

**San Bernardino Valley College  
Political Science 100 Course Outline  
American Politics**

**I. CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:**

- A. POLIT 100: American Politics  
Lecture: 3 hours per week.

A basic introduction to American politics that is designed to meet the state requirement in United States and California constitution and government with primary emphasis on the American national government. Includes an introduction to democratic political theory; the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights; the operations of our national political institutions including Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court; political parties; and an overview of California government and politics.

- B. Schedule Description: Introduction to American government and politics. Designed to meet the state requirements in United States and California constitution and government.

**II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: One.**

**III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:**

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

- A. Describe the leading features of the American and California governments;
- B. Explain the nature of the political process in general;
- C. Critically evaluate journalistic overviews of political conflicts;
- D. Recognize the specific methods by which individuals and groups are able to influence governmental decisions in the contemporary world.

**IV. CONTENT:**

The subject matter of this course includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- A. The general theory of politics: why do we have a government at all?
- B. The meaning of democracy: majority rule and individual rights – and the relationship between these two components.

- C. The origins of American democracy: the English tradition and the conditions of America in the colonial period.
- D. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and the philosophy behind it.
- E. The Constitution and the Framers: Madison and Hamilton.
- F. The text of the Constitution, to include:
  - 1. the legislative power;
  - 2. the two houses of Congress;
  - 3. the Electoral College;
  - 4. the powers of the President;
  - 5. the Supreme Court;
  - 6. the judiciary;
  - 7. the full faith and credit clause;
  - 8. the supremacy clause;
  - 9. the Amendment process;
  - 10. the Bill of Rights;
  - 11. the other Amendments;
  - 12. proposed Amendments;
  - 13. a comparison with the California Constitution.
- G. The federal system: dual and cooperative federalism.
- H. The modern Congress: the party caucuses, how a bill (sometimes) becomes a law; the role of special interest groups, and a comparison with the California legislature.
- I. The modern Presidency and the powers of the office – and a comparison with the California governorship.
- J. The federal bureaucracy, and a comparison with the California state bureaucracy.
- K. The federal judiciary, and a comparison with the California state judicial system.
- L. Political ideology: left vs. right; Communism, Fascism, and everything in between; how to think critically about political ideas.
- M. Parties: two-party vs. multi-party systems – an analysis of the difference; which is better? Democrats vs. Republicans.
- N. Old-time political machines; reform, California style.
- O. Political campaigns in the modern world.
- P. How ordinary people can be involved in the political process.

## **V. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:**

Instructors will utilize a variety of instructional methods including, but not limited to, the following:

- A. a standard lecture format,
- B. small group discussions of political issues,
- C. field trips to political happenings,
- D. game-playing exercises,
- E. videos of Congress and other political bodies in action,
- F. readings, which may include
  1. a required textbook,
  2. a required or optional book on current affairs, and
  3. newspapers and other journalistic sources,
- G. information on the Internet,
- H. extra credit earned by participation in political activities, such as electoral campaigns or lobbying.

Students will be required to complete written analyses of the above activities, and may be called upon to make oral presentations.

All this should provide students with a knowledge base, critical thinking skills, and the ability to recognize practical opportunities for political action.

## **VI. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:**

Students will be required to show mastery of the subject by completing assignments such as the following:

- A. read the required text(s), attend and pay attention to class lectures, and pass tests on the text and lecture topics;
- B. read *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* and write an essay contrasting Plunkitt's life with that of a contemporary politician;
- C. write a paper comparing and contrasting national government institutions with those of the California state government;

- D. read the op-ed page of the *Los Angeles Times* for a week, and clip one article showing a liberal view and another showing a conservative view;
- E. attend next week's meeting of the San Bernardino City Council, and write a one page summary of what occurred;
- F. locate and download information from the White House web site;
- G. track the progress of a bill through Congress or the California state legislature, by means of the Internet;
- H. spend at least three hours volunteering for a current political campaign, and write a report on what you did; or
- I. outline how you would go about lobbying your U.S. Representative on an issue of concern to you.

The methods by which this course meets the writing requirement include, but will not be limited to: essay examinations, term papers, book reports, journal assignments, written analyses of items in the news, and reaction papers.

## **VII. EVALUATION:**

### **A. Methods of Evaluation:**

1. Examinations and Quizzes will contain questions of the following type:

#### **(a) Multiple Choice Questions**

##### **Example #1**

In the U.S. Constitution, the number of Supreme Court justices

- a) is fixed at nine.
- b) is allowed to vary between five and eleven.
- c) may be any odd number over three.
- d) is not specified.

##### **Example #2**

To end Senate debate on a bill, a cloture vote requires

- a) 51 votes.
- b) 60 votes.
- c) two thirds of the members present and voting.
- d) unanimous consent.

#### **(b) Essay Questions**

##### **Example #1**

Outline the impeachment process, specifying the officials subject to it and its relation to the criminal justice process.

Example #2

Briefly explain the main functions of OMB.

2. Papers and Reports will be judged on the basis of
    - (a) clarity of organization
    - (b) coherence of expression
    - (c) critical analysis of leading ideas
    - (d) pertinent research
    - (e) spelling and grammar
    - (f) turned in by the due date
  3. Other Assignments (see Part VI above) will be evaluated on the basis of the criteria for papers and reports, as far as they are applicable
- B. Frequency of Evaluation:
1. Exams and Quizzes – at least two midterm examinations and a final will be given, and instructors may give weekly or bi-weekly quizzes to make sure the reading is being done
  2. Papers and Reports – at least one paper requiring critical analysis will serve as a partial basis for the course grade
- C. Instructors may evaluate students on the basis of group projects, and may take class attendance into account in determining a final grade

### **VIII. TYPICAL TEXTS:**

The choice of a text is at the discretion of the instructor. The approval of the department chair is required. The following are examples of acceptable texts.

- A. O'Connor, Karen and Sabato, Larry. American Government: Continuity and Change. 2000 Edition, New York, NY, Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2000.
- B. Berman, Larry and Murphy, Bruce Allen. Approaching Democracy. Second Edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1999.

- C. Barbour, Christine and Wright, Gerald C. Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics. Election Edition, New York, NY, Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- D. Hyink, Bernard L. and Provost, David H. Politics and Government in California. Fourteenth Edition, Menlo Park, CA, Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1998.
- E. McKenna, George and Feingold, Stanley. Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Political Issues. Eleventh Edition, Guilford, CN, Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, 1999.

**IX. OTHER SUPPLIES REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:**

Students may be required to obtain additional books, newspapers, magazines, and other printed materials that are relevant to a consideration of the American political system and contemporary political issues and problems. Students may need access to a computer with an Internet connection.