

1) American Government

The purpose of the American government course at Missouri colleges and universities is to prepare students to be competent citizens who understand and are capable of participating in the political processes of the nation. Upon successful completion of the course, the student will:

1. Understand of the environment of the American political system by examining the political ideologies and theories of democracy that influenced the construction of our system of government.
2. Outline the structure of our government, as set up in the Constitution.
3. Describe the links between citizens and government. In this, they should articulate key concepts about voting, political parties, campaigns, and other forms of political participation.
4. Understand (1) the structure and interactions of the presidency, congress, bureaucracy, and courts and (2) how the institutions are intended to respond to citizen inputs.
5. Understand practices and processes that describe how governmental institutions work and interact to create domestic and foreign policy.

We recognize there will be variation in emphasis by instructor, but the preceding goals, if met, will provide a student who completes the course with a grade of C or better with the minimum level of knowledge that we expect of a competent citizen and of students who enter our upper division courses. At the end of the day, students should walk away with a holistic picture of the varied institutions and practices in our system, which allows them to understand these as solutions, albeit imperfect ones, to problems of governance in this country.

These goals can be met if the content of each course covers the following topics and students are tested on their knowledge of this material.

I. The Environment of our System

- 1) Origins of the American System. Students will:
 - a) Define the word “politics.”
 - b) Define “ideology” and its component parts, beliefs and values.
 - c) Identify the key components of three classic ideologies (Classical Conservatism, Classical Liberalism, Classical Socialism).
 - d) Explain what Classic Liberalism is, why it is the “American” ideology, and why it makes the United States unique as the world’s most classically liberal nation.
 - e) Understand the difference between a democracy and a republic
Understand the contributions of Rousseau, Locke, Montesquieu, and Newton to the American version of democracy.

- 2) The Constitution. Students should be able to:
 - a) Understand the weaknesses of our first national government, the Articles of Confederation and why certain leaders felt it was necessary to create a new government (patriots, merchants)
 - b) Understand that the framers of the Constitution were pragmatic politicians who in large part drafted the Constitution to solve practical problems of governance, identify the key parts of the Constitution, both in the main body and the Amendments (the 7 articles and, at a minimum, the first 10 amendments and the Civil War Amendments).
 - c) Identify the major sections of the Missouri Constitution (especially Articles 1-4 and 12).
- 3) Federalism. Students should be able to:
 - a) Define federalism and understand why it was included in the Constitution.
 - b) Describe the clauses in the Constitution relevant to the power of the central government in the state-federal relationship (supremacy clause, full faith and credit, privileges and immunities, elastic, commerce, etc.).
 - c) Describe the clauses in the Constitution relevant to the power of the state governments in the state-federal relationship (enumerated powers, 10th amendment, 11th amendment, etc.).
 - d) Explain the importance of *McCulloch v. Maryland*.
 - e) Explain the concept of “devolution” in the state-federal relationship.
 - f) Understand the modern relevance of federalism and its implications.

II. Links between the Government and the Governed

- 1) Political Participation. Students should be able to:
 - a) Define political participation.
 - b) Understand why some people are more likely to participate in politics than others.
 - c) Explain why Americans, in general, participate at lower rates than people in other democratic countries (most nations have very different political party systems).
 - d) Explain why Americans now participate at lower rates than Americans of forty years ago (should include possible explanations as well as the argument that the decline in participation is overblown).
 - e) Understand why some interest groups are more “successful” than others (explain the difference between economic interest groups and public interest groups). Identify the ways in which interest groups influence the policymaking process (lobbying, grassroots lobbying, etc.).
- 2) Public Opinion and the News Media. Students should be able to:
 - a) Explain the role public opinion should play in governing a representative democracy (be conversant with the terms “delegate,” “trustee,” and “politico”).
 - b) Describe the possible flaws in public opinion polling and how to be a careful consumer of such polls (understand sampling, question wording, survey design, margin of error).
 - c) Describe the problems with the coverage of politics by the news media (overemphasis on scandal and sensational events).

- d) Explain how politicians use the news media (use of staged events, trial balloons and leaks, extensive PR staff).
 - e) Explain how the news media have changed politics (image over substance).
- 3) Political parties. Students should be able to:
- a) Define a political party and distinguish it from an interest group.
 - b) Explain the functions served by parties in a representative democracy.
 - c) Describe how the Progressive Era reforms and how they weakened parties in the United States.
 - d) Explain the difference between the difference between choosing representatives from single member, simple plurality districts (and states in the case of Senators) and proportional representation.
 - e) Explain why we have a predominantly two
 - f) -party system in the United States.
 - g) Describe the role third parties have historically played in the United States.
- 4) Campaigns. Students should be able to:
- a) Explain the criteria for a good election (turnout, absence of fraud and demagoguery, be informational, influence what government does).
 - b) Analyze recent elections by the criteria for a good election.
 - c) Explain what the Electoral College is and how it works.
 - d) Understand the current state of campaign finance law in the United States (should know the FECA amendments of 1973, Buckley v. Valeo, Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, McConnell v. FEC, more recent developments).

III. Institutions and Issues

Congress. Students should be able to:

- a) Explain the local orientation of members of Congress (which means that they should know Congress is better at serving local interests than the national interest and why that is the case).
 - b) Describe the structure of the House and Senate.
 - c) Understand the process of how a bill becomes a law.
 - d) Know that the passage of the annual budget is Congress's biggest job and know how that process works.
- 2) Executive Branch. Students should be able to:
- a) Know who can legally become president and contrast it with the far more limited (demographically) group of people who have actually served as president.
 - b) List the functions, or jobs, of the president.
 - c) Distinguish between the formal (constitutional) and informal (evolved) powers of the president.
 - d) Explain why the president is much more effective as a foreign policy leader than a domestic policy leader.
Understand the characteristics and functions of the bureaucracy, as well as the manner in which it fits into a democratic society.

- 3) The Courts. Students should be able to:
 - a) Explain the primary function (adjudicating) and primary objective (protect civil liberties) of courts.
 - b) Answer important questions about the design of the federal judiciary through an understanding of Hamilton's Federalists papers on the subject (why permanent tenure in office, why selection by the president and confirmation by the senate, why a small, collegial court).
 - c) Describe the design of the federal judiciary (district, circuit, supreme courts); understand how the Supreme Court functions.
 - d) Define judicial review and be able to explain the importance of Marbury v. Madison.
 - e) Understand the factors which influence Supreme Court decisions (the Constitution, the law, personal views of the justices, public opinion).
 - f) Know the limits on the power of the Supreme Court (the president, the Congress, the Constitution, judicial restraint).
 - g) Explain the difference between civil rights and civil liberties.
 - h) Define selective incorporation.
 - i) Identify the constitutional amendments that bear on our most important right, voting (15, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26).

- 4) Policy. Students should be able to:
 - a) Explain what type of economic system the United States has.
 - b) Explain why the government is involved in regulating the economy.
 - c) Explain the difference between fiscal and economic policy.
 - d) List the foreign policy goals of the United States.
 - e) Describe the process of making foreign policy in a democracy.
 - f) Differentiate between the country's military and economic tools for making foreign policy.
 - g) Understand the ways in which political institutions and the attitudes of the general public interact in the production of both foreign and domestic policy.