

# *PolS 1: American Government*

*San José State, Spring 2012*

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Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 to 3 pm;  
Wednesdays, 5 to 6 pm; and by app't

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“Decisions are made by those who show up” - Aaron Sorkin, West Wing

**Course Time and Place:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 7:30-8:45 am  
Hugh Gillis Hall, Room 116

## **Course Description:**

The course is designed to make students better, active citizens by giving them a greater understanding of how the American and California governments function. An exploration of the Constitution, the government it established, and the modern incarnation of the principles held in that document, will be done to examine what impact the students, as citizens of the State, of the U.S. and of the world can have on their government and vice versa. Particular emphasis will be given to how non-elites can have an effect.

This course is designed to meet the CSU GE Area F2-3 – US Constitution and California Government – requirement. As such, it is expected that the students master the following skills:

1. Express an understanding of the principles and foundations of the American political system, including U.S. and California governments. This understanding will include the basic tenets of federalism, separation of powers and constitutionalism.
2. Express an understanding of the link between government and the citizen. This understanding will include the internalization of the students' role in government through such forms of public participation as voting and interest group activities.
3. Utilizing the various news media to gather vital information that make for an informed citizen. To this end, students will be encouraged to access the news in a number of formats: print, television and web-based.

## **Course Requirements**

Students will be expected to come to class having read the required reading for the day and ready to discuss said reading, as well as the recent news so that students may apply real-world situations to the course reading. While the primary method used in the classroom will be lecture, the instructor will periodically open the floor for discussion. The lecture itself is designed to supplement the information within the textbooks by bringing in information beyond that which is in the reading. That being the case, it is very important that students attend as regularly as possible to avoid losing out on both the discussions and the additional information.

Quizzes: These will be posted online at <AmGovQuiz.blogspot.com> covering the week's reading, lecture and discussion. These exams will be posted each Thursday and will be due on the following Wednesday, for a total of **14** quizzes. Turn in the answers, and only the answers, at the beginning of class each Wednesday. In order to get the quiz results back to students quickly, no late quizzes will be accepted without an excellent reason with documentation. This portion of the course will account for a total of 60% of the course grade.

Political Scavenger Hunt: This is a list of 20 items that you must discover. The sheet with the items will be handed out / posted no later than **March 7** and will be due **March 21**. This activity will be worth 10% of the course grade.

Term paper: There will be one term paper. Students will select one of the listed topics on which to write a 5- to 6-page (1250 words minimum) essay, supported by no less than two scholarly resources.

The scholarly resources must be materials other than dictionaries and encyclopedias. As even the creator of Wikipedia admits, that reference site is a tertiary source and thus not a valid resource for any academic paper, in this course or any other. While Internet sources such as JSTOR are acceptable and can be cited using standard notation, if you use websites created by *reputable* organizations then you must learn the proper citation method for such resources. Plagiarism will result in **zero** points earned for this assignment.

For the sake of uniformity, the essay must observe the following format: font, Times New Roman; size, 12; margins, one inch on all four sides; color, black ink; line spacing, double. Proper citation is a must; proper grammar is imperative.

The due date of the term paper is dependent on the topic as each is geared for a particular chapter. This paper will be worth 15% of the course grade.

Final: There will be a final exam covering all the material from the semester. It will be worth 15% of the course grade. The final exam will be held on the scheduled day of the final, **Thursday, May 17 at 7:15am**.

***Grade distribution***

		<i>Due Date</i>
Quizzes:	60%	Each Wednesday
Political Scavenger Hunt:	10%	March 21
Term paper:	15%	Varies
Final:	<u>15%</u>	May 17
Total:	100%	

Standard grading practices will be done for this course. This means that the follow percentage distribution will be used to assign grades:

100-98% = A+	89-87% = B+	79-77% = C+	69-67% = D+
97-93% = A	86-83% = B	76-73% = C	66-63% = D
92-90% = A-	82-80% = B-	72-70% = C-	62-60% = D-

Less than 60% will result in an F in the course.

### **Required Reading**

Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright (BW), *Keeping the Republic* Brief 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, CQ Press (ISBN-13: 978-1-60871-274-8). A useful resource for students is located at <http://college.cqpress.com/sites/republic-brief/home.aspx>

Renée B. van Vechten (vV), *California Politics: A Primer* CQ Press (ISBN-13: 978-1-4522-0306-5)

### **Calendar**

The calendar denotes the expected pace in which the topics will be covered, though the level of interest and understanding on the part of the class may affect the schedule.

#### **Week 1** (January 25):

Introduction to the course, Syllabus explained

#### **Week 2** (January 30 / February 1):

BW Ch 1: Power and Citizenship in American Politics

vV Ch 1: Introduction: Principles for Understanding California Politics

*Due:* 2/6

*Topic 1a: Should the United States have stricter immigration laws?*

*Topic 1b: Should states become involved in preventing illegal immigration?*

#### **Week 3** (February 6 / 8):

BW Ch 2: The Politics of the American Founding

vV Ch 2: Critical Junctures: A Brief History

*Due:* 2/6

*Topic 2: Can one be loyal to one's country and advocate overthrowing the government at the same time?*

#### **Week 4** (February 13 / 15):

BW Ch 3: Federalism

vV Ch 7: Other Governments

*Due* 2/13:

*Topic 3a: Should marijuana use for medical purposes be legalized nationwide?*

#### **Week 5** (February 20 / 22):

BW Ch 4: Fundamental American Liberties

*Due* 2/20:

*Topic 4a: Should SJSU have a speech code?*

*Topic 4b: Is privacy a right guaranteed by the Constitution?*

#### **Week 6** (February 27 / 29):

BW Ch 5: The Struggle for Equal Rights

*Due* 2/27:

*Topic 5a: Does the Constitution protect the right to marriage for same-sex couples?*

*Topic 5b: Should some people be treated differently legally?*

#### **Week 7** (March 5 / 7):

*Political Scavenger Hunt sheet handed out / posted: 3/7*

BW Ch 6: Congress

vV Ch 4: The State Legislature

*Due* 3/5:

*Topic 6a: Should the government provide national health insurance?*

*Topic 6b: Should the Senate filibuster be abolished?*

*Topic 6c: Should there be term limits for members of the U.S. Congress?*

**Week 8** (March 12 / 14):

BW Ch 7: The Presidency  
vV Ch 5: The Executive Branch

*Due 3/12:*

*Topic 7a: Should the Electoral College be eliminated?*

*Topic 7b: Should all of the states hold their primary/caucus on the same day?*

**Week 9** (March 19 / 21):

*Political Scavenger Hunt sheet due: 3/21*

BW Ch 8: The Bureaucracy  
vV Ch 8: State Budgeting

*Due 3/19:*

*Topic 8a: Should campaigns be solely publicly funded?*

*Topic 8b: Should there be a limit to what government can regulate?*

**Spring Break (March 26 – 30)**

**Week 10** (April 2/ 4):

BW Ch 9: The American Legal System and the Courts  
vV Ch 6: The Court System

*Due 4/2:*

*Topic 9a: Should the courts seek the “Original Meaning” of the Constitution?*

*Topic 9b: Should the death penalty be abolished?*

**Week 11** (April 9 / 11):

BW 10: Public Opinion

*Due 4/9:*

*Topic 10: Should surveys matter?*

**Week 12** (April 16 / 18):

BW Ch 11: Parties and Interest Groups  
vV Ch 3: Direct Democracy

*Due 4/16:*

*Topic 11a: Should the United States amend the Constitution to allow for national initiatives?*

*Topic 11b: Should the use of propositions and initiatives be restricted in California?*

**Week 13** (April 23 / 25) :

BW Ch 12: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections  
vV Ch 9: Parties, Elections, & Campaigns

*Due 4/23:*

*Topic 12a: Should California repeal Proposition 14’s Open Primary system?*

*Topic 12b: Should voting be mandatory?*

*Topic 12c: Should voters be required to produce a picture I.D. in order to cast a ballot?*

**Week 14** (April 30 / May 2):

BW Ch 13: The Media

*Due 4/30:*

*Topic 13a: Should there be a limit to media ownership?*

*Topic 13b: Should there be regulation of what citizen “journalists” can post on blogs?*

**Week 15 (May 7 / 9):**

BW Ch 14: Domestic and Foreign Policy

*Due 5/7:*

*Topic 14a: Should federal taxes be increased for the top 20% of Americans?*

*Topic 14b: Should California repeal Proposition 13?*

*Topic 14c: Which is the greater threat to US national security: China or Terrorism?*

**Week 16 (May 14 / 16):**

Review for Final Exam

**May 17: Final exam**

***Absences***

Absences are not acceptable; however, you are all adults, so I will not be taking attendance beyond the second day of the course and will expect you to get the day's notes from someone who was in class should you miss a day. As several of the graded assignments will be done as class-participation projects, if you miss a day in which this occurs, you will not be able to make up that assignment.

While attendance, in and of itself, is not used to determine part of your course grade, the notes you will take will be of assistance; if you are not in class, you will not have the benefit of the discussion that occurred. Quite often, exam questions stem from the discussion held in the classroom; if you were not there for the discussion, you have put yourself at a disadvantage.

If you are unable to attend class on time, you are allowed to enter the classroom late. However, tardiness should be avoided, as you will have my undivided attention when you enter after the class has begun.

The use of electronic devices not necessary for the course is forbidden. Texting and websurfing during class are obnoxious, and will severely impact your grade.

***Classroom Behavior***

From time to time, the topics under discussion in the classroom will be 'hot-button' for some students. While it is expected that some students will be passionate about these issues, it is equally expected that the discourse can take place without responses being rude in nature. **Attacks on fellow students of a personal nature will not be tolerated.** Students who engage in such behavior will be asked to leave. Repeated offenses will result in the perpetrator being immediately dropped from the class.

***University Policy Information***

Per the Academic Senate Policy, F06-2:

The University desires it known that Academic Dishonesty will not be tolerated. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy requires that you be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions, no matter how minor, to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Any work that is done for another course, current or past, *cannot* be turned in for credit in this course. If you are unsure of the policy on Academic Integrity, please see the information on the university website:

[http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/students/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/students/index.html)

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 student with disabilities register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability.

### ***Disclaimer***

Any and all above information may be subject to change with fair notice from San José State University, the Department of Political Science and/or the professor. It is your responsibility to stay informed of any and all changes. The professor reserves the right to change the take-at-home exams to in-class quizzes, to be taken at the beginning of each class day, especially should severe absenteeism become an evident trend. The professor also reserves the right to administer pop quizzes, which will be treated as extra credit.

### ***Final Words***

It should be remembered that what you get out this course is directly proportional to the effort you put into it.

Final Grades are not “given” but rather “earned”.

Finally, as I am wont to say: high schools give diplomas; colleges give degrees; an ***education*** is what you give yourself.



Source: <http://danzigercartoons.com/?p=2605>

## Kathryn's Top 35 Grammar Pet Peeves to Avoid

35. Puns are for children, not groan readers.
34. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
33. And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
32. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
31. Avoid clichés like the plague (they're old hat).
30. Comparisons are as bad as clichés.
29. Be more or less specific.
28. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
27. Understatement is always the absolute best way to put forth earth-shaking ideas.
26. No sentence fragments.
25. Contractions aren't necessary and shouldn't be used.
24. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
23. Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
22. One should never generalize.
21. Also, always avoid annoying alliteration.
20. Don't use no double negatives.
19. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
18. One-word sentences? Never.
17. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
16. The passive voice is to be ignored.
15. If you've heard it once, you've heard it a thousand times: Resist hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it correctly.
14. Never use a big word when a diminutive one would suffice.
13. Also too, never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
12. Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
11. Kill all exclamation points!!!!
10. Eliminate commas, that are, not necessary. Parenthetical words however should be enclosed in commas.
9. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
8. Use the apostrophe in it's proper place and omit it when its not needed.
7. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
6. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
5. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
4. Who needs rhetorical questions?
3. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
2. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.

And the number one on Kathryn's Pet Peeve list.....

1. Their are words that must be used for they're proper meaning or there misused.