essay** described above (20%), and **class participation** which includes participation, lateness and attendance among other things (10%).

Attendance Policy

BCC Attendance Policy:

All students are expected to attend punctually every scheduled meeting of each course in which they are registered. Attendance and lateness policies and sanctions are to be determined by the instructor for each section of each course. These will be established in writing on the individual course outline. Attendance will be kept by the instructor for administrative and counseling purposes.

Sample Attendance Policy in this Course:

It is expected that students will attend all class meetings. If a student misses more than three weeks worth of classes throughout the semester he/she will not pass the course. **For example, if the course meets twice a week, no more than six absences are tolerated, for any reason. The student will not pass the course for reasons of absence alone.** For a course that meets once a week, the maximum number of absences tolerated is three. Three latenesses equal one absence; classes when tests are held are included as classes. Illness, accidents and business emergencies sometimes occur; therefore it behooves everyone to **anticipate these emergencies by being in class routinely.** Look upon absences as your sick days and personal days on a job: use them when necessary; take too many and you lose the job! (If you are late be sure to see the Professor that class lest it be counted as an absence.)

Other College, Divisional, and/or Departmental Policy Statements [optional but recommended]

Examples:
Statement on plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty.
ADA statement.
Sexual Harassment statement.
Statement on acceptable use of BCC technology.
Statement on the purpose and value of faculty office hours.

Student and Faculty Support Services [optional but recommended]

List support services, e.g., the Writing Center, the Math Lab, the Tutorial Center, Online Writing Lab (OWL), Office of Specialized Services, etc. Include information on the BCC Library.

Example:

Student and Faculty Support Services

The Distance Learning Office – for any problems you may have accessing your online courses	Room C-334	201-612-5581 psimms@bergen.edu
Smarthinking Tutorial Service	On Line at:	www.bergen.edu/library/learning/tutor/smart/index.asp
The Tutoring Center	Room S-118	201-447-7908
The Technology Assisted Learning Lab (Math and English)	Room C-110	201-447-7988
The Writing Center	Room C-110	201-447-7136
The Online Writing Lab (OWL)		www.bergen.edu/owl
The Office of Specialized Services (for Students with Disabilities)	Room S-153	201-612-5270
The Sidney Silverman Library – Reference Desk	Room L-226	201-447-7436

Sample Format for Course Outline and Calendar

Note to Students: The following Course Outline and Calendar is tentative and subject to change, depending upon the progress of the class.

Week(s)	Date(s)	Topic/Activity	Learning Objectives	Assignments/Events
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

See the (1) Sample Course Outline and (2) Sample Course Outline and Calendar below.

(1) SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE BASIC VALUES AND STRUCTURE OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT.

BASIC CONCEPTS AND VALUES:	Power, The State, Government, the Individual
LIMITED POWER:	Separation of Powers, Checks and balances
ENGLISH INFLUENCE:	English Civil War: Hobbes and Locke
FRENCH INFLUENCE:	Montesquieu and Rousseau
AMERICAN ADAPTATION:	From the <u>Declaration</u> to the <u>Constitution</u> , Jefferson to Madison

Assignments: Read **Chapter 1** in the text and the **Declaration of Independence, The U.S. Constitution and Federalist Paper #10**, all in the text.

2. **FEDERALISM:** divide power between a national government and state governments, each exercising significant powers (an inefficient way of dealing with major problems thereby subject to continuous debate and change).

Assignments: Read **Chapter 2** in the text.

3. **CIVIL RIGHTS:** specific protections for individuals against some government actions. What is to be protected? We continue to dispute these issues today in the Halls of Congress and the Supreme Court; for example: when does one's freedom of religion to pray in school conflict with another's right to be free from government imposed religion? when should government prevent inequalities or try to right old ones?

Assignments: Read **Chapter 13** in the text. **Reread the Bill of Rights.**

4. **EQUALITY:** What does equality mean and how do we measure it? Where is it found in the Constitution? What steps should be taken to achieve this democratic goal?

Assignment: Read **Chapter 14.**

TEST ON ALL ABOVE: CHAPS: 1, 2, 13 AND 14, ASSIGNED READINGS AND LECTURE NOTES.
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POLITICS: "WHO GETS WHAT, WHEN AND HOW", Harold Lasswell

In a democracy what is government supposed to do ? What policies should be made? How are our resources to be used?
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5. **POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES:** are you a **Conservative, Liberal or Moderate**? What are most people? Should people pay higher taxes to pay for college grants or loans for you?

Assignments: Read **Chapter 3** in the text.

6. **WHO ARE THE PEOPLE?** Demographics. Are we all alike? Do we have different needs and goals? What does the census tell us?

Assignments: Read **Chapter 4** in the text.

7. **POLITICAL PARTIES AND INTEREST GROUPS.** How do you **win** elections and get what you want? How much does it cost? Why do we have a **two-party** system? If you feel strongly about an issue (e.g., pro-or anti-abortion) should you be limited in what you can spend to inform your representatives and the public?

Assignments: Read **Chapter 5** in the text.

8. **PUBLIC OPINION:** Who thinks, who votes, who cares? How do we know what the people think? Are polls accurate?

Assignments: Read **Chapter 6** in the text.

**TEST ON ABOVE MATERIAL SINCE LAST TEST:
CHAPS. 3-6 AND LECTURE NOTES.**

INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES:

What are the functions, powers, procedures and relationships of the national government's three branches?

9. **CONGRESS:** The **First Branch:** powers, structure and process.
Making law, representing "the people", struggling with the President.

Assignments: Read **Chapter 8** in the text.

10. **PRESIDENCY:** powers, structure and process
Imperial Presidency or Deadlock?
Cabinet and Staff: friend or foe?

Assignments: Read **Chapters 9-10** in the text.

11. **JUDICIARY:** powers, structure and process
Do Judges make Law?
Is the Court a political institution?

Assignments: Read **Chapter 12** in the text.

12. **OPTIONAL POLICY TOPICS** selected by Instructor.

TEST ON ABOVE MATERIAL SINCE LAST TEST: CHAPS 8,9, 10 AND 12 AND LECTURE NOTES

(2) SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE AND CALENDAR

[with designation of Student Learning Objectives – by number – for each topic]

Note to Students: The following Course Outline and Calendar is tentative and subject to change, depending upon the progress of the class.

Week(s)	Date(s)	Topic/Activity/Assignments (See the Instructors' specific course outline for activity and the specific text in use for assignments. Activities may include any combination of classroom discussion, objective tests and examinations, essay tests, papers, short essays, book reports, student classroom presentations, etc., utilizing current (technological and traditional) techniques of social science research and writing.)	Student Learning Objectives
1-2		Introduction: Basic values and structure	1-7
3		Federalism: Perennial problems with diversity and decision making. Centralism and devolution of power	1-7
4		Civil Rights: individual freedoms v. government power, especially the Bill of Rights	1-7
5		Equality: a "person" under law, esp. 14th amendment	1-7
		Test 1	
6		Political Ideologies: are you "liberal", "conservative", "moderate"? What are most Americans?	1-7
7		Demographics and political power: Who are the People? Race, gender, age, regional, urban-suburban, etc.	1-7
8		Political Parties and Interest Groups: 2-party system, money in politics, freedom of speech and association	1-7
9		Public Opinion: what do people think? Are polls accurate?	1-7
10		Policy Makers: Congress: structure, process and power	1-7
		Test 2	

11-12		Policy Makers: Presidency: structure, process and power. Power conflicts with other branches; the Imperial Presidency	1-7
		Papers Due	
13		Policy Makers: Courts: structure, process and power. Do judges make law?	1-7
14-15		Optional Policy Topics	1-7
		Test 3	