



Southmoreland School District AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum Overview

AP U.S. Government and Politics Overview:

AP U.S. Government and Politics provides a college-level introduction to key political concepts, ideas, institutions, policies, interactions, roles and behaviors that characterize the constitutional system and political culture of the United States. Required foundational documents and Supreme Court cases are an integral part of the course and will be incorporated to help students understand philosophical underpinnings, significant legal precedents, political values of the U.S. political system, and relationships and interactions among political institutions, processes, and behavior. Both classic and contemporary scholarly writings in political science are also used to promote the comparison of political ideas and their application to recent events. Students successfully completing this course will also engage in disciplinary practices that require them to read and interpret data, make comparisons and applications, develop evidence-based arguments, and critically analyze relevant theories and concepts and apply them appropriately to develop connections across the curriculum. In addition, they will complete a political science research project or applied civics project.

Module Titles:

Module 1: Foundations of American Democracy

Module 2: Interactions Among Branches of Government

Module 3: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Module 4: American Political Ideologies and Beliefs

Module 5: Political Participation

Module Overviews:

Module 1: Foundations of American Democracy

More than 200 years after the U.S. Constitution was ratified, the compromises that were necessary for ratification--which in some instances led to ambiguity--continue to fuel debate and discussion over how best to protect liberty, equality, order, and private property. This first unit sets the foundation for the course by examining how the framers of the Constitution set up a structure of government intended to stand the test of time. Compromises were made during the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates, and these compromises focused on the proper balance between individual freedom, social order, and equality of opportunity. In subsequent units, students will apply their understanding of the Constitution to the institutions of government and people's daily lives.



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Module 2: Interactions Among Branches of Government

In this unit students continue to explore policy making, focusing on its complexity and the idea that it is a process involving multiple governmental institutions and actors. Students will look at issues or policies from several different perspectives and then apply their knowledge to better understand the complexity of the policy-making process. The Constitution grants specific powers to Congress, the presidency, and the courts, each of which exercises informal powers (developed through political practice, tradition, and legislation). Because power is widely distributed and checks prevent one branch from overreaching or usurping powers from the others, institutional actors are in the position where they must both compete and cooperate in order to govern.

Module 3: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Students will connect the founding principles of our government to the debates over the appropriate balance of liberty and order, noting how citizens and other groups have pursued policy solutions to protect the civil liberties and civil rights of all Americans, laying the foundation for later discussions about other ways citizens can participate in the government. The U.S. Constitution, primarily through the Bill Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment, protects the civil liberties and civil rights of citizens, though the extent of those protections and the need to protect the safety and general welfare of individuals has long been debated. Through social movements, legal challenges, and acts of Congress, citizens have attempted to restrict the government from unduly infringing on individual rights and from denying equal protection under the law.

Module 4: American Political Ideologies and Beliefs

Connecting the application of political science methods to the development of social and economic policies that Americans support, advocate for, and adopt is foundational to understanding the ideologies of political parties and patterns of political participation. American political beliefs are shaped by founding ideals, core values, linkage institutions (i.e., elections political parties, interest groups, and the media in all its forms) and the changing demographics of citizens. These beliefs about governments, politics, and the individual's role in the political system influence the creation of public policies.

Module 5: Political Participation

Students should understand the many ways that they can influence policy-makers and impact the decisions that will affect their daily lives. The principle of rule by the people is the bedrock of the American political system and requires that citizens engage and participate in the development of policy. Under our Constitution, governing is achieved directly through citizen participation, although there are institutions (e.g. political parties, interest groups, and mass media) that inform, organize, and mobilize support to influence government and politics, resulting in many venues for citizen influence on policy making.