

San José State University
Political Science
POLS 15 - Essentials of U.S. & California Government
Spring 2021

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Matthew Record
Office Location:	Clark Hall, 406N
Telephone:	(408) 924-5346
Email:	matthew.record@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	Via Zoom, by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Canvas Page
Classroom:	Online
GE/SJSU Studies Category:	US2, US3, D3

Welcome!

Welcome to POLS 15 – a survey of the construction of the U.S. and California’s government. This class will be an exciting exploration of theory, history and function of U.S. governance systems. Why do we have government at all? How is it organized? When has it succeeded? Why does it often fail? Most importantly, how and when can we use government as mechanism to improve society and how do we make ourselves better and more efficacious citizens?

This class uses a historical lens to explore how many of the problems in today’s society have their genesis decades, often centuries ago. We will learn how and why America’s governance system is unique in the world, both as a first mover in the development of liberal democracy but as one of the world’s few Federalist systems. Finally, we will deep dive on the policy ramifications of the U.S. government system and explore how even small changes in governmental function can have massive practical ramifications for everyday citizens.

Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, can be found on the Canvas learning management system course website. Please make sure you are consistently reachable via the messaging system as e-mails through the Canvas system and the student’s individual e-mails are how I maintain contact with the class over the course of the semester. The responsibility for being up-to-date on developments in the class and assignments lies with the student.

By enrolling in this course you consent to all course requirements listed in this syllabus, published on our Canvas site, and announced in class. You accept responsibility for accessing the Canvas course website to download any required handouts, assignments, or readings. You also accept responsibility for checking the course website regularly for any announcements. You also accept responsibility for receiving any

messages sent via the MySJSU email system. Make sure that MySJSU has your current email address. Contact me by Thursday of week one if you cannot access the Canvas website, download and read .pdf files, link to other websites, or send or receive email.

Communication

It is essential that you check the class Canvas page every single day while this course is in session, including weekends. This is a course requirement. All course materials will be posted on Canvas. I will also frequently make announcements on Canvas. I will make every effort to promptly return emails between M-F. If I do not respond within 24 hours, please feel free to send me another email. I will answer emails on the weekends and evening, though I can't guarantee prompt response at those times. I am available to meet with you by appointment if you have class or work during my regularly scheduled office hours.

Course Description

From the SJSU Course Catalog: Treatment of essentials of U.S. and California government. Satisfies the American Institutions requirements in U.S. Constitution (US2) and California Government (US3), and the Core GE requirement in Social Sciences: Social Issues (D3). GE Area: D3, and American Institution Requirement: US2 and US3.

From the SJSU GE Guidelines (S14-5): In this course you will be exposed to alternative interpretations of the historical events and political processes that have shaped the social, economic, and political system in which you live. This course will provide a multicultural framework, including both conflict and consensus perspectives, of the choices and options available to individuals and groups in their social, economic and political relations. The focus of the course is the growth of a multicultural society and the interactions, including cooperation and conflict, as these many and varied peoples have dealt with social, economic, and political issues

GE Learning Outcomes (GELO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will 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.

Required Texts/Readings/Media

Textbooks

- Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, & Kenneth A. Shepsle. American Government: A Brief Introduction. W.W. Norton, 2019. (referred to as American Gov. in the class schedule below)
ISBN# 0393674932
- Anagnoson, Bonetto, Buck, Kelleher, DeLeon, Emrey, Koch, Michelson. Governing California in the Twenty-First Century. W.W. Norton, 2019. (referred to as Governing California in the class schedule below)
ISBN# 0393674932
- InQuizitive - Login through the course's Canvas site.

Please note: Both texts are required and available at the Spartan Bookstore. Older editions of these books are acceptable to purchase though it is strongly recommended that a student not buy an edition more than five years old. Moreover, key information, page numbers and chapter numbers may vary from edition to edition. It is the student's responsibility to account for these discrepancies when they exist.

Other Readings/Media

- Tamar Gendler, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Politics and Economics* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm8asJxdcds&t=20s>)
- Kraft & Furlong, Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives
Chapter 1 Available on Canvas
- CQ Researcher, Various, Issues for Debate in American Public Policy
(Available on Canvas)

Course Requirements, Assignments and Schedule

Please note: the schedule below is subject to change with fair notice. I will make every effort to avoid changes when possible. However, it is the student's responsibility to stay apprised of possible changes to the course schedule.

Community College Memo (February 15th)

You will review the provided chapter from the CQ Issues for Debate text. You must submit a 600-word response memo for this case. The purpose of this memo is to meaningfully engage with the material from the chapter and think through the structural, institutional and economic factors that gave rise to the use of for-profit prisons as a policy response. Please address the following in the memo using specific and relevant examples from the text:

- 1) What purpose and populations do community colleges serve?

- 2) In what ways is cheap/free community college equitable for society? In what ways is it efficient?
- 3) What are the downsides to this arrangement? What are the harms that cheap/free community college might cause?
- 4) In your opinion, is this an effective policy idea? Why or why not? Be detailed and use supportive evidence.

Submission will be evaluated on a simple 1-5 scale where 5 means that the submission thoughtfully engages with the underlying issue and backs up its arguments with clear logic and examples, a 3 means the submission is sufficient but is heavy on personal opinion and summary with little synthesis or specific examples and a 1 means that the submission has either not thoughtfully engaged with the main questions of the topic or fails to achieve the minimum requirements for the assignment. This assignment assesses GELOs 4, 5 and 6.

Ideology Quiz Reflection Paper (February 22nd)

This is a writing assignment that gives you the opportunity to think more about your own background and how your life events and environment have affected the way you view the political world. Go to politicalcompass.org and take the quiz. Take a screenshot of where you fell on the political spectrum (function + PrtSc). Include the screenshot in your 600-word reflection paper that discusses what your ideology says about you. Highlight any statements that you most especially agreed or disagreed with and talk about how you think that may have impacted your ideology score. Talk about whether this was your first time thinking about your own political ideology or whether this is a topic you've considered previously. Make sure to put to paper any questions you might have and remember them for our discussion. *To receive credit, students will submit a reflection of no fewer than 600 words on their experience to Canvas.* This assignment assesses GELOs 4, 5 and 6.

Private Prisons Response Memo (April 12th)

You will review the provided chapter from the CQ Issues for Debate text. You must submit a 600-word response memo for this case. The purpose of this memo is to meaningfully engage with the material from the chapter and think through the structural, institutional and economic factors that gave rise to the use of for-profit prisons as a policy response. Please address the following in the memo using specific and relevant examples from the text:

- 1) What was the impetus behind utilizing for-profit prisons? What policy changes led to their ubiquity?
- 2) Do for-profit prisons out-perform government-run facilities on any metric? If so, how do they accomplish this? If not, why not?
- 3) Are there human rights/justice issues with for-profit prisons? If so, what are they? Why do they nonetheless persist?
- 4) In your opinion, are for-profit prisons effective? Are they ethically acceptable? Why or why not?

Submission will be evaluated on a simple 1-5 scale where 5 means that the submission thoughtfully engages with the underlying issue and backs up its arguments with clear logic and examples, a 3 means the submission is sufficient but is heavy on personal opinion and summary with little synthesis or specific examples and a 1 means that the submission has either not thoughtfully engaged with the main questions of the topic or fails to achieve the minimum requirements for the assignment. This assignment assesses GELOs 4, 5 and 6.

California Policy Problem Response Memo (May 10th)

You will pick one of the topics in the “California Policy Problems” folder on Canvas. This file folder contains various chapters of CQ Issues for Debate text. You must submit a 600-word response memo for the case you select cases. The purpose of this memo is to meaningfully engage with the material from the chapter and think through the structural, institutional and economic factors that gave rise to the use of for-profit prisons as a policy response. Please address the following in the memo using specific and relevant examples from the text. Please address the following:

- 1) Why is the issue covered in the chapter considered to be a problem? Do different groups have differing opinions on whether the issue is a problem or what exactly the problem is?
- 2) Why is this issue a *public* problem? Why should the government be involved or *should* the government even be involved at all? Is this something the market could handle without government interference? Is this a political problem or a logistical/technical problem? Is it both?
- 3) What are your thoughts on this issue? Is there something you feel the chapter overlooked/shortchanged?

Submission will be evaluated on a simple 1-5 scale where 5 means that the submission thoughtfully engages with the underlying issue and backs up its arguments with clear logic and examples, a 3 means the submission is sufficient but is heavy on personal opinion and summary with little synthesis or specific examples and a 1 means that the submission has either not thoughtfully engaged with the main questions of the topic or fails to achieve the minimum requirements for the assignment. This assignment assesses GELOs 4 and 5. This assignment assesses GELOs 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6.

Midterm Exams (Due by 8:00pm March 26th)

The midterm exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and matching. Details will be provided ahead of the exam This exam will assess GELOs 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Final Examination (Due by 8:00pm May 21st)

The final exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and matching. Details will be provided ahead of the exam This exam will assess GELOs 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Inquizitive (Due on Wednesdays, see below for exact schedule)

Most days during the semester, students must complete the readings assigned for that day and complete the pre-class quizzes assigned through use of InQuizitive, an evaluation technology which allows students to develop their knowledge of class readings at their own pace. All newly purchased textbooks automatically come with an InQuizitive access code. Students that purchase a used book can buy an access code directly from Norton for \$20. The purpose of these quizzes is to test whether students are coming in to class with basic comprehension of the reading material in order to inform class discussion. *Each quiz is worth 2.5 points toward the student's final grade and is due before the class where that chapter's readings are due.* The quizzes will assess GELOs 1 through 6.

Assignment & Exam Schedule

Community College Memo	February 15 th
Ideology Quiz Reflection Paper	February 22 nd
Private Prisons Memo	April 12 th
California Policy Problems Memo	May 10 th
Quizzes	Wednesdays (See Schedule Below)
Mid-term Examination	March 26 th
Final Examination	May 21 st

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Grading Paradigm		
98 to 100% — A Plus	93 to 97.9% — A	90 to 92.9% — A Minus
87 to 89.9% — B Plus	83 to 86.9% — B	80 to 82.9% — B Minus
77 to 79.9% — C Plus	73 to 76.9% — C	70 to 72.9% — C Minus
67 to 69.9% — D Plus	63 to 66.9% — D	60 to 62.9% — D Minus
Less than 60% — F		

And assignments and exams will be weighted accordingly:

Assignment	%
Pre-Class Quizzes	30
Mid-term Examination	20
Final Examination	20
Other Assignments	20
Ideology Quiz Reflection Paper (5%)	
Community College Memo (5%)	
Private Prisons Memo (5%)	
California Policy Problems Memo (5%)	

Make-up/Late Policy

Given the extremely condensed schedule for this class, it is absolutely essential that students not fall behind the course schedule. Make-ups will almost never be granted and usually only in the case of a grave and completely unforeseen circumstance.

Classroom Policies and Protocol

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page at http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/)

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 for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Since, the class only takes place over a two a half week period, that means each student is expected to engage with course material for several hours every day. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

POLS 15 - Essentials of U.S. & California Government Winter 2021

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings/Media	Due
Unit #1 - The Basis of Government in the U.S.			
Week 1	Why Have Government At All?	<i>Gendler Introduction</i>	How to Use InQuizitive (2/3)
Week 2	What Can Government Do?	American Gov., Ch. 1; Kraft & Furlong, Chapter 1	InQuizitive Ch. 1 (2/3)
Week 3	The Constitution and the Bill of Rights	American Gov, Ch. 2	InQuizitive Ch. 2 (2/10)
Week 4	The Promise & Difficulties of Federalism	CQ Researcher - Community Colleges; American Gov, Ch. 3	Community College Reflection Paper (2/15); InQuizitive Ch. 3 (2/17)
Unit #2 - Institutions of the U.S. Government			
Week 5	What Should Government Do?	<i>politicalcompass.org</i>	Ideology Quiz Reflection Paper (2/22)
Week 6	The U.S. Presidency	American Gov, Ch. 6	InQuizitive Ch. 6 (3/3)
Week 7	The U.S. Congress	American Gov, Ch. 5	InQuizitive Ch. 5 (3/10)
Week 8	The Federal Judiciary	American Gov, Ch. 8	InQuizitive Ch. 8 (3/17)

Week 9	The Bureaucracy	American Gov, Ch. 7	InQuizitive Ch. 7 (3/24)
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Mid-term must be completed by 8:00pm on Friday, March 26th

Unit #3 - Values, Politics and Political Actors

Week 10	Institutions of California Government	Governing California – Ch. 3-5	InQuizitive California, Chs 3, 4, 5 (4/7)
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Week 11	Civil Rights & Civil Liberties	CQ Researcher – Private Prisons; American Gov, Ch. 4	Private Prisons Memo (4/12); InQuizitive Ch. 4 (4/14)
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Week 12	Political Parties & Interest Groups	American Gov, Ch. 11 & 12	InQuizitive Ch. 11 & 12 (4/21)
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Week 13	Public Opinion & The News Media	American Gov, Ch. 9	InQuizitive Ch. 9 (4/28)
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Week 14	U.S. Voting, Campaign & Elections	American Gov, Ch. 10	InQuizitive Ch. 10 (5/5)
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Week 15	California Public Policy	CQ Researcher – TBA; Governing California – Ch. 10	California Policy Problems Memo (5/10); InQuizitive California, Ch. 10 (5/12)
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Final Examination must be completed by 8:00pm Friday, May 21st
