

# Political Science 001 – Introduction to American Government Section 80, Fall 2009 – Dr. James Brent

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**Office Hours:** Mondays, Tuesday and  
Thursdays

It is very important that all students read this syllabus closely and completely, because you are responsible for all of the information contained therein.

This is a GE course that fulfills the American Institutions Requirement. As a result, the learning objectives for this course are established by university policy. At the end of this course, all students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of”

- the foundations of the political system, including the evolution of the philosophies of the U.S. and California constitutions, political culture, separation of powers, bureaucracy, federalism, and relations among various levels of government. Students should also analyze the evolving institutions of government, including a study of the powers of the President, Congress, and the Judiciary
- the links between the people and government, including participation and voting, political parties, interest groups, and public opinion and socialization. Students should also analyze the rights and obligations of citizens, the tension between various freedoms of expression and due process and the maintenance of order, and the efforts to end racial and gender discrimination in both the public and private sectors of society
- the operations of California government, including the similarities and differences between the California and U.S. Constitutions, the relationship between state and local government in California, the basic issues of California politics, and a careful assessment of the impact of demographic changes on the history and politics of the state and the nation.

## Textbooks

There are two required textbooks, which can be purchased at the Spartan Bookstore or on-line at other outlets such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Sidlow, Edward, and Beth Henschen. (2009). *GOVT*. Belmont, CA: Cengage Press.

Christensen & Gerston (2009). *California Politics and Government: A Practical Approach*. Belmont: Cengage Learning.

## Course Modules (What You Are Responsible For)

This course is divided into 9 topics, or “modules.” Each module lasts for one or two weeks (depending on the module). Each module begins at 12:01 a.m. on a Monday and

ends at 11:59 p.m. on Sundays. **Assignments are always due at 11:59 p.m. on Sunday nights.**

Each of the 9 modules contains the following elements. You must complete each element of each module:

1. Assigned Readings – There are two textbooks for the course. Each module has one an assigned reading that you will be responsible for on the exams.
2. Videos – Each module has one or more videos/video lectures that you must view. You will be responsible for the content of these videos on the exam.
3. Web-Based Research Assignment – In each module, you will be asked to write a short paper based on internet research on a particular issue related to that module
4. Class Discussion – Each module will have an on-line discussion topic, and students are expected to thoughtfully participate in each discussion.

In addition, there will be a midterm, a final exam, and a research paper.

In this class, there are a maximum of 240 possible points, which are distributed accordingly:

Web-Based Research Assignments	80 points
Class Discussions	40 points
Midterm Exam	40 points
Final Exam	40 points
Research Paper	40 points

**Calculating Your Grade** – For this class, I grade on a traditional 90/80/70 scale. Grades within 2 points of any number divisible by 10 will earn a “plus” or “minus” depending on whether it is higher or lower than the number. For example, you must earn a 93% or higher to earn an “A.” Grades between 90% and 92% will receive an “A minus.” Grades between 88% and 89% will earn a “B+.” Grades between 83% and 87% will earn a “B”, grades between 80% and 82% will receive a “B minus.” And so on.

## List of Course Modules and Assigned Readings

Module #1 – The American Constitution (August 24 – September 6)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 1 and 2
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: September 6 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #2 – Federalism (September 7 – September 13)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapter 3
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: September 13 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #3 – Civil Liberties & Civil Rights (September 14 – September 27)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 4 and 5
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: September 27 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #4 – American Elections (September 28 – October 11)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 8 and 9

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: October 11 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #5 – Political Parties & Interest Groups (October 12 – October 18)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 6 and 7

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: October 18 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #6 – Congress (October 19 – November 1)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapter 11

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: November 1 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #7 – The Presidency & the Executive Branch (November 2 – November 15)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 12 and 13

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: November 15 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #8 – The Judiciary (November 16 – November 29)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapter 14

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: November 29 at 11:59 p.m.

Module #9 – California Politics and Government (November 30 – December 8)

--READING: Christensen and Gerston – entire book

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: December 8 at 11:59 p.m.

## Web-Based Research Activities

For each of the 9 modules of this course, you will be given a web-based activity assignment relevant to that particular module. Usually, the activity will require you to locate and retrieve information from the Internet and present an analysis of that information to your classmates. More information about the specific activities can be found from the course homepage by clicking on the icon that says "assignments".

All students must complete 8 of the 9 research activities. Assignments are worth 10 points each, meaning that the assignments in total are worth 33% (80 points out of 240) of your overall grade in the course. **LATE WEB-BASED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.** However, students can skip one assignment without suffering any damage to their grade in the course. If a student submits more than 8 assignments, I will count only their 8 highest scores.

## The Midterm and Final Examinations

In this course, you will be required to take a midterm exam and a final exam. These exams will be administered on-line and are, therefore, open-book, open-note exams. Each exam will be a combination of short-answer, multiple-choice and essay questions. The final exam is NOT cumulative.

Each exam will be available on-line for a 24-hour period. You must take the exam within that 24 hour period. You will have 2 hours to complete each exam. If you do not take the exam during the specified period, you must take a make-up exam *in person* on the SJSU campus.

## Class Discussions

For each module, you will be asked to view a video or to read a document, and then to participate in an on-line discussion/debate with your classmates regarding what you've watched or read. Participation in these discussions is worth 5 points each. Students are required to participate in on-line discussions in at least 8 of the 9 course modules. Once a module ends, the discussion topic for that module also ends. Therefore, there is no way to make up for missed class discussions.

In order to receive credit for an on-line discussion, you must do the following:

1. Make an initial post of at least 200 words – After you have viewed the video or done the assigned reading, you should post a response of at least 200 words to the class discussion board. You can earn up to 3 points for doing this.
2. Wait at Least 24 Hours
3. Respond to someone else's post with at least 150 words – You must also respond to a post submitted by another student. This response must be at least 150 words in length. You must wait at least 24 hours after posting your original comment before posting your second comment in order to receive credit. You can earn up to 2 points for doing this.

Conduct in On-Line Discussions – I believe very strongly in freedom of speech. On the other hand, I also recognize that any class will only be successful if all students feel comfortable expressing themselves. It is very easy for on-line communication to become quite nasty, particularly discussions about politics. Therefore, all students should observe the following guidelines when participating in on-line discussions in this class:

- If you wouldn't say it in a real classroom, don't say it on-line!
- You should not make personal attacks against your colleagues. You may criticize their *arguments*, but you should never criticize them personally.
- You should never use racial or other epithets in referring to your fellow students.
- Think carefully about what you post before you post it. It's easy to be misunderstood. You can't "erase" things in cyberspace.
- Please remember that you cannot post anything anonymously, and that I am constantly participating in and monitoring the on-line discussions.

## University-Mandated Statements

University Policy S05-15 requires that the following statements appear on every greensheet:

“Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University’s Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at [http://sa.sjsu.edu/student\\_conduct](http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct).”

“If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with DRC to establish a record of their disability.

## Research Paper

America has many significant problems. In our system of separation of powers, the different branches of government must work together to solve problems. If they cannot come to agreement, the result is known as “gridlock” and the problems may remain unsolved. Your research paper will be an opportunity to see how the three branches work together (or fail to work together) to achieve change.

For your paper, you should pick a major political issue, such as:

- Reform of Social Security
- Immigration reform
- Health care reform
- Gun control
- Campaign Finance regulations
- Laws related to racial or gender discrimination
- Energy policy
- Environmental regulation
- You may pick other topics not listed here *if you consult with me in advance*.

After you have picked a major political issue, you should conduct research and write a paper that addresses the following dimensions:

- What (if anything) does the Constitution say about this issue?
- What actions has Congress taken on this issue in the last 10 years?
- What actions has the president taken on this issue in the last 10 years?
- What decisions has the Supreme Court made about this issue in the past 10 years?
- What actions has the state of California taken on this issue in the past 10 years?
- How has separation of powers/checks and balances affected attempt to deal with the issue you’ve selected? Which branches of government have blocked reform, and which branches have advanced reform?

Please note five important aspects of this assignment.

- This is an analytical paper. In other words, your paper should be devoted to defending your conclusion using logic and evidence. It should use only credible sources, and it should back up its assertions with facts.
- This is a research paper. That means that you should conduct research to find relevant information to support your conclusion. Although I am interested in your opinion, you must be able to support that opinion with facts and figures and evidence. You will obtain these facts and figures and evidence from your research. Please note that the better and more numerous your sources, the higher your grade is likely to be. *Papers that use only web sites as sources cannot receive a "A" or "B." Papers that use Wikipedia as a source cannot receive an "A."*
- You must provide attribution. In an academic paper, you must cite your sources within the text of the paper, as well as provide a "works cited" page at the end. This applies both to direct quotes from other authors AND circumstances in which you merely use the ideas or information reported by another author.
- Your writing counts. Points will be deducted for spelling and grammar.
- Effort counts. This paper should be at least 8, typed, double-spaced pages long, and it should use a minimum of 8 sources. Papers that demonstrate more effort are more likely to receive a higher grade than papers that demonstrate less effort.

**Paper due: December 10 at 11:59 p.m.**

*I reserve the right to require students to submit their papers to Turnitin.com.*