# American Government

## Course Description

This course takes a close look at how our American government works. It reviews our history from the moment the first colonists set foot on American soil to when we won our independence and established our own form of government free from the ties of Britain. From independence to the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, we will look at the role each branch of government played in shaping our nation as well as all the other factors involved, from interest groups to the media. We will further explore the scope of each branch of government and how they work together as well as struggle against each other to govern within the framework of the Constitution.

## Required Text

## The text that accompanies this course is American Government and Politics Today. (Schmidt, 2017)

## Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

## Learning Outcomes

* Discuss the need for government, the different types of government, and the type of government we have in the United States along with the main political ideologies found among our citizens.
* Describe how the United States Constitution was written and understand how it was different from the Articles of Confederation.
* Discuss federalism and the early disputes over powers of the national government versus powers of the states.
* Distinguish between civil liberties and civil rights, explaining the protections offered by the Constitution and the major Supreme Court decisions that have impacted those protections.
* Discuss public opinion and how polls impact policymaking, along with the role of the media in agenda setting.
* Describe the role of interest groups and political parties in our political system.
* Explain how presidential primaries, campaigning, and the election system works.
* Compare and contrast the nature and functions of the three branches of government, discussing the system of checks and balances and the organization and scope of the federal bureaucracy.
* Discuss past and present domestic, economic, and foreign policy of the U.S. government.

## Course Topics

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| Category/Topics | Learning Content |
| The Democratic Republic | Explains the need for government and defines politics, government, order, liberty, authority, and legitimacy. Lists different forms of government and distinguishes between direct democracy and representative democracy. Discusses different theories of how democratic systems work including majoritarianism, elite theory, and pluralism. Discusses American political culture and conflicts that can occur between the values of liberty and order, and between liberty and equality. Defines conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and libertarianism while looking at where they fit on a political spectrum and an ideological grid. |
| Forging a New Government: The Constitution | Reviews early colonial experiences with self-government including the Mayflower Compact and other colonial documents and legislation that later had an impact on the Constitution. Summarizes the events that led to tension between the Colonies and Great Britain, ultimately resulting in the first and second Continental Congresses, and finally, the Declaration of Independence. Explains the significance of the Declaration of Independence and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Describes the factions involved in the crafting of the Constitution, the major compromises that resulted, and the basic structure of the new government. Discusses the arguments for and against ratification of the Constitution and how the Bill of Rights became part of the Constitution. Explains how the Constitution can be changed, both through the formal amendment process and through informal methods such as legislation, presidential action, and judicial review. |
| Federalism | Explains the differences between unitary, confederal, and federal systems of government. Discusses the advantages of federalism. Describes some of the ways in which the Constitution both explicitly and implicitly delegates powers to the national government and the state governments. Reviews early Supreme Court cases that defined the authority of the national government and describes how the Civil War effectively established the supremacy of the national government. Explains how federalism in the United States has changed over time, and how the national government exerts substantial control over state governments through grants and mandates. Discusses recent Supreme Court rulings that could be seen as bolstering states’ rights. |
| Civil Liberties | Discusses civil liberties that are written into the main body of the Constitution as well as those in the Bill of Rights. Discusses the Establishment Clause and specific controversies regarding the separation of church and state. Describes different types of speech and how they are protected by the First Amendment. Explains the constitutional basis of the right to privacy and the controversies over abortion and the right to die. Lists the rights of criminal defendants and discusses the conflict that often arises between preserving civil liberties and maintaining security. |
| Civil Rights | Summarizes the history of the civil rights movement beginning with the amendments and Civil Rights Acts passed after the Civil War to the more recent successes of the civil rights movement and modern legislation. Defines standards of judicial review used by federal courts and discusses various Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action. Describes the experiences of Latinos and American Indians. Summarizes the women’s rights movement and modern feminism, and discusses gender-based discrimination. Discusses the gay rights movement and the events that lead to the legalization of same-sex marriage. |
| Public Opinion, Political Socialization, and the Media | Defines public opinion and political socialization. Discusses the effects of demographic factors on political ideology and political party preferences. Explains the science behind opinion polls and the challenges with obtaining accurate results. Discusses the effect public opinion has on the political process. Lists the different types of mass media and the functions they serve, and discusses how media consumption patterns are changing. Summarizes the ways the media can impact political campaigns and discusses the presence of bias in the media. |
| Interest Groups and Political Parties | Lists the major types of interest groups and describes the techniques they use to promote their policy goals. Summarizes legislation designed to control lobbying activities. Describes the organization of political parties and their functions. Explains the history of political parties in the United States and how we ended up with the two major parties that exist today. Discusses the historical foundations of the two-party system and the role the minor political parties play in politics. |
| Campaigns and Elections | Describes presidential campaigns, the current system of campaign finance, presidential primaries, and how elections are conducted. Discusses voter turnout and the factors that influence the vote. |
| The Congress | Describes the functions of Congress and the powers granted to Congress by the Constitution. Explains major differences between the House and the Senate. Summarizes issues with apportionment of the House. Describes the organization of Congress including its leadership structure and the role of committees. Explains how the federal budget is established and discusses the process by which a bill becomes law.  |
| The Presidency | Lists the requirements for becoming president. Describes the different functions of the president, some of the special powers available to them, and how a president can be removed from office. Describes the organization of the executive branch including the Cabinet and the Executive Office of the President. Discusses the role of the vice president.  |
| The Bureaucracy | Describes the history of the federal bureaucracy and the overall breakdown of the federal budget. Explains the organization of the federal bureaucracy including the cabinet departments, independent executive agencies, independent regulatory agencies, and government corporations. Summarizes the history of the federal civil service and explains the modern process by which federal employees are hired. Examines modern attempts to improve the federal bureaucracy and make it more transparent and efficient. Describes the role federal agencies play in making policy and the ultimate control Congress exerts over those agencies. |
| The Judiciary | Reviews the major sources of law including common law and case law. Explains the organization of the federal court system and the basic judicial requirements for a case to be brought before a court. Describes the process by which the Supreme Court accepts a case for review, forms an opinion, and announces its decision. Explains how federal judges are selected. Discusses the ways in which the Supreme Court makes policy and the checks that exist to limit the judicial branch. |
| Domestic and Economic Policy | Describes the steps involved in the creating of new policy. Discusses illegal immigration, state laws against illegal immigrants, and current disputes. Discusses energy policy and the significance of the climate change debate. Examines the different aspects of economic policy including fiscal policy and monetary policy. Provides a brief overview of our tax system and the types of taxes paid by Americans. |
| Foreign Policy | Describes different aspects of foreign policy, the techniques and strategies used to achieve foreign policy goals, and the two main philosophies that guide American foreign policy. Discusses the impact terrorism has had on recent foreign policy. Discusses significant foreign policy issues addressed through diplomacy. Examines the roles of the executive and legislative branches in forming foreign policy. Summarizes the history of major themes in United States foreign policy. |

## Study Questions

Study questions are similar to homework assignments for reviewing and supplementing what you have learned in a lesson. You can repeat the questions as preferred, but will need to achieve a score of 80% or higher on the study questions associated with a lesson before that lesson is marked as complete. You will then receive the appropriate proportion of the total number of points available for the study questions based on their overall average score for all study questions in the course.

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## Course Time Limit

This course is self-paced, which means you can complete the course requirements at a pace that is comfortable for you. However, there is an overall time limit of 180 days to complete each course, starting from the date on which you registered. This time limit is indicated on your Courses screen as “Course Period.”

Once the time limit has passed, you will no longer be able to attempt any further activities or assessments. Assuming you have not yet attempted the Final Exam, you can immediately unregister and reregister for the course to start over. Otherwise, you will be required to wait to reregister per our Course Retake Policy.

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## Course Retake Policy

There is a one-week waiting period before this course can be re-taken, starting from the date of the last Final Exam attempt.

To retake the course, first unregister from the course on your Courses screen. If it has been over a week since your last attempt, you will then be able to register for this course again.

Your highest final score for the course will be used for the transcript.

## Exams

There are a total of four exams for this course as described below.

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| **Exam** | **Coverage** | **Number of Multiple-Choice Questions** | **Time Limit, Minutes** |
| **First** | Lessons 1-15 | 25 | 60 |
| **Midterm** | Lessons 16-37 with some review of topics from Lessons 1-15 | 50 | 90 |
| **Third** | Lessons 38-52 | 25 | 60 |
| **Final** | Cumulative; everything taught in the course with an emphasis on content from the last half (and particularly the last quarter) of the course | 50 | 90 |

## Grading

To determine your level of mastery for this course, you will earn points by successfully completing the learning and evaluation activities below in sequence.

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| --- | --- |
| Source | Points Available |
| Study Questions | 300 |
| Graded Exam #1 | 100 |
| Midterm Exam | 200 |
| Graded Exam #2 | 100 |
| Final Exam | 300 |

Upon completion of the course and the grading source activities, InstantCert will provide you with a percentage score. The minimum passing score is 700 points, or an overall course grade of 70%.

**Important! Only a passing score on a course marked 100% complete (including the proctored final exam) is eligible for college credit.**

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## Proctoring of the Final Exam

A proctor is a person who monitors the work of another person who is taking an examination. Online proctoring services allow you to take the working remotely and in the same way as if you were sitting in an exam room. Proctoring ensures that the test you take complies with current college level examination policies.

Proctoring is used only for the final exam. It is offered through the online proctoring service RPNow at the Software Secure web site. You will pay a separate fee to RPNow for each final exam attempt.

RPNow requires that students download and install proprietary software. They will need to use a PC or a Mac with a webcam. Students can review the full system requirements for RPNow at:

<http://clientportal.softwaresecure.com/support/index.php?/Knowledgebase/Article/View/252/0/system-requirements-remote-proctor-now>

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## Exam Retake Policy

Both graded exams, the midterm and the final exam can be retaken ONCE. There is a 3-day waiting period before you will be allowed to retake an exam. If you retake an exam, the higher result of your two attempts will be used to calculate your final score.

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## Academic Integrity

You are required to comply with the InstantCert full Student Code of Conduct, which specifically prohibits cheating or any other academically dishonest behavior. Violation of any part of the Student Code of Conduct can result in a grade reduction or even suspension from the course.

## Software Requirements

The operating system, browser, internet access and speed are provided below for use with courses from the InstantCert web site.

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| **Operating Systems** | * Windows XP and above
* Mac OS X
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| **Browsers** | * The latest version of Chrome, Firefox of Safari
* IE9 or higher
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| **Internet and Speed** | Broadband Internet; 1Mbps or higher |

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## Accessibility and Disability Accommodations

InstantCert strives to make online education accessible to people everywhere in the following ways:

* All course content is available online, accessible from anywhere through an Internet connection.
* All video lessons include a transcript for use by those who are hearing impaired and/or by students that wish to have written copies of the lessons.
* All video lessons have close captioning.
* Lesson pages can be navigated by screen readers.
* Videos may be replayed an unlimited amount of times. Video speed can be increased or slowed.
* Lesson transcripts and quizzes can be printed for offline use.
* The proctoring software RPNow works with screen readers.