



# 2023-2024 COURSE SYLLABUS

## A.P. UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT & POLITICS (5 credits/semester) SXS 203

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Term and Year: Fall 2023

Name of Instructor: Brett Williams

Room Number: C-304

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Class Website: <https://sites.google.com/scusd.edu/williams-ap-gov/home>



Scan to access course website

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This semester's course is a study of the basic beliefs and ideals that underlie American democracy; its historical roots; and how its legal, governmental, and economic institutions affect public policy at the local, state, national, and international levels. Special emphasis is given to preparing the student for the College Board's Advanced Placement Test in American Government and Politics. AP Government students attempt to answer three main questions:

1. How does our political system affect me and the people I care about?
2. What are the priorities of those in power, and what forces have shaped those priorities?
3. How can I impact the policy choices of those in power to help bring about positive change in my community?

### COURSE GOALS

Above all else, my goal is to help students craft and refine their voice and political identity. I plan on helping facilitate that through a variety of different activities this year. Much research indicates that students learn far more from doing than through lectures. That being said, great emphasis will be placed on student discussion and debate. The forms these take will range from simulated Appropriations Committee hearings, and Socratic Seminars to whole class debates. To quote moveon.org, "Democracy is not a spectator sport." So be ready to participate.

### TEXTBOOK

Abernathy, Scott, and Karen Waples. *American Government: Presidential Election Update*. 1st ed., Bedford, Freeman, & Worth, 2021.

### THE EXAM

This course is the equivalent of a college course and students are encouraged to prepare to take the AP Exam in the Spring Semester (Thursday, May 1st, 2022, 8 am). There are several advantages to taking the AP US Government exam: Foremost is the potential to earn college credit while still in high school. The exam is **2 hours and 45 minutes** in length. Half of the exam is an **80-minute, 55-question multiple-choice** section. The other half of the exam is a **100-minute essay section** with three free-response questions and one argument essay. The A.P. U.S. Government exam is graded on a five-point scale. Generally, most public universities (most of the UCs) award credit to students who earn a 3 or higher while many private colleges require a score of 4 or higher. For example, a score of 3 or better will fulfill the American Institutions requirement at UC Berkeley. Others provide elective credit for a passing AP score. However, since each school is free to set its own policy, students are advised to check the policies of institutions they are interested in attending. You can do that here at: <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/creditandplacement/search-credit-policies>. It's also worth reflecting on your level of commitment in preparing for such an exam. Without that, a passing score is likely out of reach. The choice is yours.

Aside from the potential of college credit, there are a number of other reasons to take the exam. First, the challenge of taking a three-hour exam alone prepares students well for the challenges college assessments pose. Second, qualifying scores create new opportunities for scholarships or other means of recognition from the universities students attend or from other prestigious



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organizations. Third, you'll have all the bragging rights of having excelled on an exceedingly challenging exam. Finally, even for those who do not pass, colleges pay attention to those who take the risk.

## COURSE OUTLINE

Content Area	Dates
1. Foundations of Government	8/31-9/29
2. Political Beliefs, Ideologies, Parties, and Policies	10/2-10/13
3. Linkage Institutions: Elections, Pol. Parties, Interest Groups, and Media	10/16-11/3
4. Institutions of Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Courts	11/6-11/17, 11/28-12/8
5. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	12/11-12/22
6. Civic Empowerment Project Class Prep and Presentations	1/8-1/12
7. Final Review	1/15-1/19

NOTE: Take advantage of the State Seal of Civic Action Opportunity this semester. Find out more [here](#).

## GRADING

Ongoing Self Assessment	A log where students keep track of their progress on all class assignments preparing them for the Summative Assessments and reflecting on their performance and understanding of both formative and summative assessments.t.	10%
Projects	Debate Project, Civic Empowerment Project	30%
Summative Assessments	Multiple choice, short answer, essay, and presentations.	60%

## GRADING SCALE

A=89.5%+      B=79.5%+      C=69.5%+      D=59.5%+      F=59.4% or below

## GRADING BASED ON MASTERY (On the standards indicated below)

[California State Standards](#)

[National Standards for Personal Financial Education](#)

[Common Core Standards for Social Studies](#) (pp. 85-95).

## STANDARDS-BASED GRADING

Here are a few articles to learn about Standards Based Grading

- <https://kappanonline.org/standards-based-grading-equity-reform-feldman/>
- <http://my.aasa.org/AASA/Resources/SAMag/2019/May19/Feldman.aspx>
- **Grading for Equity** by Joe Feldman (2019: Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS & RIGOR:

**Formative Assessments:** Mastery of content in this class requires participation in group and class discussions and activities, as well as individual study and preparation. Students will be required to complete an **Ongoing Self Assessment on Formative Assessments by Standard** to help prepare them for summative assessments. **Formative assessments will be reviewed for accuracy (in class), but not graded.**



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**Summative Assessments:** After being introduced to a particular topic, students will be expected to prepare for in-class content application (Presentations/Writing Assignments/Portfolios/Quizzes/Tests).

**Retakes: Standards-based grading** is about developing a growth mindset. So retakes are a large part of the course. Students will have an opportunity to retake a given assessment on the target standards they are seeking to reach proficiency or above. Retakes will be offered once a week on Wednesdays at lunch or before school at 7:30 a.m. In order to do a retake, the OSA for that content must be complete.

**Makeups:** Students who miss class, will need to make up any Summative Assessments they are missing **ASAP**. Students can do that on the same day and time retakes are offered. Students who are far behind should reach out through Remind, or email so we can coordinate a plan together to get caught up. Don't let yourself fall behind; advocate for yourself.

## GRADING SCALE

Grade	Score Point	Criteria
A	4 (89.5-100%)	<b>SUPERB - Exceeded the standard</b>
B	3 (79.5-89.4%)	<b>PROFICIENT - Met the standard</b>
C	2 (69.5-79.4%)	<b>DEVELOPING - Student has key gaps in their understanding of the standard</b>
D	1 (59.5-69.4%)	<b>NOVICE - Student is unable to demonstrate Proficient or Superb levels without assistance</b>
Incomplete	Incomplete	No evidence

Rubrics will be used for assignments ranging from presentations to papers. The 1-4 scale demonstrates their proficiency in those areas. The percentages used for summative assessments in IC should be viewed relative to this scale as well.

- **1- Novice** Learner knows part of the standard, but may still have learning to accomplish, misconceptions to clear up, and practice is needed. They are beginning to understand the standard.
- **2- Developing:** Learner knows part of the standard, but still makes mistakes because confidence in their knowledge is developing. More practice is needed to improve their confidence.
- **3- Proficient:** Learner knows the standard but might make a few small mistakes because they are human. They are confident in their learning.
- **4- Superb:** Learner knows the standard and can make connections to how this standard relates to other standards. They make little to no mistakes and can justify their thoughts with background knowledge. They can transfer their knowledge to similar, yet different scenarios.

## GRADING & INFINITE CAMPUS

Instead of assignment headings like Ch.1 Quiz, you will see something like this 1. Found Docs, 2. SCOTUS Cases. This is intended to demonstrate to students and parents alike exactly where a student is on a given standard. Students can then



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pinpoint their challenge areas, and retake the quiz portion that only targets that specific area. In this respect, this grading system should help make grades more transparent and students more empowered.

**Extra Credit:** You have enough work to do in the class without extra credit. Focus on developing proficiency on the required standards instead of taking advantage of retakes, and prepping extensively for the projects.

**Late/Incomplete Work form** to your assignment before submitting it. You can find it on my [website](#), in the sidebar, and on Google Classroom. Late Forms will primarily be used on project stages. **I do not accept late work for your Ongoing Self Assessments (OSAs)**. My reason is that the whole purpose of the OSA is to prepare you for the quizzes. Turning in OSAs after your quizzes then makes no sense. If you're absent for a quiz, just turn in your OSA for that week after your makeup quiz.

## Ongoing Self-Assessment

- This will be a document you will receive in class at the start of each unit, almost always on Monday, and it will be submitted with your assignments from that week's unit, stapled to the back. View it as a portfolio of your work, and a chance to reflect on where you are succeeding, and where you need to focus your efforts better. The reflections here should help considerably both with retakes and progressing through the semester.

## PROJECTS

### Debate Project

You will also be engaging in a team debate on one of nine different issues that will be occurring throughout the semester. You will either be affirming the prompt or negating it. The objective here is to learn how to effectively construct strong arguments based on valid sources, as well as how to refute counterarguments. Reading and listening critically are the keys to success here. Find out more about the debate project [here](#). Note: If you wish to have the opportunity to improve your

### Civic Empowerment Project

The beginning stages of this project will be completed during the semester. However, the bulk of the project will occur after the APGOPO Exam on May 1st. The goal of this project is to apply what we've learned about the levers of power and to mobilize behind an issue of our choosing in an effort to create, reform, or repeal an existing policy. That policy might exist at Kennedy, in your neighborhood, in the city at large, in the state, or even a national issue. Find out more about the Civic Empowerment Project [here](#).

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Computer - bring to class every day
- A binder with binder section dividers for this class (Class Assignments, Handouts, Warmups, Your Choice)
- Lined binder paper
- Pencils and pens (black or blue only please)

## BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

The following are a few of the more notable expectations students will follow:

1. Be on time physically and mentally.
2. Treat others with respect at all times, especially when confronting ideas different from your own.
3. Be on task, and offer help to others if you finish early.



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4. Keep your electronic devices hidden and silent unless the instructor approves use.
5. Adhere to the JFK expectations of academic integrity.\*

\*Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the attempt to pass off the ideas, research, theories, or words of others as one's own" (College Board). There are however a number of assignments throughout the year where the teacher will encourage you to talk about your responses with your classmates, but note that your work is your work and should always remain in your possession unless the teacher is currently grading it. Plagiarizing any assignment will result in a 0 for that assignment. Cheating on any quiz or exam will also immediately result in a zero for that assignment. Students caught cheating will not be able to make up the points lost on these assignments. Plagiarizing or cheating a second time will lead to an Unsatisfactory mark for Citizenship for the semester and a parent conference with the possibility of more severe consequences depending on the situation. The teacher and administration determine the degree of the severity of the consequence. In this class, my ultimate goal is for you to develop YOUR VOICE. You may use the cited ideas and arguments of others to help support your arguments, but they still must be YOUR arguments. It's YOUR position that I want above all else in this class.

### FINAL NOTE

Please note that after teaching for 20 years I have learned that every group of students is different. With that in mind, I reserve the right to change the policies indicated above at any time during the semester. Before these changes occur though I will be sure to communicate those changes with the students in advance, and announce those changes using Google Classroom and where possible, on my website.

I want to end by saying what an honor it is to teach you this year. Please consider me your advocate here at Kennedy High School. You have a support system here at Kennedy as well as at home. Remember that and it will be a good year.



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## A.P. U.S. Government and Politics Executive Summary

This executive summary of the Syllabus is meant for your binder. The full syllabus should be accessed at <https://sites.google.com/site/williamsapgov/> and read closely. Once you and your parent have done so, please complete the Syllabus Verification form on Google Classroom where the full Syllabus can also be found.

- Keep this page in your binder and have it with you throughout the semester.
- Be ready to take risks. We're all going to be wrong at some point this semester. Let's grow from that.
- Your grade will be based on the standards related to this course alone. Formative assessments, which are practice-based, will not be graded.
- Summative assessments (quizzes, exams, presentations) and projects (the debate project and the CEP) represent 90% of your grade in the class. Prepare accordingly, and be willing to try different approaches.
- Retakes (on summative assessments) are an integral part of the class. Take advantage of them and build your proficiency in all the required standards.
- Late work will not be accepted without a completed Late/Incomplete form attached. You can find the Late Forms on my [website](#) on the right-hand side under General Resources.
- **Late work will not be accepted for OSAs.**
- Students who take A.P. classes usually do much better in college in terms of both retention and graduating on time, but **be careful in managing your time.**
- High levels of participation are necessary to get the most out of this course to excel. So, spread the word and talk to whoever you can about this stuff.
- Review tools for these can be found on my website under [Unit Resources](#) or [Review Tools](#).
- The projects are largely group projects, so please be ready to work as part of a diverse team.
- **Quizzes** will happen once a week and fall on **Fridays**. They will consist of MC, short answer, essay, and presentations. **Please don't miss those days.**
- The [notes templates](#) and the unit slides should serve as your resources. Find the slides under [Unit Resources](#) on my website.
- I frequently email and or post announcements so please make sure you check your school email regularly as well as your Google Class account for my class. I will also be using Remind to post class notices. Please ensure I have your primary contact information for these, not your parent's or your junk email accounts.
- Remember above all, that I am your advocate here, but in order to fight for you, I need you to be open with me about how I can best do that. We're part of a team.

Again, please fill out the Syllabus Verification Form on Google Classroom to ask any questions or express any concerns about the course. You can also email me anytime at [brett-williams@scusd.edu](mailto:brett-williams@scusd.edu) or call me at 916-395-5090 Ext. 506304.

Scan the QR code below to access the full class syllabus.

