

**TAMALPAIS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
Larkspur, California**

Course of Study

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of the Course

American Government is a course that examines our legal foundations and governmental structure as well as the contemporary reality of our political system. Students will explore political behavior and the process of decision-making in the American system of government.

B. Outcomes

This course will address the following district graduation outcomes:

- #1 Communicate articulately, effectively, and persuasively when speaking and writing;
- #2 Read/view and analyze material in a variety of disciplines;
- #3 Use technology to access information, analyze and solve problems, and communicate ideas;
- #4 Demonstrate knowledge of individual rights and responsibilities in a democratic society;
- # 10 Analyze current issues from historical, political, economic, geographic, and multicultural perspectives.

C. Articulation with Other Courses

This course draws upon the concepts and understandings learned in U.S. History, World History, and World Cultures and Geography. Moreover, the curriculum complements topics covered in Economics.

D. Course Goals

The course provides students with the opportunity to learn both the theory and political reality of our governmental system and to develop the citizenship skills necessary to become informed, active participants in our political system.

II. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

A. Learning Indicators

1. Students will be able to identify, in writing, the philosophical and historical origins of the American system of government, including specific philosophers (e.g., John Locke and Thomas Hobbes) and specific historical circumstances of colonial and Revolutionary America.
2. Students will be able to describe the structure of the United States government as enumerated in the Constitution.
3. Students will apply an understanding of the legislative process through participation in a Senate simulation. The simulation will require students to research a topic, write an original piece of legislation, and defend it orally.
4. Students will apply an understanding of the Bill of Rights and the judicial process through participation in a mock trial. The simulation will require students to research constitutional arguments and relevant case precedents; write court briefs or related documents; and present (or judge) their arguments in a simulated court setting.
5. Students will participate in, or observe, community-based activities or events. This may include working on an election campaign, performing other types of community-based projects, and/or observing local government meetings. (The specific nature of the activity may vary from year to year.)
6. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the media's role in the political process through creating original campaign commercials for candidates or issues.
7. Students will research a domestic or foreign policy issue and write a specific proposal for government action. This may take the form of a "Presidential White Paper," a letter to a government official, a newspaper editorial, or a letter to the editor.
8. The course content shall include the following. Teachers may choose varying degrees of emphasis, and add on supplementary topics.
 - a. History and philosophy of government
 - Key philosophers (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Jefferson)
 - Historical roots (The impact of contemporary philosophy and colonial experiences)
 - b. The U.S. Constitution
 - Structure of government
 - Key constitutional principles (separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, limited government, republican government)
 - c. The Legislative Branch
 - Organization and powers of Congress
 - Lawmaking process
 - Outside influences (lobbyists, PACs, public opinion, etc.)
 - d. The Executive Branch
 - Organization and powers of the Executive Branch
 - The bureaucracy and its functions

- e. Judicial Branch
 - Structure of state and federal court systems
 - Supreme Court history and landmark decisions
 - Basis for judicial decision-making (judicial activism v. original construction, use of precedents, etc.)

- f. The Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment
 - First amendment freedoms and limits
 - Due process and equal protection

- g. Political parties and elections
 - Political ideologies
 - Political parties (function, strengths and weaknesses of the two-party system)
 - Electoral process (structure, influences, role of the media)

- h. State and local government

9. Critical Thinking, Communication, Social Participation, and Valuing Skills

The government course will stress analytical and research skills, as well as the application of those skills to the course content. These skills will be developed within the context of the outline above. (Skills marked with an asterisk will be especially emphasized.)

a. Critical Thinking Skills

Data Collecting

- Using the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Congressional Quarterly, card catalogues, CD-ROM, the Internet, and other reference sources

Information Processing

- Organizing, arranging, and categorizing information
- Examining for validity and analyzing accuracy
- Differentiating between fact and opinion; determining bias
- Recognizing perspective

Application

- Synthesizing; formulating proposals based on research *
- Developing arguments to support proposals
- Using ideas, principles, and concepts to create a product

Metacognition

- Evaluating the effectiveness of activities and projects
- Reflecting on their intellectual growth

b. Communication Skills

- Producing a coherent essay *
- Giving an effective oral presentation *

c. Social Participation Skills

- Active listening
- Giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Initiating and promoting ideas
- Respecting conflicting opinions
- Persuading, compromising and bargaining between groups

d. Values and Valuing

- Identifying personal political values
- Recognize values underlying societal decisions and government policies
- Take on the position of another individual or group holding values different than one's own.

B. Means of Student Assessment

Students will be assessed on the learning outcomes using performance or project-based assessment whenever possible. Projects, portfolios, papers, letters, simulations, oral presentations, tests and classroom discussion are some of the methods that will be used. Grading standards and classroom procedures will be set by individual teachers and communicated clearly to students, in writing, at the beginning of the course.

C. Means of Course Assessment

The course will be evaluated through the district Government exam, administered at the beginning and the end of each semester Government is offered. Additionally, teachers will use student performance data to determine the effectiveness of the course.

III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

A. Methods

A variety of strategies will be used to implement the curriculum and address the student outcomes mentioned above. They will include discussions, reading and analysis, lectures and guest speakers, research projects, multiple-ability group work, simulations such as the Mock Court and Mock Senate, and group presentations.

B. Materials

Materials used include the following:

1. Texts and Supplementary Readings include Basic Principles of American Government (Amsco), Perspectives: Readings on American Government (Close Up), We the People, as well as various readings and newspaper articles.

2. Library and reference sources include Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Congressional Quarterly, Politics in America, Congressional Quarterly's Guide to the Supreme Court, almanacs, CD-ROM, the Internet, and other sources.
3. Audio-visual resources include music, other sound recordings, CD-ROMs, laser disks, videos.
4. School and community resources include guest speakers, local government, and community organizations.

C. Infusion of Technology

Technology is used by students to access information (CD-ROM, Internet, etc.) and to prepare and present finished work (word processing, multimedia, videos, etc.).

IV. GENERAL INFORMATION

This class is a one-semester, 5-unit class intended for 12th graders. It is a requirement for graduation. It satisfies the government portion of the U.C. "A" requirement.

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