

Las Positas College  
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## Course Outline for POLI 7

### INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Effective: Fall 2018

#### 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.

4.00 Units Lecture

#### **Strongly Recommended**

- Eligibility for ENG 1A -

#### **Grading Methods:**

Letter or P/NP

#### **Discipline:**

- Political Science

|   | <b>MIN</b> |
|---|------------|
| <b>Lecture Hours:</b>                       | 72.00      |
| <b>Expected Outside<br/>of Class Hours:</b> | 144.00     |
| <b>Total Hours:</b>                         | 216.00     |

#### II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: 1

#### III. PREREQUISITE AND/OR ADVISORY SKILLS:

**Before entering this course, it is strongly recommended that the student should be able to:**

- A. -Eligibility for ENG 1A
1. Use strategies to assess a text's difficulty, purpose, and main idea prior to the act of reading
  2. Annotate a text during the act of reading
  3. Employ strategies that enable a critical evaluation of a text
  4. Respond critically to a text through class discussions and writing
  5. Use concepts of paragraph and essay structure and development to analyze his/her own and others' essays
  6. Write effective summaries of texts that avoid wording and sentence structure of the original
  7. Respond to texts drawing on personal experience and other texts
  8. Organize coherent essays around a central idea or a position
  9. Apply structural elements in writing that are appropriate to the audience and purpose
  10. Provide appropriate and accurate evidence to support positions and conclusions
  11. Produce written work that reflects academic integrity and responsibility, particularly when integrating the exact language and ideas of an outside text into one's own writing
  12. Utilize effective grammar recall to check sentences for correct grammar and mechanics
  13. Proofread his/her own and others' prose

#### IV. MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES:

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

- A. Explain the founding and development of the U.S. Constitution
- B. Identify and evaluate institutions and political processes within the United States and California
- C. Discuss and analyze contemporary political issues and operations in the United States and California
- D. Explain the civil liberties and civil rights of individuals as articulated in the U.S. Constitution and federal court decisions
- E. Analyze the role of culture, diversity and ideology in shaping public opinion and public policy in the United States and California
- F. Analyze how to effectively participate in politics at the national, state, county and/or city levels

#### V. CONTENT:

- A. The political philosophies of the framers of the U.S. Constitution and critics of the Constitution.
  1. Acquire knowledge and gain understanding of the fundamental heritage, principles, and processes of American government.
  2. 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.
- 3. Basic principles of a republican form of government.
- B. The process of amending and interpreting the U.S. Constitution and California constitution.
  - 1. U.S. process vs California's propositions
  - 2. Historical disputes involving amending and interpreting in U.S. and California Constitutions
- C. The theory and practice of federalism.
  - 1. History of American Federalism
  - 2. Federal and State Relations
  - 3. Conflicts and resolution between federal and state governments
- D. Contemporary operations of United States political institutions and processes, including the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and nongovernmental institutions.
  - 1. Separation of powers
  - 2. checks and balances
  - 3. identify the roles of the three branches of government
  - 4. Relationship between legislative, executive and judicial branches
  - 5. Government and political institutions
  - 6. Making and enforcing public policy
- E. The rights and liberties of individuals as articulated in the U.S. Constitution and federal court decisions.
  - 1. American Constitution and Bill of Rights
  - 2. Supreme Court decisions, interpretations, judicial activism and review
  - 3. Concepts of civil liberties and civil rights and application in American society
  - 4. Historical and contemporary struggles over liberties and rights
- F. Contemporary operations of California state and local political institutions within the framework of federal-state relations.
  - 1. Description and evolution of the California Constitution
  - 2. Development of California's political institutions: Legislative, Executive, Judicial
  - 3. Unique characteristics of California politics and government within a federal structure
  - 4. Direct Democracy vs indirect democracy
- G. Individual and group political behavior of Americans and Californians within the frameworks established by the U.S. Constitution and California constitution, such as elections, interest groups, political parties, and the media.
  - 1. Development of the political party system and evaluation of the role of political parties in American and California government and politics
  - 2. The political process: impact and role of interest groups and media in politics
  - 3. Election and campaign processes in U.S. and California
- H. Factors that shape politics and policymaking including diversity, political culture, political socialization, political ideologies and public opinion.
  - 1. The political process: public opinion and achieving the effects of political socialization and ideology
  - 2. Role of interest groups and the media in influencing public opinion
  - 3. America and California's great diversity creating unique culture and society influencing public policy
- I. Domestic, economic, and foreign issues and policies.
  - 1. Public policy making
    - a. Economic, social and foreign policy at the national, state (California) and local government levels

#### VI. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. **Projects** - per instructor
- B. Political interviews, newsworthy items, current events that complement class discussions.
- C. Primary and secondary readings and internet assignments
- D. **Lecture** - Formal and informal lecture method and presentation
- E. **Classroom Activity** - Small group, individual presentations per instructor
- F. Computer assisted instruction
- G. **Research** - assignments/papers per instructor
- H. **Discussion** - Class discussions
- I. **Written exercises and case studies** - Written assignments
- J. **Audio-visual Activity** - Use of appropriate audio-visual media
- K. **Guest Lecturers** - per instructor

#### VII. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Reading Assignments
  - 1. Compare the political parties of California and assess their effectiveness in relation to political party structures in other regions of the nation.
    - a. 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.
  - 2. Provide an analysis of a minimum of three contemporary political cartoons.
    - a. What is the issue behind the cartoon?
    - b. What is the cartoonist attempting to say about the issue?
    - c. Do you agree with the cartoonist's view?
    - d. Why?/Why not?

#### VIII. EVALUATION:

##### A. **Methods**

- 1. Exams/Tests
- 2. Quizzes
- 3. Research Projects
- 4. Papers
- 5. Oral Presentation
- 6. Group Projects
- 7. Class Participation
- 8. Class Work
- 9. Home Work

##### B. **Frequency**

- 1. Minimum of two midterm examinations and a final examination
- 2. Additional quizzes and in-class assignments per instructor

3. Analytical critiques on reading assignments per instructor
4. Papers/projects/oral presentations per instructor
5. Daily classroom participation
6. Weekly home work reading assignments
7. Group work and papers at the discretion of the instructor

IX. TYPICAL TEXTS:

1. Greenberg & Page, . *The Struggle for Democracy*. 12th ed., Pearson, 2017.
2. Christensen, Terry, and Larry Gerston. *California Politics and Government*. 14th ed., Wadsworth, 2018.
3. Barbour, Christine, and Gerald Wright. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*. 8th ed., CQ Press, 2017.
4. Shea, Daniel, and Christopher Smith. *Living Democracy*. 4th ed., Pearson, 2015.

X. OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

- A. Blue Books, scantrons, case briefs