

Introduction to American Government

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PURPOSES / GOALS / OBJECTIVES:

...to help you become a responsible United States citizen by developing a basic understanding of the language, concepts, and principles of government in the United States.

...to help you develop an understanding an appreciation of the ideology, structure, and practical workings of the U.S. governmental system.

...to help you understand the content, structure, and underlying principles of the Constitution of the United States of America.

...to help you evaluate the roles of voters, interest groups, and political parties in the American political system.

...to help you explain why states have their own constitutions and the relationship of state constitutions and the federal constitution.

...to help you develop your ability as citizens to explore, discuss, and make informed decisions related to national issues.

...to help you better understand the meaning and impact of domestic and international events on the United States of America.

...to enhance your learning about the United States as well as develop your appreciation for being an American citizen.

...to help you develop an understanding of the role that public opinion, campaign advertising, and media coverage play in the American political system.

...to help you become an economically literate United States citizen by developing a basic understanding of the language, concepts, and basic principles of economics.

...to help you to apply reading and writing skills to inquire, think critically, and apply civic concepts to new situations.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

The purpose of this course is to prepare students to participate in exercising their political responsibilities as thoughtful and informed citizens. The course will focus on the origins, development, structure, and functions of government in the United States of America. Topics of study include the constitutional framework, federalism, the three branches of government and the federal bureaucracy, civil rights and liberties, political participation, and the political behavior of the American public. While the main focus of the course is on the federal government, additional attention is paid to state and local governments in Pennsylvania. Primary and secondary source documents will be used to reinforce the concepts presented in this course.

PRIMARY COURSE RESOURCES:

Textbook: Sanford, William R, Carl Green R.. **Basic Principles of American Government for the 21st Century.** New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 2006.

Individual Student Laptops: The goal is to prepare students for 21st century society by combining the use of technology resources and traditional methods of instruction in and out of the classroom.

COURSE OUTLINE [18 WEEKS]: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

INTRO. UNIT - Introduction to the Course:

- Classroom Rules and Regulations
- Teacher and Student Introductions
- Overview of Course Syllabus
- Overview of Course Grading and Expectations
- Diagnostic Assessment of Knowledge

UNIT I (A) - Foundations of Government:

- Defining Government and its Purpose
- Government Classification
- Principles of Democracy

UNIT I (B) - Foundations of Government:

- The Roots of American Democracy
- The Articles of Confederation

UNIT II (A) – The United States’

Constitution:

- The United States Constitution: Preamble, Articles, and Amendments
- Principles of the U.S. Constitution

UNIT II (B) – American Citizenship:

- The Naturalization Process
- Duties of Responsible Citizenship
- Aliens (Legal and Illegal) in the United States
- Immigration and Related Problems
- Ethnicity and Related Issues

UNIT III – The Branches of Government:

- The Legislative Branch: U.S. House of Representatives / U.S. Senate
- The Law Making Process
- The Executive Branch: President / Vice President / Executive Departments
- The Judicial Branch: U.S. Supreme Court / U.S. Courts of Appeals / U.S. District Courts

UNIT VI – State and Local Government:

- The Concept of Federalism
- Local Governments: Counties, Cities, Boroughs, and Townships
- Local Issues and Finances
- Overview of Pennsylvania State Government

UNIT V (A) – Politics in the United States:

- **Political Parties:** History, Structure, and Functions
- **The Political Spectrum:** Liberals, Moderates, and Conservatives
- Third Parties and Their Role in the American Political System
- Types of Interest Groups and their Role in the American Political System

UNIT V (B) – Public Opinion and Mass

Media:

- Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion
- **Public Opinion:** Its Role and Measurement
- **Propaganda:** Techniques and Characteristics
- Mass Media and its Influences on Politics

UNIT VI - Voters, Voter Behavior, and the Electoral Process:

- Voter Qualifications in Pennsylvania
- Influences on Voter Behavior
- The Nomination and the Election Process
- Campaign Finance

UNIT VII – Functions of U.S. Government:

- **Taxes:** Federal, State, and Local Systems.
- **Spending:** Federal, State, and Local Spending.
- U.S. Domestic Policy / U.S. Foreign Pol

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, EXPECTATIONS AND RELATED INFORMATION

PROJECT(S):

Projects will be assigned periodically throughout the course depending on the material being discussed in class. Students will be given time in class to work on individual and group projects. However, it is expected that any work not completed in class will be finished at home.

COURSE GRADING:

The determination of midterm and marking period grades will be based upon the following assessment areas:

1. **Unit Examinations:**

[75% of Student Marking Period Grade]

- ☞ Unit examinations will constitute a major part of the student’s marking period grade.
- ☞ Examinations are always announced in advanced.
- ☞ The format of all examinations will be discussed the day prior to taking the assessment.

- ☞ Unit examinations will consist of matching, fill-ins, vocabulary, multiple choice, short answer, listing, and perhaps a short / long essay writing prompt.
- ☞ Examinations that are missed due to a one (1) day absence must be made-up the first day you return to school. The only exceptions are students who are absent for an extended period of time.

Do not rely on extra credit. This course is structured so that you should be able to accumulate enough points to pass without the help of extra credit.

2. **Writings and Quizzes:**

[15% of Student Marking Period Grade]

- ☞ Quizzes are typically announced in advanced. However, the teacher reserves the right to give “unannounced quizzes” if necessary.
- ☞ The format of quizzes will consist of matching, multiple choice, and perhaps true / false
- ☞ Writing assignments will be given throughout the course on a variety of topics. Assignments are expected to be handed-in on time. Those received late without a valid excuse may receive a deduction in points.

3. **Classwork / Participation / Supportive Grades:**

[10% of Student Marking Period Grade]

- ☞ **LEQ Reflection Journals:** Students will be required at the conclusion of each class to record their thoughts, opinions, questions, etc... in response to class discussions and the essential question(s) for each lesson. Student reflections should be neat, concise, and demonstrate a high degree of student analysis and thought.
- ☞ Participation is expected both individually and in-group activities. You are encouraged to participate in all group activities. **ALWAYS BE PREPARED FOR CLASS!**
- ☞ Students will demonstrate respect towards all resources including classroom resources and individual laptop computers.
- ☞ All students are expected to demonstrate a positive attitude toward this class.

4. **Final Examination:**

- ☞ All students must complete a comprehensive final examination in order to fulfill the requirements of this course. **Failure to complete the final examination will result in automatic failure of the course – [See District Policy]. The final examination will account for 20% of the course grade.**

FINAL COURSE GRADE EQUATION

Marking Period Grade (1 st or 3 rd):	[40%]
Marking Period Grade (2 nd or 4 th):	[40%]
Final Examination Grade:	[20%]

FINAL COURSE GRADE

Social Studies Department Retesting Policy:

A. **Who will retest?**

- **1st and 3rd Marking Period:** Each department member will require a *mandatory retest* for any students scoring below a 70% on any given summative assessment.
- **2nd and 4th Marking Period:** *Students may request* to complete a retest on any given summative assessment. It will ultimately be decided by the classroom teacher whether a retest opportunity will be granted to the student.

B. Requirements to Retest:

- Students will be required to demonstrate additional preparation for the retest by completing review / reinforcement assignments (i.e. Exam Review Sheet) and attending a **MINIMUM OF ONE** tutoring session(s) either during 5th period remediation or from 7:30AM – 8:10AM or 3:20PM – 4:00PM.
- All student work including homework, review sheets, etc... must be completed in order to be eligible for retesting.
- It is the student's responsibility to meet with the teacher to schedule a time to complete the retest.

C. Retesting Timeline:

- The student must complete retesting within a **two-week** period from the date the classroom teacher returns the graded assessment to the class.

D. Additional Information:

- **The retest score, better or worse, is what will be recorded in the grade book. This is the most recent indicator of student understanding of content.**
- Students will be granted at least **ONE** (1) retest per single summative assessment (unit examinations).
- Retesting can be done before school, testing center – 5th, or after school depending on the availability of the teacher.
- It will be noted in the comment section of a student's report card that retesting was utilized.

Mr. Meckley's – [Assessment Rationale]:

I believe very strongly in the constant gathering and processing of student achievement data in order to promote positive academic growth and development for each and every student in my classroom. Therefore, summative and formative assessments can be expected on a daily basis throughout this course. It is my hope that students assume a greater responsibility for their own learning and thus develop an intrinsic ability to self-monitor and adjust their own personal learning goals.

Assessment Goals and Expectations:

- Provide valuable information on areas where students have met, exceeded, or need direction for improvement.
- Engage students in the learning process by encouraging personal growth and reflection.
- Provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do.
- Provide students with feedback to help motivate, self-reflect, and enable improvement – “learning to learn”.
- Use varied assessment strategies to better meet the needs of students with diverse learning abilities.
- Establish clear learning goals and methods of tracking student progress towards these goals.
- Align diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments with State and Common Core standards and assessment anchors.
- Base instructional decisions on the data that is gathered through formative and summative assessments.

Please refer to “**Mr. Meckley's Classroom Guidelines and Behavioral Expectations**” sheet for additional information relating to absences, grading, course requirements, and classroom expectations.

ADDITIONAL GRADING INFORMATION:

All grades will be assigned a numerical percentage (0 to 100) based on the grading scale adopted by the South Western School District. **Grades will be based on actual student performance [NO CURVES].**

SOUTH WESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT GRADING SCALE

100	-	90	=	A (Excellent)
89	-	80	=	B (Good)
79	-	70	=	C (Average)
69	-	60	=	D (Passing)
Below		60	=	F (Failure)

When absent for any reason, it is your responsibility to see me on your first day back to make arrangements to complete any work that you might have missed. **Please understand that missing one class in block scheduling is equivalent to missing two classes in traditional scheduling. ATTENDANCE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM.**

NOTEBOOKS:

1. A three [3] ring binder notebook is strongly recommended for this class. Everything you receive including homework, content outlines, and reinforcement worksheets should be organized in this binder. It is important that you maintain an organized notebook in order to better prepare for chapter tests and the final examination.
2. Please be advised that periodic checks will be made to ensure you are maintaining an organized notebook.

CHEATING POLICY:

1. **Cheating is a very serious offense.** Cheating is defined as one or more of the following:
 - A. Talking or giving answers to another student with or without his or her knowledge.
 - B. Talking no matter the topic during a quiz or examination.
 - C. An abundance of identical incorrect answers between two students on a quiz or examination.
 - D. Using another student's work as your own.
 - E. Plagiarizing from another source without correct documentation.
2. **Chapter Examinations or Quizzes:** Cheating on an examination or quiz will result in the following consequences:
 - ❖ 0% for the Examination or Quiz and Parental Notification – **First Offense**
 - ❖ 0% for the Marking Period – **Second Offense**
 - ❖ 0% for the Course – **Third Offense**
3. **Reports, Homework Assignments and Projects:**
 - ❖ 0% for that particular assignment.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- ❖ **ATTENDANCE:** Attendance is crucial for learning. See your handbook concerning absence policies. If you are tardy to class, please come in quietly and avoid disrupting the class. **Be mindful that you have become a distraction.**
- ❖ **PARTICIPATION:** **One of the goals of this course is positive participation.** This means several things; it is much more than speaking in class. It is more than asking questions or giving correct responses. Participation is being able to take in information as well as respond to it. It involves being prepared and creating an atmosphere where discussion and exploration of ideas are encouraged.

- ❖ Communicating well in public takes time and practice. We will spend much time this semester examining and discussing various issues and content. You will form small groups that meet repeatedly. You will also take part in class-wide discussions. We will use everyone's insight to construct a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. **Research has demonstrated unequivocally that intellectual development requires people to discuss ideas with one another.** We will create a safe environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their ideas with the class. By doing this, all of us benefit.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR EDUCATION. Assume the responsibility of asking questions and seeking additional help when necessary. I will gladly meet with you before, during, or after school hours. I am generally available in the morning from 7:20-8:10AM and after school from 3:20-4:00PM. I hope that you find this class to be rewarding as you prepare for the world beyond the doors of South Western High School. I hope you will find this to be a challenging and eye-opening experience. Thank You and ...

Have a Great Semester!

"It is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed."

- *Theodore Roosevelt*