

Setting a Policy for AP[®] U.S. Government and Politics

The purpose of this guide is to provide college faculty and administrators with research data, participation and performance data of AP[®] U.S. Government and Politics students, curricular content, and sample exam questions to facilitate the establishment of appropriate credit and placement policies for AP U.S. Government and Politics.

The Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP) provides motivated students with the opportunity to take college-level courses while still in high school. Students demonstrate their mastery of the curriculum by taking AP Exams—35 exams are available in 20 subject areas. In 2005, more than 1.2 million students took AP Exams worldwide. Of the 2.1 million AP Exams taken in 2005, about 130,000 were in U.S. Government and Politics. More than 3,000 colleges and universities, including many international institutions, accept qualifying AP Exam scores for credit, placement, or both.

Throughout its 50-year history, the AP Program has maintained its high standards of rigor in its courses and exams. Since its inception, AP has been a respected force in American education due to the critical involvement of college and university faculty members.

Political Science Faculty Involvement in AP

College and university faculty members play a vital role in every stage of development and scoring of an AP course and exam, helping to ensure their high quality. Each AP discipline has its own Development Committee—composed of college and university professors and experienced AP teachers—that is responsible for creating the course guidelines and exam questions. College and university faculty members also serve as the Chief Readers, responsible for establishing the exam-scoring guidelines and overseeing the annual AP Reading of the free-response section for their academic discipline.

“I have great respect for the AP teachers who are able to take college-level material and work with high school students in a sophisticated and rigorous course. I am impressed with the college faculty and high school teachers who are involved in the Reading, training institutes, and workshops. I know how dedicated all of these people are. And I can say honestly that I have learned a tremendous amount in the 11 years that I have been associated with the AP Program—about teaching, about rigorous and fair testing, and about comparative politics and U.S. politics. It has been an extraordinarily valuable professional experience for me.”

—Jean Robinson, AP U.S. Government and Politics Development Committee
Indiana University

Current and Recent Members of the AP U.S. Government and Politics Development Committee

Fernando A. Benavides*

Mansfield High School
Texas

Kathleen Bratton*

Louisiana State University
Louisiana

Gary W. Copeland,* Chair

University of Oklahoma
Oklahoma

Daniel J. Devitt

Menlo School
California

Kerry L. Haynie,* Chief Reader

Duke University
North Carolina

David F. La Shomb

Brainerd Senior High School
Minnesota

Kristen D. Parris, former Chair

Western Washington University
Washington

Clarissa L. Peterson*

DePauw University
Indiana

Pete Pew*

William S. Hart Union High School
California

Jean C. Robinson

Indiana University
Indiana

Joseph Stewart Jr., former Chief Reader

Clemson University
South Carolina

Donley T. Studlar

West Virginia University
West Virginia

J. David Woodard

Clemson University
South Carolina

* Current committee member

The College Board publication *AP and Higher Education* discusses the following topics at greater length: how to set an AP policy, AP research studies, the development of AP courses and exams, and the AP Exam scoring. For more information or to request a copy of this publication, please go to apcentral.collegeboard.com/highered.

How to Set an AP Policy

The College Board encourages higher education institutions to base their AP policy decisions on data and research, and recognizes that different institutions and departments will set different policies, based upon factors unique to their institution, student body, and academic discipline. The best way for colleges and universities to determine their AP credit and placement policies is to conduct their own research on the performance of AP and non-AP students at their own institution and in their own department.

Research on AP U.S. Government and Politics Student Performance

Research studies show that students who do well on an AP Exam are academically prepared to place out of a corresponding college course and move on to the next higher-level course in the discipline. See Table 1 for data from a research study comparing AP and non-AP student performance in second-level political science courses.

Table 1: Student Performance in Second-Level College Political Science Courses
AP U.S. Government and Politics Students Versus Non-AP Students

	AP EXAM GRADE	GPA	PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING AN A OR B
AP Students Who Place Out of Intro. Course	AP 5	3.27	85
	AP 4	3.32	90
	AP 3	2.97	79
Students Who Complete Intro. Course	Non-AP	2.88	73

Taking the AP course and exam stimulates further interest in the subject area and encourages deeper disciplinary knowledge.

Research studies show that students who take the AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam are more likely to take further course work in political science than students who do not take the AP Exam. Higher scores on the AP Exam make this trend even more pronounced, with a greater likelihood of majoring or minor-ing in the discipline. See Table 2 for data from this research study.

Table 2: Additional College Political Science Course Work
AP U.S. Government and Politics Students Versus Non-AP Students

	AP EXAM GRADE	PERCENT TAKING ADDITIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES	AVERAGE NUMBER OF COLLEGE POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES TAKEN
AP U.S. Government and Politics Students	AP 5	45	1.4
	AP 4	39	1.1
	AP 3	34	1.0
Non-AP Students	Non-AP	32	0.7

PDF copies of these and other research studies can be found at apcentral.collegeboard.com/colleges/research.

In addition to research studies on AP student performance, the College Board conducts college comparability studies to measure the degree to which the AP courses and exams are equivalent in content and difficulty to corresponding college courses. The AP Exam scoring rubric is established so that the lowest composite score that earns an AP grade of 5 is equivalent to the average score earned by college students who received grades of A in a comparable course. The lowest score that earns an AP grade of 4 is equivalent to the average B, and the lowest score that earns an AP grade of 3 is equivalent to the average C.

The research that the College Board conducts is intended to help institutions and academic departments as they establish appropriate AP policies. AP Central® (apcentral.collegeboard.com), the College Board's online home for AP professionals, contains other resources that may assist in this process, including the Course Description, released exam questions, and sample student responses at different levels of ability.

For more information go to:
apcentral.collegeboard.com/govpolus/exam

AP Credit Policy Info on the Web

Information about AP credit and placement policies at more than 1,000 colleges and universities is available on the College Board's Web site at www.collegeboard.com/ap/creditpolicy.

AP U.S. Government and Politics Students, Course, and Exam

Participation and Performance Data for AP U.S. Government and Politics Students in 2005

Total Number of Schools Offering AP U.S. Government and Politics: 5,569

Table 3: AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam Score Distribution, 2005

EXAM GRADE	NUMBER OF EXAMINEES	% AT
Score of 5	8,349	6.5%
Score of 4	23,990	18.6%
Score of 3	35,364	27.3%
Score of 2	42,742	33.1%
Score of 1	18,878	14.6%
	129,323	100.0%

Figure 1: AP U.S. Government and Politics Examinees by Gender, 2005

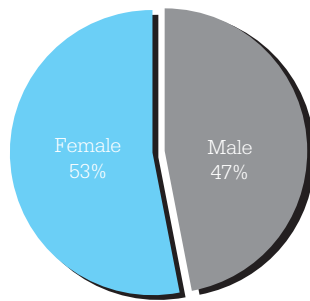
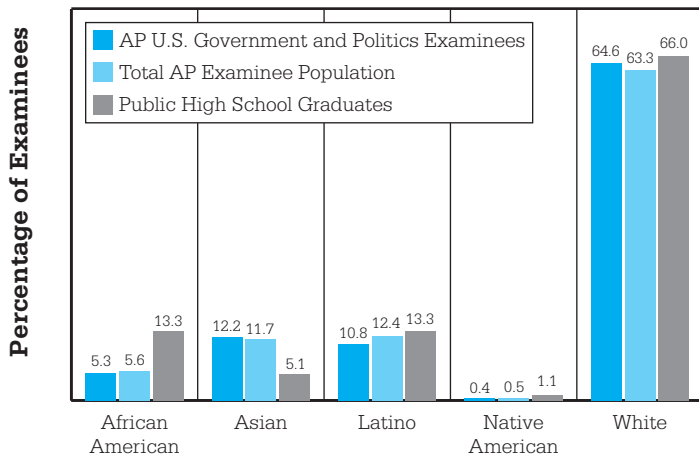


Figure 2: AP U.S. Government and Politics Examinees by Race and Ethnicity, 2005



The AP U.S. Government and Politics Course

The AP U.S. Government and Politics course provides students with a learning experience equivalent to that of an introductory college course in United States government and politics. The course gives students an analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States, studying general concepts used to interpret U.S. politics and analyzing specific examples. The course develops familiarity with the various institutions, groups, beliefs, and ideas that constitute U.S. politics.

Students successfully completing this course will:

- know important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government and politics;
- understand typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures); and
- be able to analyze and interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics.

The Development Committee creates guidelines for the AP U.S. Government and Politics course and designs the AP Exam. Periodically the Development Committee conducts curriculum surveys, sent to professors who teach the comparable college-level course, that help ensure that the AP U.S. Government and Politics course remains current with concepts and themes as taught in college and university classrooms.

The Development Committee has created a topic outline that covers the main subject areas that should be taught, along with the relative weight to be assigned to each topic.

- I. Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government..... 5–15%
 - A. Considerations that influenced the formulation and adoption of the Constitution
 - B. Separation of powers
 - C. Federalism
 - D. Theories of democratic government
- II. Political Beliefs and Behaviors..... 10–20%
 - A. Beliefs that citizens hold about their government and its leaders
 - B. Processes by which citizens learn about politics
 - C. The nature, sources, and consequences of public opinion
 - D. The ways in which citizens vote and otherwise participate in political life
 - E. Factors that influence citizens to differ from one another in terms of political beliefs and behaviors

- III. Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media... 10–20%
 - A. Political parties and elections
 - 1. Functions
 - 2. Organizations
 - 3. Development
 - 4. Effects on the political process
 - 5. Electoral laws and systems
 - B. Interest groups, including political action committees (PACs)
 - 1. The range of interests represented
 - 2. The activities of interest groups
 - 3. The effects of interest groups on the political process
 - 4. The unique characteristics and roles of PACs in the political process
 - C. The mass media
 - 1. The functions and structures of the media
 - 2. The impact of media on politics
- IV. Institutions of National Government: The Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Federal Courts..... 35–45%
 - A. The major formal and informal institutional arrangements of power
 - B. Relationships among these four institutions and varying balances of power
 - C. Linkages between institutions and the following:
 - 1. Public opinion and voters
 - 2. Interest groups
 - 3. Political parties
 - 4. The media
 - 5. Subnational governments
- V. Public Policy..... 5–15%
 - A. Policymaking in a federal system
 - B. The formation of policy agendas
 - C. The role of institutions in the enactment of policy
 - D. The role of the bureaucracy and the courts in policy implementation and interpretation
 - E. Linkages between policy processes and the following:
 - 1. Political institutions and federalism
 - 2. Political parties
 - 3. Interest groups
 - 4. Public opinion
 - 5. Elections
 - 6. Policy networks
- VI. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties..... 5–15%
 - A. The development of civil liberties and civil rights by judicial interpretation
 - B. Knowledge of substantive rights and liberties
 - C. The impact of the Fourteenth Amendment on the constitutional development of rights and liberties

“The rigorous pace and high standards of the AP curricula have kept me in classes with committed students and passionate teachers for the duration of my high school career. This sophisticated, high-pressure environment has afforded me a deeper, more detailed exposure to each subject studied than would have been possible in any non-AP class. Also, in preparing for AP Exams, I have developed the skills necessary for long-term retention of learned concepts, and have begun to appreciate and recognize the relevance of these concepts beyond the classroom.”

—Peyton Smith, AP U.S. Government and Politics student
Mansfield High School, Class of 2005

Beginning in fall 2006, AP U.S. Government and Politics teachers and principals of schools where AP U.S. Government and Politics is taught must certify that their 2007-08 courses follow all the requirements stipulated by the Development Committee, including using college-level texts, in order to ensure that the AP course reflects college-level standards. By completing this AP Course Audit, high schools will receive individual licenses to label their U.S. government and politics courses “AP.” In fall 2007, colleges and universities will receive a list of all high schools authorized to use the “AP” designation for their U.S. government and politics courses.

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam

The AP U.S. Government and Politics Exam consists of a 45-minute multiple-choice section and a 100-minute free-response section. The two sections are designed to complement each other and to measure a wide range of skills and knowledge. The free-response section includes four mandatory questions.

AP U.S. Government and Politics free-response questions from recent exam years are listed below.

Question 1

Presidents are generally thought to have advantages over Congress in conducting foreign policy because of the formal and informal powers of the presidency.

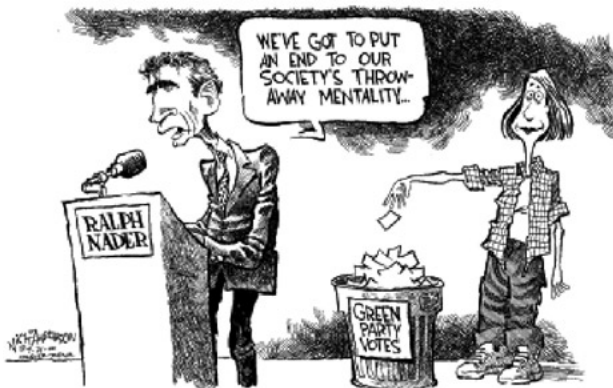
- (a) Identify two formal constitutional powers of the President in making foreign policy.
- (b) Identify two formal constitutional powers of Congress in making foreign policy.
- (c) Identify two informal powers of the President that contribute to the President's advantage over Congress in conducting foreign policy.
- (d) Explain how each of the informal powers identified in (c) contributes to the President's advantage over Congress in conducting foreign policy.

Question 2

Different interest groups will choose different techniques to achieve their objectives based on their resources, characteristics, and goals.

- (a) Describe each of the following techniques and explain why an interest group would choose each technique.
 - Litigation
 - Campaign contributions
 - Grass roots lobbying/ mass mobilization
- (b) Select one of the following groups and identify the primary technique it uses from the list in part (a). Explain why the group you selected would employ that technique over the other two techniques.
 - American Medical Association (AMA)
 - Sierra Club
 - National Rifle Association (NRA)
 - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Question 3



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Minor parties (third parties) have been a common feature of United States politics.

- (a) Describe the point of view expressed about minor parties in the political cartoon above.
- (b) Identify and explain how two rules of the U.S. electoral system act as obstacles to minor-party candidates winning elections.
- (c) Minor parties make important contributions to the U.S. political system in spite of the institutional obstacles to their candidates' success. Describe two of these contributions.

Question 4

Trust and confidence in government have declined in recent decades.

- (a) Explain how divided government has contributed to the decline in trust and confidence in government. Be sure to include a definition of divided government in your response.
- (b) Explain how the increased cost of election campaigns has contributed to the decline in trust and confidence in government.
- (c) Explain two specific consequences of the decline in trust and confidence in government for individual political behavior.

Question 5

The judicial branch is designed to be more independent of public opinion than are the legislature or the executive. Yet, the United States Supreme Court rarely deviates too far for too long from prevalent public opinion.

- (a) Describe two ways in which the United States Supreme Court is insulated from public opinion.
- (b) Explain how two factors work to keep the United States Supreme Court from deviating too far from public opinion.

Question 6

The power of the federal government relative to the power of the states has increased since the ratification of the Constitution.

- (a) Describe two of the following provisions of the Constitution and explain how each has been used over time to expand federal power.
 1. The power to tax and spend
 2. The "necessary and proper" or "elastic" clause
 3. The commerce clause
- (b) Explain how one of the following has increased the power of the federal government relative to the power of state governments.
 1. Americans with Disabilities Act
 2. Civil Rights Act of 1964
 3. Clean Air Act

Question 7

Initially, the United States Constitution did little to protect citizens from actions of the states. In the twentieth century, the Supreme Court interpreted the Constitution to protect the rights of citizens from state governments in a process referred to as incorporation.

- (a) Define selective incorporation
- (b) For two of the following, explain how each has been incorporated. Each of your explanations must be based on a specific and relevant Supreme Court decision.
1. Rights of criminal defendants
 2. First Amendment
 3. Privacy rights

Question 8

The United States Congress has debated a variety of campaign finance reforms over the last decade. The proposals debated have included the following:

Eliminating soft money
Limiting independent expenditures
Raising limits on individual contributions

- (a) Select one of the listed proposals and do all of the following:
1. Define the proposal.
 2. Describe an argument that proponents make in favor of the proposal.
 3. Describe an argument that opponents make against the proposal.
- (b) Select a different listed proposal and do all of the following:
1. Define the proposal.
 2. Describe an argument that proponents make in favor of the proposal.
 3. Describe an argument that opponents make against the proposal.

“My involvement with AP without a doubt has helped me to become a better teacher. From my professional interactions with high school AP government teachers, I have learned several strategies and techniques that have made me a more effective communicator and transmitter of ideas and knowledge. Participating in the summer Readings where AP Exams are scored has helped me to not only write better test questions for my own exams, but has also provided me with some skills that make me a more consistent and reliable grader.”

—Kerry Haynie, AP Government and Politics Chief Reader
Duke University

How to Get Involved

There are many ways college and university faculty members can help maintain the high standards of the AP Program:

- Participate in a college comparability study
- Be an AP Reader
- Contribute multiple-choice test items for the AP Exam
- Become an AP Faculty Consultant

For more information, please go to: apcentral.collegeboard.com/highered/getinvolved

Contact Us

National Office
Advanced Placement Program
45 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10023-6992
212 713-8066
E-mail: ap@collegeboard.org

The College Board: Connecting Students to College Success

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,000 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns. For further information, visit www.collegeboard.com.