

Political Science 001 – Introduction to American Government Section 81, Spring 2012 – Dr. James Brent

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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 is one required textbook, which can be purchased at the Spartan Bookstore or on-line at other outlets such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Sidlow, Edward, Beth Henschen, Larry Gerston & Terry Christensen. (2011). *GOVT2 (California Edition)*. (3rd edition) Belmont, CA: Cengage Press.

Course Modules (What You Are Responsible For)

This course is divided into 9 topics, or “modules.” Most of the modules last for two weeks, except for Modules #2, #5 and #9, which each last for only one week. Each module begins at 11:00 a.m. on a Monday and ends at 11:00a.m. one or two weeks later.

Assignments & discussions related to each module are always due at 11:00 a.m. on Monday.

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

1. Assigned Readings – Each module has an assigned reading from the textbook that you will be responsible for on the exams.
2. Videos – Each module has various videos and video lectures that you must view. The videos were professionally produced, while the video lectures were recorded by me. 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. “101 Gazette” – Each module will require students to post an article and comment upon an article posted by another student.

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

There are a maximum of 240 possible points, which are distributed accordingly:

Web-Based Research Assignments	80 points
001 Gazette	40 points
Midterm Exam (March 21)	40 points
Final Exam (May 17)	40 points
Research Paper (due April 30 or May 14)	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 (January 25 – February 6)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 1 and 2
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: February 6 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #2 – Federalism (February 6 - February 13)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapter 3
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: February 13 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #3 – Civil Liberties & Civil Rights (February 13 - February 27)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 4 and 5
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: February 27 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #4 – American Elections (February 27 – March 12)

- READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 8 and 9
- ASSIGNMENTS DUE: March 12 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #5 – Political Parties & Interest Groups (March 12 – March 19)

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

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: March 19 at 11:00 a.m.

MIDTERM ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

Module #6 – Congress (March 19 – April 9)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapter 11

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: April 9 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #7 – The Presidency & the Executive Branch (April 9 – April 23)

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

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: April 23 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #8 – The Judiciary (April 23 – May 7)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapter 14

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: May 7 at 11:00 a.m.

Module #9 – California Politics and Government (May 7 – May 14)

--READING: Sidlow & Henschen, Chapters 18, 21, 22, 23 and 25

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: May 14 at 11:00 a.m.

FINAL EXAM ON THURSDAY, MAY 17

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".

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. However, you will NOT have access to the course videos and video lectures during the

exam. 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.

001 Gazette

Politics is happening every day. For each module, you will be required to locate, share and discuss a news article about a current event that pertains to the subject of that particular module. Here are the details:

1. You should locate an article on the Internet that pertains to the topic of the module. For example, Module #1 is about the U.S. Constitution, and therefore you should find an article that has to do with the U.S. Constitution. The article that you locate should be from a *credible, unbiased* news source. The article that you locate can either be in print, or it may be a video.
2. Post a link to your article in the “001 Gazette” portion of the course website, along with a 150-word summary of the article that you’ve posted.
3. Wait at least 24 hours.
4. Comment upon an article that has been posted by another student with a response of at least 100 words. **Your response to another student’s article must be posted at least 24 hours after you post your own article in order to receive credit.**

Participation in these discussions is worth 5 points each. You will receive 3 points for posting your article and commentary, and you will receive another 2 points for responding to another student’s article. You are required to participate in at least 8 of the 9 course modules. Once a module ends, the 001 Gazette for that module also ends. Therefore, there is no way to make up for missed 001 Gazette assignments. Also, please note that you must wait at least 24 hours between posting your article and responding to another student’s article. This means that you cannot wait until the last minute to contribute to the 001 Gazette.

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."

"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

Many complain that American politics is "broken" in some way, and should be fixed. For your research paper, please pick some proposed political and write an argumentative paper in which you explain why we should either embrace or reject the proposal you've chosen. A partial list of acceptable topics would include:

- Should the electoral college be abolished?
- Should term limits for members of Congress be adopted?
- Should we adopt a balanced budget amendment?
- Should we adopt term limits for members of Congress?
- Should we adopt public financing for congressional campaigns?
- Should the president be given a 'line-item veto'?
- Should California adopt a "part-time" legislature?
- Should we adopt proportional representation?
- Should the First Amendment's "freedom of speech" be modified to permit regulation of campaign spending?
- Should the media be forced to give free airtime to political candidates?
- Should Proposition 13 be amended or repealed?
- Should the ability to filibuster judicial nominations be restricted?
- Should we abolish the initiative system in California?
- You may pick other topics not listed here *if you consult with me in advance*.

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. Please note that all papers are submitted automatically to Turnitin.com to check for possible plagiarism.
- 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.

There are two alternative due dates for the research paper. If you submit the paper by 11:00 a.m. on Monday, April 30, you will receive written feedback from me along with your grade. If you want extra time to work on your paper, you may submit it by 11:00 a.m. on Monday, May 14 and it will be considered "on time," but it will not receive any written feedback from me. Papers submitted after 11:00 on May 14 will be considered late and will receive a penalty of one letter grade.