



# 2019-2020 COURSE SYLLABUS

**A.P. UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT & POLITICS**  
**(5 credits/semester) SXS 203**

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Term and Year: Spring 2020  
Name of Instructor: Brett Williams  
Room Number: C-304  
Telephone Number: (916) 395-5090 Ext.506304  
E-mail Address: brett-williams@scusd.edu  
Class Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/williamsapgov/>



## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This semester course is a study of the basic beliefs and ideals which underlie American democracy; it's historical roots; and how it's legal, governmental, and economic institutions affect public policy at the local, state, national, and international levels. Special emphasis is given to preparing the student for the College Board's Advanced Placement Test in American Government and Politics. AP Government students attempt to answer three main questions:

1. Upon what historical precedents is public policy based?
2. How do people today influence policymaking?
3. What affect does public policy have on the American people and those they interact with?

## COURSE GOALS

My goal, above all else, is to help students craft and refine their voice, or political identity. I plan on helping facilitate that through a variety of different activities this year. Much research indicates that students learn far more from doing than through lecture. That being said, great emphasis will be placed on student discussion and debate. The forms these take will range from simulated Appropriations Committee hearings, and Socratic Seminars to whole class debates. To quote moveon.org, "Democracy is not a spectator sport." So be ready to participate.

## TEXTBOOK

Edwards, George C., et al. Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy. 17th ed., Pearson Education, 2018.

## SHOULD YOU TAKE THE EXAM THIS MAY?

This course is the equivalent of a college course and students are encouraged to prepare to take the AP Exam in the Spring Semester (Thursday, May 4, 2020, 8am). There are several advantages to taking the AP US Government exam: foremost is the potential to earn college credit while still in high school. The exam is 2 hours and 45 minutes in length. Half of the exam is an 80-minute, 55 question multiple-choice section. The other half of the exam is a 100-minute essay section with three free-response questions and one argument essay. The A.P. U.S. Government exam is graded on a five-point scale. Generally, most public universities (most of the UCs) award credit to students who earn a 3 or higher while many private colleges require a score of 4 or higher. For example, a score of 3 or better will fulfill the American Institutions requirement at UC Berkeley. Others provide elective credit for a passing AP score. However, since each school is free to set its own policy, students are advised to check the policies of institutions they are interested in attending. You can do that here at: <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/creditandplacement/search-credit-policies>. It's also worth reflecting on your level of commitment in preparing for such an exam. Without that, a passing score is likely out of reach. The choice is yours. Also note, that if any students have financial concerns about the cost of the exam eligible students can get fee waivers. Eligible students are any who are on free and reduced lunch. Others concerned about the cost, consider this, if a student passes with a score of 3 or higher, they may have spent \$94, but would have saved several hundred at most UCs.



Aside from the potential of college credit, there are a number of other reasons to take the exam. First, the challenge of taking a three-hour exam alone prepares students well for the challenges college assessments pose. Second, qualifying scores create new opportunities for scholarships or other means of recognition from the universities students attend or from other prestigious organizations. Third, you'll have all the bragging rights of having excelled on an exceedingly challenging exam. Finally, even for those who do not pass, colleges pay attention to those who took the risk.

## COURSE OUTLINE

Content Area	Dates
1. Foundations of Government*	1/6-1/31
2. Political Beliefs, Ideologies, Parties and Policies**	2/3-2/14
3. Linkage Institutions: Media, Elections and Interest Groups	2/26-3/7
4. Institutions of Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Courts	3/10-4/4
5. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	4/13-4/22
6. Personal Finance + Civic Action Project Wrapup***	5/7-6/5

\*AP Government will be starting January 7th when the students get back from Christmas Break.

\*\*For the week of February 18th-February 25th curriculum will be focused on Operation Protect and Defend. During that time, federal and state judges and attorneys come and present before the classes on a specific legal issue. Last year we focused on Japanese internment and the challenges our government faces in keeping us safe today. The week will culminate with students writing an essay on the topic. Interested students can enter their essay in the contest the organization holds each year. Last year Kennedy students won over \$2000.

\*\*\*After the College Board's Advanced Placement United States and Government we will be returning to Economics for the final unit of the semester.

## GRADING

As the course will be reliant upon so many different styles of learning it is critical to pull these apart in the grading program to isolate specific strengths and challenges for each student. What is included in each category, as well as the category weights, are indicated below.

Tests	MC Exams, FRQs, Argumentative Essays	30%
Quizzes	Quizzes (Oral, Fill-in, MC)	15%
In Class Assignments	Close Readings, Worksheets, Smaller projects/presentations, *PACE Req.s	15%
Semester Projects	Debate Project, Civic Empowerment Project, From Job to Career project**	30%
<b>Final Exam</b>	2 Day Exam: 45-50? s MC, 1 FRQ+1 Arg. Essay	10%

\*Only students who are in PACE will be required to turn in those assignments.

\*\*The From Job to Career Project is a project that will be completed after the College Board's A.P. U.S. Government Politics Exam on May 4th, 2020.

## GRADING SCALE

A=89.5%+      B=79.5%+      C=69.5%+      D=59.5%+      F=59.4% or below

## HOMEWORK POLICIES

An A.P. Government course covers a great deal of content. We will cover all that we can in class, but there will be a fair amount of



reading, researching and writing outside of class as well. The bulk of the homework will be reading from the text. I believe there are many paths to successfully understanding content from the text, so students will be provided with a variety of resources to help them understand the material. The rest of the homework will be devoted to preparing for your debate project, the Civic Empowerment Project, smaller class debates and presentations, as well as preparing for exams.

Chapter notes will not be collected this semester, but can instead be turned in to prevent losing points on quizzes you may miss. The notes could also come in quite handy should you choose to do test corrections on an exam you feel you did poorly on. It will save you much time that is essential in a test corrections session.

We will be moving very quickly, so get all your work in on time. **Late work** will receive **zero credit**. I understand things come up though, so in the event that you are not able to turn something in on time, please make sure you attach the **Late/Incomplete Work form** to your assignment before submitting it. The **forms** are **located** on the **class website**, in the left sidebar. You may use this form **three times over the course of the semester**, so use them wisely.

If you are absent, you have as many days as you were absent to make up the material. You are responsible for getting any assignments you missed. Much of the material can be found on my website under Unit Resources. If you are turning in work late because you were absent, be sure to tell me so I can check it off rather than marking it late. I will not accept work on a unit of study after we have tested. You will also need to contact me if you are late on the day of a group presentation by phone or email and get clearance from attendance for illness. Without these expect a 0. The reason for this is that your whole group is counting on you. First and foremost, please remember to communicate with me regarding your absences and/or inability to get work in on time. We need to work together this year, and the only way we can do that is if we are open and honest with each other.

## PROJECTS

### Debate Project

This project will require groups of four (two Pro, two Con) to debate on an assigned issue. The 9 different debate issues/prompts can be found below. The format of the debate is Public Forum, and the directions for this style can be found on my website along with the requirements and point values. We will of course be discussing this format in class as well to help best prepare you.

1. Should Congress support the Green New Deal? **DATE: 2/5**
2. Is the Trump Administration a threat to the free press? **DATE: 2/12**
3. Is the War Powers Act unconstitutional? **DATE: 3/11**
4. Should Congress decriminalize border crossings? **DATE: 3/16**
5. Are attempts to impeach Trump merely hyper partisanship at play? **DATE: 3/20**
6. Do federal deficits matter? **DATE: 3/25**
7. Should Congress increase the number of Supreme Court justices? **DATE: 4/1**
8. Should the 2nd amendment be repealed? **DATE: 4/15**
9. Should Congress pay reparations to the descendants of slaves? **DATE: 4/22**

### Civic Empowerment Project

This project began 1st semester with the intent of having students discover a particular problem in their communities and starting a plan towards fixing that. Second semester, students are expected to take their plans further by engaging more members of the community in moving towards implementation of their policy proposal if at all possible.

#### 2nd Semester Civic Empowerment Project Requirements

- a. Civic Action 1
- b. Civic Action 2
- c. Civic Action 3
- d. CEP Report
- e. Group Presentations

### \*From Job to Career Project



This project will wrap up the year. The goal is to take students from identifying their dream job to taking those initial steps towards that dream job. Guest speakers, research, resume building, applying for a job (simulated applications are accepted, cover letters, and a mock interview are all part of it.

\*Note, this is an Economics project. Since we abridged the Economics course first semester we will be returning to it after the College Board A.P. Government exam.

Expect smaller projects throughout the semester as well. For these there will be more time to prepare in class. These smaller projects will not last more than 3-4 days.

All of these projects are group projects. These projects will require you to work as part of a diverse team. I am well aware of the challenges group work can pose, and will do what is in my power to mitigate some of those challenges on my end where I can. It's worth noting though that this is one of the primary areas many managers are saying is lacking among college graduates, according to an article in *Inside Higher Ed* in February 2018. More importantly, working as part of a team is what makes a democracy tick.

## TESTS & QUIZZES

Quizzes will be given at least once a week. These quizzes could take a variety of different forms. Sometimes, they may be multiple choice, fill in questions to answer individually, and other times they may be an oral vocabulary quiz for a group. Other quizzes could consist of an argumentative essay or an FRQ. All quizzes though will place special emphasis on the vocabulary terms, the 9 foundational documents, and the 15 landmark court cases, so please ensure you stay on top of those each unit by making use of the chapter notes templates and the chapter slides. I have posted numerous other resources on my website from Crash Course videos and study guides to graphic organizers and released FRQ prompts as well.

The quizzes, in most cases, cannot be made up. In order to prevent losing quiz points you can turn in a completed set of Vocabulary Template on the assigned chapter by no later than Friday the week the quiz is given. Please label the template clearly, so I can tell which quiz to exempt for you.

Tests will be given on Fridays after each unit is complete. Each unit will last from two to four weeks. These tests will consist of varying combinations of short answer (FRQs), argumentative essays, and multiple choice questions depending on the unit. The typical test will have 1 FRQ and 25-35 multiple choice questions, or 1 Argumentative Essay and 25 multiple choice questions. You will have up to 20 minutes for the FRQ, 35 for the argumentative essay and between 25-30 minutes for the multiple-choice portion. Tests can be made up or taken again one time per unit. Said time will be posted in class, and on the website. Note that the teacher may use an alternate test.

The Final Exam will model the College Board exam as closely as the schedule allows. The first day will consist of one argumentative essay and one FRQ. The second day will consist of 55 multiple choice questions. It will be administered shortly before the College Board exam. Why not knock out both in the same week? You can do it!

## BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to be respectful, courteous, and civil. The following are a few of the more notable expectations students will follow:

1. Be on time physically and mentally.
2. Treat others with respect at all times, especially when confronting ideas different than your own.
3. Be on task, and offer help to others if you finish early (when appropriate).
4. Keep your electronic devices hidden and silent unless the instructor approves use.
5. Adhere to the JFK and PACE expectations of academic integrity. \*

\*Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the attempt to pass off the ideas, research, theories, or words of others as one's own" (College Board). There are however a number of assignments throughout the year where the teacher will encourage you to talk about your responses with your classmates, but note that your work is your work and should always remain in your possession unless the teacher is currently grading it. Plagiarizing any assignment will result in a 0 for that assignment. Cheating on any quiz or exam will also



immediately result in a zero for that assignment. Students caught cheating will not be able to make up the points lost on these assignments. Plagiarizing or cheating a second time will lead to an Unsatisfactory mark for Citizenship for the semester and a parent conference with the possibility of more severe consequences depending on the situation. The teacher and administration determine the degree of the severity of the consequence. In this class my ultimate goal is for you to develop **YOUR VOICE**. You may use the cited ideas and arguments of others to help support your arguments, but they still must be your arguments. It's your position that I want above all else in this class.

### **FINAL NOTE**

Please note that after teaching 16 years I have learned that every group of students is different. With that in mind, I reserve the right to change policies indicated above at any time during the semester. Before these changes occur though I will be sure to communicate those changes with the students in advance, and announce those changes using Google Classroom.

I want to end saying what an honor it is teaching you this year. Please consider me your advocate here at Kennedy High School. You have a support system here at Kennedy as well as at home. Remember that and it will be a good year.



### A.P. U.S. Government and Politics Executive Summary

Please sign below to confirm you have downloaded, read and understand the syllabus provided for this class. The full Syllabus can be found at <https://sites.google.com/site/williamsapgov/>. By signing students and parents understand that.

- A.P. U.S. Government is intended to provide students with a college level course.
- Students who take A.P. classes usually do much better in college in terms of both retention and graduating on time, but be careful in managing your time.
- High levels of participation are necessary to get the most out of this course to excel. So, spread the word and talk to whoever you can about this stuff.
- Vocabulary is critical, and succeeding means consistently reviewing the basic terms and concepts. Review tools for these can be found on my website at: <https://sites.google.com/scusd.edu/williams-ap-gov/home>
- The homework will largely consist of reading the assigned chapters of the textbook, preparation for your debate project, the Civic Action Project and the other smaller projects throughout the semester.
- These projects are group projects, so please be ready to work as part of a diverse team.
- Quizzes will happen once a week and fall typically on Mondays. The chapter notes templates and the chapter slides should serve as your resources.
- If you miss a quiz you can turn in a completed Vocabulary Template to excuse you from the quiz score.
- Unit exams will occur usually every two to three weeks on Fridays.
- If you score less than a 90% on a multiple-choice exam you can come to retake the exam to try and improve your score on the same day others come to make up the exam. I take the latest score though, so be willing to try a different tack in studying.
- If you miss an exam you will need to make it up on a day during the unit I have set aside after school for just such activities. You must make up the exams at this time. If you cannot make it, for reasons outside your control, please talk with me, and I can see what we can do.
- I do not expect memorization for presentations, but students are expected to present rather than read their main arguments/talking points. This conveys understanding, that the material is their own, and that they can help inform the rest of the class on the issue they were assigned.
- I frequently email and or post announcements so please make sure you check your school email regularly as well as your Google Class account for my class. I will also be using Remind to post class notices. Please ensure I have your primary contact information for these, not your parent's or your junk email accounts.
- Remember above all, that I am your advocate here, but in order to fight for you, I need you to be open with me about how I can best do that. We're part of a team.
- Be ready to take risks. We're all going to be wrong at some point this semester. Let's grow from that.

Please contact me to provide me any information about your child that might be pertinent to his/her educational experience this semester in A.P. Government (i.e., physical or cognitive limitations, exceptional experiences or capabilities) or if you just have some questions.

I have read, understood, and will abide by all of the provisions of the entire A.P. U.S. Government and Politics syllabus, including the AP Executive Summary here.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Parent Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please **sign** and **return** the following page of the syllabus to Mr. Williams by **Wednesday, January 8th**.

