

American Government

Course Text

Patterson, Thomas E. *We the People*, 12th edition. McGraw-Hill, 2017. ISBN 9781259439186.

Course Description

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union..." These are the first words of the United States Constitution, the country's most important government document. What did the framers of this document envision as a "more perfect union?" In this course, you will explore the result of their vision—the American government. You will discover how the founders created a democracy based upon the ideals of liberty, equality, and self-government. You will explore how the government is structured and how it operates, and you will examine the three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial—that make up the system of checks and balances. You will find that although the Constitution in principle grants certain rights and liberties to the people, many groups have not been allowed those rights in practice and have had to fight for them. But as you will discover, the very nature of the United States government means that the people have a voice, and that the Constitution is a living document, because it can be adapted and amended to change with the times.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- Describe the ideals that the United States was founded upon, and discuss their lasting influence on the nation's politics.
- Distinguish between civil rights and civil liberties, and explain how these rights and liberties are achieved through politics.
- Explain how citizens participate in public affairs during elections and through intermediaries such as political parties, interest groups, and the media.
- Discuss the ways Americans think politically, and describe the effect their opinions have on government.
- Describe the division of political power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.
- Debate the proper relationship between the people and the government.
- Explain how the policies of the United States reflect the nature of its political system and its people, and why they tend to be piecemeal and reactive.
- Compare and contrast the structures of the federal, state, and local governments.

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Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Important Terms

In this course, different terms are used to designate tasks:

- Proctoring: all final exams require proctoring which can be completed conveniently from your home. A webcam is required.
- Tutoring: memberships include online tutoring for students to access with any content/subject related questions in the place of faculty. If your tutor is not able to answer your questions please contact a student advisor.
- Practice Exercise: A non-graded assignment to assist you in practicing the skills discussed in a topic.
- Exam: A graded online test.

Course Evaluation Criteria

StraighterLine provides a percentage score and letter grade for each course. See [Academic Questions](#) section in FAQ for further details on percentage scores and grading scale. A passing percentage is **70%** or higher.

If you have chosen a Partner College to award credit for this course, your final grade will be based upon that college's grading scale. Only passing scores will be considered by Partner Colleges for an award of credit.

There are a total of 1000 points in the course.

Topic	Assessment	Points Available
3	Graded Exam #1	125
7	Graded Exam #2	125
	Cumulative Graded Midterm Exam	200
10	Graded Exam #3	125
14	Graded Exam #4	125
15	Cumulative Graded Final Exam	300
Total		1000

Course Topics and Objectives

Topic	Title	Subtopics	Objectives
1	American Political Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • America's Core Political Ideals • The Rules of American Politics • Theories of Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List and discuss America's three core political ideals.. • Analyze how democracy, constitutionalism, and capitalism establish a political process that is intended to promote self-government, defend individual rights, and protect property. • Compare and contrast the four theories of power in America: majoritarianism, pluralism, elitism, and bureaucratic rule. • Describe the evolution of the social contract, and explain why all members within a society must agree with its terms
2	Constitutional Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiating Toward a Constitution • Checks and Balances • The Bill of Rights • Democracy and Republic • The Social Contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation helped shape the Constitution. • Compare and contrast the Virginia and New Jersey plans, and explain how they led to the Great Compromise. • Analyze how the system of checks and balances controls the power of government. • Examine the Bill of Rights and explain why it is important to Americans' liberty.
3	Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and State Sovereignty • National and State Powers • The History of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define federalism and describe the bargaining process at the Philadelphia Convention resulting in its inception.

		<p>Federalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federalism and the Modern State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast the powers of the federal and state governments. • Examine turning points in federalism. • Discuss two reasons why the national government's authority increased dramatically in the twentieth century.
4	Civil Liberties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Speech and Freedom of the Press • Libel and Obscenity • The Free-Exercise and Establishment Clauses • Abortion and Privacy Rights • Defendants' Rights and Habeas Corpus • Terrorism and Civil Liberties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss key Supreme Court decisions involving free speech and freedom of the press. • Evaluate the standards that govern libel and obscenity. • Define the separation of church and state. • Discuss key Supreme Court decisions involving abortion and privacy rights. • Define procedural due process and habeas corpus. • Discuss the four constitutional amendments that contain specific procedural protections for the accused, and explain what protections each provides. • Describe the powers given to the U.S. government by the Patriot Act, and explain which rights it curtails.
5	Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act • Women's Right to Vote • Equal Protection: The Fourteenth Amendment • Social Movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the results of the Brown decision and the Civil Rights Act. • Discuss how African-Americans and women gained the right to vote. • Distinguish among reasonable basis, strict scrutiny, and intermediate scrutiny tests.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how social movements interact with government to produce changes over time in civil rights.
6	Public Opinion and Mass Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does Public Opinion Matter? Where Did You Get Your Political Beliefs? How Has the Internet Changed Mass Media? The Press and Democracy: Friends or Foes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how the public's disinterest in political information and lack of knowledge about the political world restricts the role it can play in policy formation. Define and discuss public opinion and public opinion polls. Test whether you are liberal or conservative, and examine where your political beliefs come from. Describe how the Internet has changed the traditional news media's control of political information. Examine the four roles of the media, and explain the importance of each to a democratic society.
7	Voting and Party Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Vanishing Voter Why Your Vote Counts Are Parties Obsolete? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine the reasons for low voter turnout and what is being done to promote awareness of and participation in the electoral process. Differentiate between prospective voting and retrospective voting, and explain how voting can strengthen democracy. Examine reasons for the weakening of American party organizations and the decline in their influence, as compared to the powerful role of parties in European politics.

8	Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are Interest Groups Engines or Corrupters of Democracy? • The Free Rider Problem • Inside and Outside Lobbying • Pros and Cons of Pluralism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss whether interest groups are engines or corrupters of democracy. • Explain the free-rider problem, and discuss strategies employed by interest groups to surmount it. • Compare and contrast the tactics used in inside and outside lobbying, and examine how political action committees (PACs) influence politics. • Compare and contrast pluralism and interest-group liberalism.
9	Getting Elected to Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why We Re-elect Incumbents • Why Incumbents Sometimes Lose • Redistricting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze why incumbents are typically reelected and how incumbency weakens democracy. • Examine the reasons why incumbents sometimes lose. • Examine redistricting and how it affects Congressional elections.
10	Congressional Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Leaders • Committees • How a Bill Becomes a Law • What Does Congress Do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast the roles and responsibilities of Senate leaders and House of Representatives leaders. • Discuss the principal-agent model of congressional leadership, and explain how leadership in the modern Congress has changed. • Explain the role of the congressional committee system, discuss congressional committee makeup and assignments, and describe the jurisdiction of congressional committees. • Explain the duties of the committee chair, and

			<p>discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the seniority system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a flowchart that shows how a bill becomes law. • Differentiate between cloture and filibuster, and describe a rider. • Explain the three major policy-making functions of Congress, and analyze to what degree these roles are complementary, competitive, or mutually exclusive.
11	The Presidency and the Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Does the President Do? • The Electoral College • What Does the Cabinet Do? • How Are Cabinet Members Held Accountable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the four authoritative roles that the Constitution grants to the president, and explain how foreign and domestic policy events have shaped the development of presidential power. • Discuss the pros and cons of the electoral college. • Define the ways cabinet agencies differ from each other and from independent agencies. • Explain how the president can hold the bureaucracy accountable for its actions.
12	The Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Judiciary System • Landmark Cases • Federal Court Appointees • Judicial Restraint and Activism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the functions of the Supreme Court, courts of appeals, and district courts. • Distinguish between original and appellate jurisdiction, and examine the five types of Supreme Court opinions. • Define landmark cases that expanded the power of the courts. • Explain the criteria the president uses when selecting Supreme Court

			<p>nominees, and identify factors that make it more likely nominees will be rejected by the Senate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast judicial restraint and judicial activism.
13	Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal Policy • Monetary Policy • Social Welfare Policy • Foreign and Defense Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate between supply-side and demand-side economics, and explain when each should be used. • Examine how taxes are determined and whether we should have a deficit. • Examine how the Federal Reserve System controls monetary policy. • Analyze individual-benefit programs, and explain which programs have public support and why. • Trace the shift of U.S. foreign and defense policy, from dealing with communism to fighting terrorism.
14	State and Local Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Governments • State and Local Governments • Types of Local Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the structure of state governments. • Describe the relationship between state and local governments. • List and discuss some of the major types of local government.
15	Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a review of key content covered in this course.