

Political Science 150: Introduction to American Government and Politics
College of the Canyons Spring 2010
Instructor: Dr. Steven Reti steven.reti@canyons.edu

Course Description

In this course, we will examine how American politics works, develop our own opinions and share them with one another, and consider how we can improve the American political system.

We begin by determining our own ideologies. Are you a communist? A liberal? A conservative? A libertarian? An independent? It's okay to not know who you are. We study how the ideas of the Framers shaped the U.S. Constitutional system. Next, we examine all the different ways to get involved: voting, interest groups, political parties, campaigning, etc. I ask you to relate what we are studying to current political events. Third, we study how the institutions of government process all of our demands. Are Congress, the Presidency, and the Courts doing a good job?

Course Requirements

Assignments	Description	Value
(1) Attendance/Participation	Please come to class on time ready to discuss the readings. Reading due dates will be assigned in class. It is expected, barring illness or emergency, that you attend every class. Please participate in class discussions; everyone learns a great deal from your ideas! These points will be earned through attendance and active meaningful participation.	100pts
(2) Three unit tests	Each test will consist of multiple choice and essay questions based on our class discussions and the readings.	200pts each
(3) Quizzes	Occasional evaluations: multiple choice, short essay	20 pts. each
(4) Three analytical papers	1. Political autobiography 2. Assignment to be announced 2. Mock Trial Brief	100 pts. Each
(5) Current Events analyses	We apply general concepts to contemporary events. I will ask you to discuss current issues in short essays.	20 pts. each

Student Learning Outcomes:

The student will be able to:

Identify the basic institutions of the government of the United States and the State of California.

Compare and contrast democratic theories of American government.

Exhibit a heightened sense of personal political efficacy and civic responsibility.

Objectives:

- 1) Summarize federalism and the relationships between national, state, and local government within that political structure.
- 2) Describe and evaluate the basic theories behind the U.S. Constitution and their role in contemporary American political life.
- 3) Compare the functions of the three branches of government.
- 4) Explain the differences in the major contemporary political ideologies and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.
- 5) Compare the influence of political parties, interest groups, the media and public opinion in public policy decisions.
- 6) Identify and explain the major theories and challenges in domestic and foreign political affairs.
- 7) Explain the role of state and local governments with a particular emphasis on the distinguishing characteristics of California government.

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Course Materials

- (1) Barbara A. Bardes, Mack C. Shelley, II. And Steffen W. Schmidt, **American Government and Politics Today** (any recent edition acceptable)
- (2) Korey, John L., **California Government**, (Earlier editions are acceptable).
- (3) Supplementary Reading distributed in class
- (4) The *New York Times* email edition (free at nytimes.com)

Unit 1: The American Constitutional System

Topic 1: Introduction to American Politics

- a. Read chapter 1 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 1 of Korey.

Topic 2: The U.S. and the California System of Government compared

- a. Read chapter 2 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 2 of Korey.

Topic 3: Federalism

- a. Read chapter 3 of Bardes.

Paper Assignment 1: Topic and Due Date to be announced.
Unit 1 exam: Date to be announced

Unit 2: Links between People and Government

Topic 4: Public Opinion

- a. Read chapter 6 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 3 of Korey.

Topic 5: Political Participation

- a. Read chapter 9 of Bardes.

Topic 6: Interest Groups

- a. Read Chapter 7 of Bardes.

Topic 7: Political Parties

- a. Read chapter 8 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 4 and 5 of Korey.

Paper Assignment 2: Date to be announced

Unit Exam 2: Date to be announced

Unit 3: Institutions of Government and Law

Topic 8: Congress

- a. Read chapter 10 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 6 of Korey.

Topic 9: Presidency

- a. Read chapter 11 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 7 of Korey.

Topic 10: The Judiciary

- a. Read chapter 13 of Bardes.
- b. Read chapter 8 of Korey.

Topic 11: Civil Liberties

- a. Read chapter 4 of Bardes.

Topic 12: Civil Rights

- a. Read chapter 5 of Bardes.

Paper Assignment 3: due date to be announced

Unit Test 3: Date to be announced

