

Las Positas College
3000 Campus Hill Drive
Livermore, CA 94551-7650
(925) 424-1000
(925) 443-0742 (Fax)

Course Outline for POLI 7

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Effective: Fall 2006

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

POLI 7 — INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT — 4.00 units

Introduction to the principles, problems and basic issues of government with particular emphasis on the national government in the United States, including discussion of the American Constitution, and California state and local government. Strongly recommended: Eligibility for English 1A. 4 hours.

4.00 Units Lecture

Prerequisite

ENG 1A - Critical Reading and Composition

Grading Methods:

Optional

Discipline:

	MIN
Lecture Hours:	72.00
Total Hours:	72.00

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

III. PREREQUISITE AND/OR ADVISORY SKILLS:

Before entering the course a student should be able to:

A. ENG1A

IV. MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES:

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

1. demonstrate an understanding of the basic, introductory subject matter in the field
2. analyze political issues in an objective, critical manner
3. distinguish between direct democracy and representative democracy
4. explain the basic principles of a republican form of government
5. discuss the concept of federalism and evaluate its impact on the American political system
6. interpret political events in the framework of the U.S. Constitution
7. explain the operation of the government and the political processes
8. discuss the separation of powers and identify the roles of the three branches of government, including judicial review
9. discuss the expansion of suffrage and its impact on government and society
10. identify and explain the concept of civil liberties and their civil rights and its application in American society
11. describe the development of the political party system and evaluate the role of political parties in American government and politics
12. describe and assess the processes of public policy making
13. apply general knowledge gained in the class to everyday events that take place locally, nationally, and internationally
14. describe the California Constitution
15. know the development of California's political institutions: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial
16. describe the unique characteristics of California history, government and politics
17. discuss government in action as it pertains to public policy making, including economic and social policies at the national, state, and local government levels

V. CONTENT:

- A. Acquire knowledge and gain understanding of the fundamental heritage, principles, and processes of American government.
- B. Develop a philosophy toward government as an institution in American society that will serve as a frame of reference in critically analyzing current political problems.
- C. Introduction to the study of government and political institutions
- D. Evolution of the American political system
- E. The American Constitution and Bill of Rights
- F. The political process: role of interest groups, political parties and media in politics
- G. Political institutions: Congress, the president and judicial branch
- H. The Supreme Court and administration of justice
- I. History of American Federalism, including:

1. Federal and State Relations
2. Conflicts between states
- J. Description of the California Constitution
- K. Development of California's political institutions: Legislative, Executive, Judicial
- L. Unique characteristics of politics and government in California
- M. Government in action: public policy making of economic and social policy at the national, state (California) and local government levels

VI. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. **Lecture** - An informal lecture method and presentation
- B. **Discussion** - Class discussions
- C. Computer assisted instruction
- D. **Audio-visual Activity** - Use of appropriate audio-visual media
- E. **Written exercises and case studies** - Written assignments

VII. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

A. Reading Assignments 1. Reading from Gerston & Christensen, Chapters 2 & 3, Greenberg & Page, Chapter 9: Compare the political parties of California and assess their effectiveness in relation to political party structures in other regions of the nation. What has impacted the nature of parties in the Golden State? 2. Read a selected Supreme Court case and provide (a) a brief summary of the constitutional issues which were presented to the Supreme Court, (b) a summary of the decision of the court and a critique of the logic used in the majority decision, and (c) the significance of the decision to our system of government, history of our nation's economic system. B. Writing, problem solving or performance: 1. Provide a written analysis of why the U.S. Constitution does or does not meet the democratic conditions of popular sovereignty, political equality, and political liberty as defined in lecture and Greenberg & Page, Chapter 2. 2. Provide an analysis of a minimum of three contemporary political cartoons. What is the issue behind the cartoon? What is the cartoonist attempting to say about the issue? Do you agree with the cartoonist's view? Why?/Why not?

VIII. EVALUATION:

A. **Methods**

1. Exams/Tests
2. Class Participation
3. Home Work
4. Other:
 - a. Typical essay examination questions:
 1. Describe and analyze the arguments in The Federalist #10. How should a free society deal with potential conflicts and differences of opinions?
 2. The two-party system in the U.S. can be divided historically into six major systems. Describe the nature of party competition, control of government, and the major issues of each period. What major factors generated the change in party systems. Discuss the significance of realignment, dealignment, and divided government in the political party systems.
 3. Discuss the claimed erosion of either (a) the separation of powers in the 20th century or (b) federalism and the power of the states in the last half of the 20th century. Please specify the way federalism has affected California politics. On either topic, provide specific policy examples or Supreme Court decisions.
 - b. Student preparation and participation in classroom discussion of issues
 - c. Minimum of three short, written assignments of a research and/or evaluative/analytical nature

B. **Frequency**

1. Minimum of two midterm examinations
2. Additional quizzes and in-class assignments as appropriate
3. Final examination

IX. TYPICAL TEXTS:

1. E. Greenberg & B. Page *The Struggle for Democracy*. 6th ed., Addison-Wesley, 2003.
2. M. Cummings & D. Wise *Democracy Under Pressure*. 9th ed., Thomson and Wadsworth, 2003.
3. J. Wilson & J. Dilulio *American Government*. 9th ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.
4. S. Davis & J. Peltason *Understanding the Constitution*. 16th ed., Thomson and Wadsworth, 2004.
5. L. Gerston & T. Christensen *California Politics and Government*. 7th ed., Wadsworth Publishing, 2003.

X. OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

- A. Blue Books, scantrons, case briefs