

# Political Science 15B – Essentials of U.S. & CA Government

## Sections 80, 81 & 82 Fall 2017 – Dr. James Brent

Office: Clark Hall 457

Phone: (408) 924-5572

Email: [james.brent@sjsu.edu](mailto:james.brent@sjsu.edu)

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 8:00 to 9:00 and 10:30 to 12:00

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:

1. GELO 1 (US2): Explain how political decisions are made, their consequences for individuals and society, and how individuals and groups may affect the decision-making process. Analyze the meaning and content of the democratic process as it has evolved in the United States and California and describe the foundations of the political system and the evolving institutions of government, the links between the people and government, and the operations of California government.
2. GELO 2 (US3): Identify the tools of political action and collective decision making at the local, state, national, and global level and articulate the values and assumptions that inform their civic engagement.
3. GELO 3 (D3): Place contemporary developments in cultural, historical, environmental, and spatial contexts.
4. GELO 4 (D3): Identify the dynamics of ethnic, cultural, gender/sexual, age-based, class, regional, national, transnational, and global identities and the similarities, differences, linkages, and interactions between them.
5. GELO 5 (D3): Evaluate social science information, draw on different points of view, and formulate applications appropriate to contemporary social issues.
6. GELO 6 (D3) Apply multidisciplinary material to a topic relevant to policy and social action at the local, national, and/or international levels.

## Textbooks

The main “textbook” in this course is an online (electronic) multimedia textbook entitled *Globalyceum*. The cost is about \$40. I will follow up with additional details about how to access the site. In addition, there is one traditional textbook that can be purchased at Amazon.com or other retail sites (although you will not need it until the second half of the course)

Van Vechten, Renee. (2016) *California Politics: A Primer* (4th edition). Washington CQ Press. ISBN 978-1483375595

## Course Modules (What You Are Responsible For)

This course is divided into 9 topics, or “modules.” Modules open on Mondays at noon, and usually last for 2 weeks (except for Modules 2 and 9, which last 1 week).

Module 1	August 23 – September 4
Module 2	September 4 – September 11
Module 3	September 11 – September 25
Module 4	September 25 – October 9
Module 5	October 9 – October 23
Module 6	October 23 – November 6
Module 7	November 6 – November 20
Module 8	November 20 – December 4
Module 9	December 4 – December 11

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 Globalyceum or the California government textbook that you will be responsible for on the exams.
2. Lectures – Each module has one or more lectures that you must view. You will be responsible for the content of these videos on the exam.
3. Web-Based Activity (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. **Web-based activities are always due at noon on Mondays**

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

There are a maximum of 220 possible points, which are distributed accordingly:

Web-Based Research Assignments	80 points
Midterm Exam (October 19 and 20)	40 points
Final Exam (December 14 and 15)	40 points
Outline & List of Sources (due October 30)	10 points
Research Paper (due December 1 or 15)	50 points

Final letter grades for the course will be assigned based on the following scale:

A = 93-100%	B = 83-87%	C = 73-77%	D = 63-67%
A- = 90-92%	B- = 80-82%	C- = 70-72%	D- = 60-62%
B+ = 88-89%	C+ = 78-79%	D+ = 68-69%	F = 59% or less

## The Assignments Explained

**Web-Based Assignments** -- For each of the 9 modules of this course, you will be given a 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, although some involve taking and submitting pictures. More information about the specific activities can be found from the course homepage by clicking on the icon that says "assignments".

You should complete 8 of the 9 assignments. Assignments are worth 10 points each, These assignments will not be accepted if submitted later than the end of the “grace period” (explained below), no matter what the reason. 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. The midterm covers modules 1-5 and the final exam covers modules 6-9. Each exam will be available on-line for a 48-hour period. You must begin the exam within that 48-hour period. You will have 90 minutes to complete each exam. Access to course lectures and Globalyceum will be disabled once the exam period begins.

## Research Paper

Trump & the Republican Congress have already challenged many of the fundamental assumptions and practices of American government. For your research paper, you will be asked to select one specific proposal Trump or Congress has made or action they have taken and argue for or against its adoption.

This assignment has three parts:

1. Topic Selection & Approval (0 points)
2. Outline & List of Sources (10 points)
3. Paper (50 points)

### Step 1 - Topic Selection & Approval (due October 2)

Please send me an email ([james.brent@sjsu.edu](mailto:james.brent@sjsu.edu)) telling me what specific proposal or action you want to write about. I will send you a reply email letting you know whether your topic is approved or not. There are NO points associated with this.

## Step 2 – Outline & List of Sources (due October 30)

Using the “assignment” tab in Canvas, please submit a one-page outline of your paper, along with a list of 15 sources that you might use in the paper. These sources should be credible, unbiased sources, and at least five (5) should be peer-reviewed articles, law review articles, or other academic sources. You should use proper bibliographic form, but I do not care whether you use MLA, APA, or another style. [Please note: By listing sources here, you are NOT committing yourself to using those exact sources in your final paper.]

## Step 3 – The Paper (due December 1 or December 15)

Your final draft should be a minimum of 8 pages long and should use a minimum of 8 high-quality sources. 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 taken from credible sources. It should also consider both sides of the issue.
- 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. Academic sources are especially encouraged. *Papers that use only web sites as sources cannot receive a “A” or “B.” Papers that use Wikipedia or an online encyclopedia as a source cannot receive an “A.”*
- This is a paper about government. Although your paper should certainly address the issue of whether the proposal is a good idea (would it work?), it should also address issues such as its constitutionality, its effect on federalism, its effect on separation of powers (if any), etc.
- 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: all papers are automatically submitted to Turnitin.com.*
- Your writing counts. Points will be deducted for poor 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.
- Certain Topics Are Off Limits – There are several topics that you may not write about. These include any proposals or actions related to gay marriage, marijuana, abortion & birth control, the death penalty, or gun control.

## My Late Policy

**The Research Paper** – I do accept the research paper if submitted late. In fact, there are two alternative due dates for the research paper. If you submit the paper by noon on Monday, December 1, you will receive written feedback from me along with your grade (although you will not receive the opportunity to revise the paper – merely feedback that explains how your grade was arrived at). If you want extra time to work on your paper, you may submit it by noon on Monday, December 15 and it will be considered “on time,” but it will not receive any written feedback from me. Papers submitted after noon on December 15 will be considered late and will receive a penalty of one letter grade.

**The Web-Based Research Activities** – I do NOT accept these assignments late, regardless of the excuse. There are no exceptions to this policy whatsoever. However, to accommodate students who have technical difficulties, you do enjoy a 60-minute “grace period.” If you miss the submission deadline due to technical issues, you may email it to me instead at [james.brent@sjsu](mailto:james.brent@sjsu). However, I must receive the submission within 60 minutes of the original due date and time (in other words, no later than 1:00 p.m. on the due date). Under no circumstances will I accept assignments submitted after the grace period expires.

## Contacting Me

I am happy to receive your questions and feedback. I would ask that you contact me in one of two ways:

- 1) via email at [james.brent@sjsu.edu](mailto:james.brent@sjsu.edu)
- 2) From Canvas -- click “Inbox” and then the “new message” icon at the top to send me a message

**Please do NOT use the “comment” feature to send me messages, as I do not receive all of them.**

In addition, I will occasionally post “announcements” in Canvas. It is very important that you make sure to read all of these announcements.

## List of Course Modules and Assigned Readings

Module #1 – The American Constitution (August 23 – September 4)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 1

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: Sept. 4 at noon

Module #2 – Federalism (September 4 – September 11)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 2

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: Sept. 11 at noon

Module #3 – Civil Liberties & Civil Rights (September 11 – September 25)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 3

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: September 25 at noon

Module #4 – American Elections (September 25 - October 9)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 4

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: October 9 at noon

Module #5 – Political Parties & Interest Groups (October 9 – October 23)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 5

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: October 30 at noon

MIDTERM ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19 AND 20

Module #6 – Congress (October 23 – November 6)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 6; Van Vechten, Chapter 4

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: Nov. 6 at noon

Module #7 – The Presidency & the Executive Branch (November 6 – November 20)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 7; Van Vechten, Chapter 5

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: November 20 at noon

Module #8 – The Judiciary (November 20 – December 4)

--READING: Globalyceum, Module 8; Van Vechten, Chapter 6

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: December 4 at noon

Module #9 – California Politics and Government (December 4 – December 11)

--READINGS: Van Vechten, Chapters 2, 3 7, 8 and 9

--ASSIGNMENTS DUE: December 11 at noon

MIDTERM ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14 AND 15

# University Policies

## Workload and Credit Hour Requirements

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

## Other University Policies

Other important university policies can be found [by clicking here](#).