



Course Outline

2026-2027 Catalog

POLS C1000 - American Government and Politics

Catalog Description

Transfer Status: CSU/UC

Unit(s): 3.00

Lecture: 51.00 Contact hours/102.00 Out of class hours/153.00 Total hours/3.00 Unit(s)

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Course Description: This course is an introduction to government and politics in the United States and California. Students examine the constitutions, structure, and operation of governing institutions, civil liberties and civil rights, political behaviors, political issues, and public policy using political science theory and methodology. (C-ID POLS 110).

Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Critique governing institutions and political processes within the United States and California.
2. Explain the founding and development of the U.S. and California Constitution.
3. Employ introductory political science research methods to contextualize contemporary political issues and operations in the United States and California.
4. Assess civil liberties and civil rights of individuals and groups as articulated in the U.S. and California Constitutions and subsequent court decisions.
5. Investigate the role of identity and political ideology in shaping public opinion and public policy in the United States and California.
6. Analyze how to effectively participate in politics at the national, state, county, and/or city levels.

Course Content

Topic Titles / Suggested Time Topic	
	<u>Lecture</u>
<u>Topics</u>	<u>Lec Hrs</u>
The purpose of government and nature of democratic governance	51.00
• Political philosophies that underlie democratic government • Comparison of representative and direct democracy • The value of, influences on, and consequences of participation and non-participation in democratic government	
The U.S. and California Constitutions as frameworks for government	
• Political philosophies of the framers and critics of the U.S. Constitution • Processes for amending and interpreting the U.S. and California Constitutions	
The theory and practice of federalism in the United States, focusing on California	
• The framework and operation of federal, state, and local relations • Interaction between the federal government and Native American tribes and entities	
The structure and contemporary operations of federal, state, and local governing institutions in the United States and California including the	
• Executive branch • Legislative branch • Judicial branch	
Civil liberties and civil rights of individuals and groups	
• Civil liberties and rights as articulated in the U.S. and California Constitutions and federal and state court decisions • Contemporary and historical interactions between government and marginalized populations within the United States based on factors such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender and gender expression, sexual orientation, class, ability status, age, citizenship status, language, religion, and/or other forms of identity	
Individual and group behaviors within the context of the U.S. and California constitutions, including	
• Elections, campaigns, and voting • Political parties • Interest groups • Social movements	
Factors that shape politics and policymaking including	

Topics

Lec Hrs

- Political culture
- Political socialization
- Political ideologies
- Public opinion
- Media

Political issues and public policies

- Domestic
- Economic
- Foreign

Introductory research methods used in political science including

- Qualitative tools and techniques
- Quantitative tools and techniques

Total Hours: 51.00

Methods of Instruction

- A. Discussion
- B. Group Discussions
- C. Guest Speakers
- D. Homework: Students are required to complete two hours of outside-of-class homework for each hour of lecture
- E. Lecture

Methods of Evaluation

- A. Examples of potential methods of evaluation used to observe or measure students' achievement of course outcomes and objectives could include but are not limited to quizzes, exams, essays, field journals, projects, critical analysis papers, service learning, simulations, research demonstrations, etc.
- B. Methods of evaluation and appropriate representative assignments will be determined at the discretion of local faculty.

Examples of Assignments

Reading Assignments

1. Read the chapter on public opinion, then read the supplementary article from the Washington Post's Monkey Cage Blog. Come to class prepared to contrast the majoritarian and pluralist models of democracy with respect to their assumptions about public opinion. Also, be prepared to explain what is happening in the figure about Proposition 19 and social desirability.
2. Read the article about redistricting. Be prepared to discuss the difference between redistricting and gerrymandering, how redistricting impacts the incumbency advantage, and what the United States Supreme Court said in the Rucho case in 2019.

Writing Assignments

1. After reading the chapter on federalism, find a news article that relates to either dual or cooperative federalism in a California based newspaper, like the Sacramento Bee. Write a one-page summary of your article and explain how it relates to either dual or cooperative federalism. Include MLA or APA citations.
2. Comedian Stephen Colbert took the political world by storm in 2011 when he announced the creation of his "Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow" Super PAC, an independent expenditure committee that would allow him to raise funds from individuals and corporations and engage in unlimited political spending (Comedy Central 2011). After reading the essay on Campaign Finance Reform and watching the video from Comedy Central, write a 2 page essay explaining the differences between Political Action Committees and Independent Expenditure Committees (Super PACs). Your short essay should also discuss the effects of Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, a landmark Supreme Court case in 2010 that held that the First Amendment protects corporate political speech as part of "an essential mechanism of democracy" (Citizens United v. FEC 2010).

Out-of-Class Assignments

1. In Fall of 2022 various candidates ran for public office at the state level. Locate two speeches or campaign events online. Be able to discuss the public policy differences in the events you observed during our next class. Please review the reading, from our textbook, on Elections and Campaigns before viewing the speeches and be prepared to incorporate key ideas and key terms from the chapter during class discussion.
2. Attend the student debate on campus dealing with diversity and education. Be prepared to discuss in class. Be prepared to describe what "Affirmative Action" is; how this idea was treated by various parties in the debate.

Recommended Materials of Instruction

Patterson, T. (2024). *We The People*. McGraw Hill, 15th. 9781265634568.

Sidlow and Henschen. (2025). *GOVT 12: Principles of American Government*. Cengage, 12th. 9798214147062.

Van Vechten. (2023). *California Politics: A Primer*. Sage, 7th. 9781071875445.

Janda, K., Berry, J.M., Goldman, J, Schildkraut, D, & Manna, P. (2024). The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics. *Cengage*, 15th. 9780357794555.

Zero Cost Textbook

Glen Krutz and Sylvie Waskiewicz. (2024). American Government 3e. OER. <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-3e/>

Reti. 2023. Introduction to California Government and Politics. (OER)

[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Political_Science_and_Civics/Introduction_to_California_Government_and_Politics_\(Reti\)](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Political_Science_and_Civics/Introduction_to_California_Government_and_Politics_(Reti))

Other Learning Materials

Any college-level introduction to American government and politics textbook. May also include supplementary materials such as, but not limited to, primary sources (e.g. The Federalist Papers), readers, etc.

The Sacramento Bee newspaper

Minimum Qualifications

Political Science (Masters Required)

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