



2020-2021 COURSE SYLLABUS



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

GENERAL INFORMATION

Term and Year: Fall 2020

Name of Instructor: Brett Williams

Room Number: C-304

Telephone Number: (916) 395-5090 Ext.506304

E-mail Address: brett-williams@scusd.edu

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This semester course is a study of the basic beliefs and ideals which underlie American democracy; its historical roots; and how it's 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

My goal, above all else, 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 lecture. 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

Edwards, George C., et al. Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy. 17th ed., Pearson Education, 2018.

SHOULD YOU TAKE THE EXAM THIS MAY?

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 3, 2021, 8am). 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. Also note, that if any students have financial concerns about the cost of the exam eligible students can get fee waivers. Eligible students are any who are on free and reduced lunch. Others concerned about the cost, consider this, if a student passes with a score of 3 or higher, they may have spent \$94, but would have saved several hundred at most UCs.

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 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 took the risk.

COURSE OUTLINE

Content Area	Dates
1. Foundations of Government*	9/3-9/25
2. Political Beliefs, Ideologies, Parties and Policies**	10/12-10/23
3. Linkage Institutions: Media, Elections and Interest Groups	10/26-11/13
4. Institutions of Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Courts	11/16-12/18
5. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	1/4-1/15
6. Final Review	1/18-1/22

GRADING

As the course will be reliant upon so many different styles of learning it is critical to pull these apart in the grading program to isolate specific strengths and challenges for each student. What is included in each category, as well as the category weights, are indicated below.

Tests/Quizzes	MC Exams, FRQs, Argumentative Essays, Fill-In, Presentations	30%
In Class Assignments	Close Readings, Worksheets, Smaller projects/presentations, 1 Political Event Writeup	25%
Semester Projects	Mikva Challenge/Sr. Project	35%
Final Exam	2 Day Exam: 45-50? s MC, 1 FRQ+1 Arg. Essay	10%

GRADING SCALE

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

HOMEWORK POLICIES

An A.P. Government course covers a great deal of content. We will cover all that we can in class, but there will be a fair amount of reading, researching and writing outside of class as well. The bulk of the homework will be reading from the text. I believe there are many paths to successfully understanding content from the text, so students will be provided with a variety of resources to help them understand the material. The rest of the homework will be devoted to preparing for your debate project, the Civic Empowerment Project, smaller class debates and presentations, as well as preparing for exams.

Chapter notes will not be collected this semester, but can instead be turned in to prevent losing points on quizzes you may miss. The notes could also come in quite handy should you choose to do test corrections on an exam you feel you did poorly on. It will save you much time that is essential in a test corrections session.

We will be moving very quickly, so get all your work in on time. **Late work** will receive **zero credit**. I understand things come up though, so in the event that you are not able to turn something in on time, please make sure you attach the **Late/Incomplete Work form** to your assignment before submitting it. The **forms** are **located** on the **class website**, in the left sidebar. You may use this form **three times over the course of the semester**, so use them wisely.

If you are absent, you have as many days as you were absent to make up the material. You are responsible for getting any assignments you missed. Much of the material can be found on my website under Unit Resources. If you are turning in work late because you were absent, be sure to tell me so I can check it off rather than marking it late. I will not accept work on a unit of study after we have tested. You will also need to contact me if you are late on the day of a group presentation by phone or email and get



clearance from attendance for illness. Without these expect a 0. The reason for this is that your whole group is counting on you. First and foremost, please remember to communicate with me regarding your absences and/or inability to get work in on time. We need to work together this year, and the only way we can do that is if we are open and honest with each other.

*Note, attendance will be strained over distance learning; I understand that. This will force me to flex on some of the parameters I have set above. But, what I ask of you is to please communicate with me when attendance or meeting deadlines poses challenges. College professors will expect the same, and I think you will find both them and me flexible in many instances.

PROJECTS

Mikva Challenge/Senior Project

This project will begin in September and end in late May. This project has replaced my prior Civic Empowerment Project. Unlike that project, the assignments and course content will be weaved together throughout this course and Economics. It will require you to contact elected officials, do polls of your peers and those in the larger community, hold and participate in community forums (over Zoom during the quarantine), and a variety of other actions dependent up on the class and group focus. The specific components will be laid out in advance to provide students time to complete each step. This will be the Senior Project for all my students.

Expect smaller projects throughout the semester as well. For these there will be more time to prepare in class. These smaller projects will not last more than 3-4 days.

All of these projects are group projects. These projects will require you to work as part of a diverse team. I am well aware of the challenges group work can pose, and will do what is in my power to mitigate some of those challenges on my end where I can. It's worth noting though that this is one of the primary areas many managers are saying is lacking among college graduates, according to an article in *Inside Higher Ed* in February 2018. More importantly, working as part of a team is what makes a democracy tick.

TESTS/QUIZZES/PRESENTATIONS

Quizzes will be given at least once a week. These quizzes could take a variety of different forms. Sometimes, they may be multiple choice, fill in questions to answer individually, and other times they may be an oral vocabulary quiz for a group. Other quizzes could consist of an argumentative essay or an FRQ. All quizzes though will place special emphasis on the vocabulary terms, the 9 foundational documents, and the 15 landmark court cases, so please ensure you stay on top of those each unit by making use of the chapter notes templates and the chapter slides. I have posted numerous other resources on my website from Crash Course videos and study guides to graphic organizers and released FRQ prompts as well.

The quizzes, in most cases, cannot be made up. In order to prevent losing quiz points you can turn in a completed set of Vocabulary Template on the assigned chapter by no later than Friday the week the quiz is given. Please label the template clearly, so I can tell which quiz to exempt for you.

Tests will be given on Fridays after each unit is complete. Each unit will last from two to four weeks. These tests will consist of varying combinations of short answer (FRQs), argumentative essays, and multiple choice questions depending on the unit. The typical test will have 1 FRQ and 25-35 multiple choice questions, or 1 Argumentative Essay and 25 multiple choice questions. You will have up to 20 minutes for the FRQ, 35 for the argumentative essay and between 25-30 minutes for the multiple-choice portion. Tests must be made up before the next unit test is given. Said time will be posted in class, and on the website. Note that the teacher may use an alternate test. If you score less than a 90% you may use the notes you submit on the day of that exam to lift your grade up to 10%. That will only occur if you have completed all the chapter notes for that unit.

The presentations will be done as a group in most cases. If you miss one of those make sure your group gets all of your prep work, and they make clear your part, or you will receive a 0 for that assessment. Sometimes, I may have you individually present your particular part if it is an excused absence.

The Final Exam will model the College Board exam as closely as the schedule allows. The first day will consist of one argumentative essay and one FRQ. The second day will consist of 55 multiple choice questions. It will be administered shortly before the College



Board exam. Why not knock out both in the same week? You can do it!

NOTE: What sort of tests and quizzes are administered, as well as how those tests and quizzes are administered could change over distance learning as we determine the most equitable, and rigorous way forward.

BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to be respectful, courteous, and civil. 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 than your own.
3. Be on task, and offer help to others if you finish early (when appropriate).
4. Keep your electronic devices hidden and silent unless the instructor approves use.
5. Adhere to the JFK and PACE 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 17 years I have learned that every group of students is different. Moreover, starting school under the quarantine poses even more uncertainties. With that in mind, I reserve the right to change 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 saying what an honor it is teaching 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.



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

Please sign below to confirm you have downloaded, read and understand the syllabus provided for this class. The full Syllabus can be found at <https://sites.google.com/site/williamsapgov/>. By signing students and parents understand that.

- A.P. U.S. Government is intended to provide students with a college level course.
- 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.
- Vocabulary is critical, and succeeding means consistently reviewing the basic terms and concepts. Review tools for these can be found on my website at: <https://sites.google.com/scusd.edu/williams-ap-gov/home>
- The homework will largely consist of reading the assigned chapters of the textbook, preparation for smaller projects and presentations as well as the Mikva Challenge.
- These projects are group projects, so please be ready to work as part of a diverse team.
- Quizzes will happen once a week and fall typically on Mondays.
- The chapter notes templates and the chapter slides should serve as your resources.
- If you miss a quiz you can turn in a completed Vocabulary Template to excuse you from the quiz score.
- Unit exams will occur usually every two to three weeks on Fridays. Nearly all will be timed exams.
- You may submit your unit notes on the day of the exam to ensure a higher score. Completed notes will boost your score up 10%, but they will only be accepted if you have completed each part. Moreover, the boost will only occur if you score less than 90%. 90% or above will not yield additional points for the exam, hence the notes are insurance.
- If you miss an exam you will need to make it up on a day during the unit I have set aside after school for just such activities. You must make up the exams at this time. If you cannot make it, for reasons outside your control, please talk with me, and I can see what we can do.
- I do not expect memorization for presentations, but students are expected to present rather than read their main arguments/talking points. This conveys understanding, that the material is their own, and that they can help inform the rest of the class on the issue they were assigned.
- 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.
- Be ready to take risks. We're all going to be wrong at some point this semester. Let's grow from that.

Please contact me to provide me any information about your child that might be pertinent to his/her educational experience this semester in A.P. Government (i.e., physical or cognitive limitations, exceptional experiences or capabilities) or if you just have some questions.

I have read, understood, and will abide by all of the provisions of the entire A.P. U.S. Government and Politics syllabus, including the AP Executive Summary here.

Printed Student Name

Student Signature

Date

Printed Parent Name

Parent Signature

Date

Over distance learning instead of signing the above, please complete this [Google Form](#) by no later than Wednesday, September 9th upon your completion.

