

**POLS 120 – American Political Systems
Learning Outcomes
Effective Summer 2005**

Areas of Study:

- 1. Fundamental Political Ideas**
- 2. The United States Constitution**
- 3. Federalism**
- 4. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights**
- 5. Public Opinion, the Media, and Interest Groups**
- 6. Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections**
- 7. The United States Congress**
- 8. The Presidency**
- 9. The Federal Bureaucracy**
- 10. The Judiciary**

NOTE: While every effort has been made to cover the major topic areas that are covered in each section of POLS 120, students should be aware that individual faculty members determine the specific topics covered and the emphasis on each topic in their classes.

The POLS 120 Departmental Final Examination consists of a total of 50 multiple choice questions. Ten of the questions are based on student interpretation of a selected paragraph.

Topic One: Fundamental Political Ideas

Learning Outcomes:

1. Define politics and recognize examples of this activity in everyday life.
2. Define government and describe its basic activities and role in society.
3. Distinguish between pure democracy and representative democracy and identify the characteristics of each.
4. Define initiative, referendum, and recall. Recognize examples of these terms in contemporary politics.
5. Define and understand the various political systems: democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, totalitarianism, and anarchy.
6. Define the terms conservatism and liberalism. Describe the approach of advocates of each concept to government. Recognize examples of the uses of these terms in political discourse.

Topic Two: The United States Constitution

Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe the fundamental political values and arguments of the Declaration of Independence. Explain the concepts of natural laws and the social contract.
2. Describe the basic features of the Articles of Confederation. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the Articles. Explain how their defects led to the Constitutional Convention.
3. Describe the purpose, members, and the agenda of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Explain the significance of the Great Compromise and outline its major components.
4. Define the political beliefs of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Describe their role in the Constitutional Convention and the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.
5. Explain the underlying concept behind the Bill of Rights. Outline the major provisions of the Bill of Rights and describe its significance in the ratification process.
6. Define the concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances. Describe their purpose and recognize examples of their operation in the federal government.
7. Explain the significance of the following provisions of the Constitution: the necessary and proper clause, the supremacy clause, the commerce clause, and advice and consent powers. Distinguish between express and implied powers.
8. Describe the major principles enunciated by the U.S. Supreme Court in the following cases: Marbury v Madison, Gibbons v Ogden, McCulloch v Maryland.
9. Explain the methods of amending the U.S. Constitution.

Topic Three: Federalism

Learning Outcomes:

1. Define and distinguish the three major types of government organization: confederal, federal, and unitary.
2. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of federalism.
3. Describe the different models of federalism.
4. Explain the role of the Supremacy Clause and the Necessary and Proper Clause in the context of federalism.
5. Define the concepts of police powers, reserved powers, concurrent powers, and prohibited powers.
6. Explain the concepts and significance of full faith and credit, privileges and immunities, and rendition or extradition.

Topic Four: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Learning Outcomes:

1. Define the Bill of Rights, explain its purpose and the historical origins of the concepts outlined in the Bill of Rights.
2. Explain the distinction between civil rights and civil liberties.
3. Summarize the purpose of the First Amendment; explain how the Supreme Court has interpreted Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, the Right to Petition Government, and Freedom of Assembly. Define those instances where the Courts have permitted government to limit First Amendment rights.
4. List and explain the rights that apply to criminal proceedings that are spelled out in the Bill of Rights.
5. Explain the right to bear arms and apply it to contemporary society.
6. Explain the right to privacy and how the U.S. Supreme Court reached the conclusion that there is such a right.
7. Explain the contents of the Civil War Amendments with special attention to the Fourteenth Amendment and its application of all Americans. Explain how the Supreme Court has interpreted the concepts of equal protection and due process of the Laws. Explain the incorporation theory.
8. Explain the concept of separate but equal. Define Jim Crow laws and give examples.
9. Explain the contents and significance of the two cases of Brown v. Board of Education. Contrast the rulings in the Brown cases and Plessy v. Ferguson and explain the concept of informal amendment of the Constitution.
10. Describe the purpose, contents, and effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its subsequent amendments. Describe the purpose, contents, and effects of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments. Describe contemporary examples of denial of the right to vote.
11. Explain the various techniques used to keep former slaves and their descendents as well as poor whites from voting.
12. Explain the process of women getting the right to vote.

13. Distinguish between the concepts of affirmative action and reverse discrimination. Understand the current status of the issues.
14. Define and understand sexual harassment. Distinguish sexual harassment and sex or gender discrimination.
15. Define and explain the rationale for the Older Americans Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Discuss what types of protection are provided by each act.
16. Describe the issues facing gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals.

Topic Five: Public Opinion, the Media, and Interest Groups

Learning Outcomes:

1. Define and apply the concept of political socialization. Identify the various individuals, groups, and institutions that perform this function.
2. Define public opinion. Describe the purpose and ways in which public opinion is measured in American politics. Define the terms: survey research, sampling error, margin of error, and exit poll.
3. Outline the uses of public opinion in issue development and political campaigns.
4. Define and apply the concept of pluralism.
5. Define the term mass media and outline the major types of media that fall into the definition of that term. Explain the impact of the mass media on American politics.
6. Define and recognize examples of special interest groups. Distinguish between broad interest groups and single interest groups. Outline the ways in which they affect American politics.
7. Describe the various types of lobbying and the activities of Political Action Committees (PACs). Explain the influence of political action committees on American politics.
8. Define and apply the concept of political culture.

Topic Six: Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections

Learning Outcomes:

1. Distinguish between liberalism and conservatism. Describe and apply the policy preferences of the Democratic and Republican Parties.
2. Define the two party system; explain the reasons for the persistence of this system in American politics. Explain the role that is played by the Electoral College in maintaining the two party system. Define the concept of winner take all.
3. Define the role of third parties in the American party system. Give examples of significant third parties in the history of American politics.
4. Describe the ways in which political parties are organized in the American system. Define the function of the national political party organizations, the functions of the national conventions, and the purpose of party platforms.
5. Distinguish between political party caucuses and primary elections to nominate national party candidates. Describe the difference between a closed primary, open primary, and blanket primary.
6. Describe the purpose of the Federal Election Campaign Act and the McCain Feingold Act. Describe the way in which presidential and congressional campaigns are financed.
7. Describe the practical effect of the growth of independent voters on voter turnout and political party organizations in general.
8. Describe the composition, structure, and voting rule of the Electoral College.
9. Explain the concept of term limits and why this concept may be applied at the state and local level but not the federal level of government.
10. Explain the various reasons why a person runs for office.
11. Explain the impact of minority groups on our political system. Describe the role played by other socio-economic factors on elections.

Topic Seven: The United States Congress

Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe how a bill becomes a law.
2. Explain the term “bicameralism” and “presentment” in the context of law making.
3. Describe the special powers of the U.S. Senate. Define filibuster and explain its use. Contrast the size and membership of the U.S. Senate with the size and membership of the U.S. House of Representatives.
4. Describe the special powers of the U.S. House of Representatives. Explain the role of the Rules Committee in the House.
5. Define the major leadership roles in the U.S. House and Senate. Explain how these leaders are selected and the significance of the political party system in leadership elections.
6. Define and recognize examples of apportionment, redistricting, and gerrymandering; describe their purpose and results.
7. Describe the selection, composition, powers, and functions of congressional committees; standing committees, select committees, special committees, and joint committees. Explain the role and significance of conference committees. Describe the process that is used to select committee chairpersons.
8. Describe the power of incumbency.
9. Describe the process and possible results of impeachment charges and trial in the federal government. Explain the role of the House and Senate individually. Explain the role of the Judiciary in the process.

Topic Eight: The Presidency

Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe the role and power of the president as Chief of State, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, Chief Legislator, Chief Diplomat, Chief Executive, and party leader. Recognize examples of how these powers are exercised.
2. Define the veto and pocket veto. Explain how and why the president exercises these powers. Explain the concepts of line item veto and legislative veto. Explain the issues related to each type of veto at the federal level.
3. Describe the election, powers, and functions of the U.S. Vice President. Describe the line of presidential succession.
4. Describe the selection process, composition, and powers of the President's Cabinet. Recognize examples of cabinet departments. Explain the role of the cabinet as advisors to the President. Define the term "kitchen cabinet" and explain its role in the White House.
5. Define the President's powers in the context of war. Explain the role of the War Powers Act.
6. Define and explain the powers of appointment and removal that are unique to the President.

Topic Nine: The Federal Bureaucracy

Learning Outcomes:

1. Define the term bureaucracy and describe its role in private and public organizations.
2. Define and recognize examples of the spoils system and the civil service system in the federal bureaucracy.
3. Describe the purpose and structure of the independent regulatory agencies and independent executive agencies in the federal government.
4. Describe the efforts that have been undertaken to make government more accessible and accountable to citizens. Explain the concept of legislative oversight function and its impact on executive branch agencies.
5. Distinguish between issue networks and iron triangles and explain their role in policymaking.
6. Describe the concept of privatization (private contracts) and its impact on government services and costs.

Topic Ten: The Judiciary

Learning Outcomes:

1. Define the concepts of legal precedent and stare decisis. Explain their importance to the American legal system.
2. Explain the difference between the common law, statutory law, administrative law, and judge-made law.
3. Describe the structure, jurisdiction, and operation of Federal District Courts, the U.S. Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court.
4. Explain and apply the concept of judicial federalism.
5. Describe the selection process for federal judges.
6. Define the Writ of Certiorari and explain its role in the appellate process. Explain the Rule of Four.
7. Define and explain the U.S. Supreme Court's power of judicial review.
8. Explain how interest groups express their position on pending court cases.
9. Define the concepts and processes of plea bargaining and case settlement. Describe their respective impact on the courts.
10. Describe the difference between judicial activism and judicial restraint.