

Grade 12

United States Government

United States Government is a one-semester required course for students in Grade 12. The course goal is for students to develop the civic knowledge necessary for becoming active participants as citizens of this nation. Achievement of this goal prepares students to engage as informed citizens through voting, serving on a jury, holding political office, and deliberating public policy.

In this course, students broaden knowledge and critical-thinking skills learned in Grades 9-11 and deepen their understanding of the origin, structure, and function of government at all levels. Content focuses on intellectual, political, and economic factors that influenced the development of a republic based on rule of law, freedom of opportunity, individual liberty, and representative government. Democratic principles that served as a foundation for the development of our nation are embedded in a detailed study of the Constitution of the United States, a key component of the course.

Twelfth-grade students are developing a sense of maturity necessary for analysis of the role of government in the lives of individuals and in the nation. An effective instructional environment promotes critical thinking and research and provides opportunities for civic participation. Classroom activities that include debate, creative problem solving, collaborative group work, and evaluation of electronic and print media foster long-term learning of content and encourage students to understand the value of their role as citizens in a democracy.

Students will:

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1. Explain historical and philosophical origins that shaped the government of the United States, including the Magna Carta, the Petition of Rights, the English Bill of Rights, the Mayflower Compact, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, and the influence of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the Great Awakening.
 - Comparing characteristics of limited and unlimited governments throughout the world, including constitutional, authoritarian, and totalitarian governments
 - Examples: constitutional—United States
 - authoritarian—Iran
 - totalitarian—North Korea

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2. Summarize the significance of the First and Second Continental Congresses, the Declaration of Independence, Shays' Rebellion, and the Articles of Confederation of 1781 on the writing and ratification of the Constitution of the United States of 1787 and the Bill of Rights of 1791.

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3. Analyze major features of the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights for purposes, organization, functions, and principles, including rule of law, federalism, limited government, popular sovereignty, judicial review, separation of powers, and checks and balances.

- Explaining main ideas of the debate over ratification that included the Federalist papers
- Analyzing the Bill of Rights for its application to historical and current issues
- Outlining the formal process of amending the Constitution of the United States

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4. Explain how the federal system of the United States divides powers between national and state governments.

- Summarizing obligations that the Constitution of the United States places on a nation for the benefit of the states, including admitting new states and cooperative federalism
- Evaluating the role of the national government in interstate relations

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5. Compare specific functions, organizations, and purposes of local and state governments, including implementing fiscal and monetary policies, ensuring personal security, and regulating transportation.

- Analyzing the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 to determine its impact on local funding and campaign funding 🗳️
- Describing the influence of special interest groups on state government

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6. Analyze the expansion of suffrage for its effect on the political system of the United States, including suffrage for non-property owners, women, African Americans, and persons eighteen years of age.

- Describing implications of participation of large numbers of minorities and women in parties and campaigns
- Analyzing the black codes, Jim Crow laws, and the Selma-to-Montgomery March for their impact on the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 🗳️

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7. Describe the process of local, state, and national elections, including the organization, role, and constituency of political parties.

- Explaining campaign funding and spending
- Evaluating the impact of reapportionment, redistricting, and voter turnout on elections

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8. Describe functions and the development of special interest groups and campaign contributions by political action committees and their impact on state and national elections.

- Analyzing rulings by the United States Supreme Court, including Buckley versus Valeo, regarding campaign financing to determine the effect on the election process

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9. Trace the impact of the media on the political process and public opinion in the United States, including party press, penny press, print media, yellow journalism, radio, television, and electronic media.

- Describing regional differences in public opinion in the United States
- Analyzing television and electronic media for their impact on the election process and campaign spending from the John F. Kennedy-Richard M. Nixon debate to the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States
- Explaining the effect of attack advertisements on voter selection of candidates

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10. Evaluate roles political parties play in the functioning of the political system of the United States.

- Describing the role of third-party candidates in political elections in the United States
- Explaining major characteristics of contemporary political parties in the United States, including the role of conventions, party leadership, formal and informal memberships, and regional strongholds
- Describing the influence of political parties on individuals and elected officials, including the development of party machines, rise of independent voters, and disillusionment with party systems

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11. Evaluate constitutional provisions of the legislative branch of the government of the United States, including checks by the legislative branch on other branches of government.

- Comparing rules of operations and hierarchies of Congress, including roles of the Speaker of the House, the Senate pro tem, majority and minority leaders, and party whips
- Identifying the significance of Congressional committee structure and types of committees
- Tracing the legislative process, including types of votes and committee action, from a bill's presentation to presidential action

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12. Evaluate constitutional provisions of the executive branch of the government of the United States, including checks by the executive branch on other branches of government and powers, duties as head of state and head of government, the electoral process, and the Twenty-fifth Amendment.

- Critiquing informal powers of the President of the United States, including press conferences, State of the Union addresses, total media access, head of party, and symbolic powers of the Oval Office
- Identifying the influence of White House staff on the President of the United States
- Ranking powers held by the President's Cabinet, including roles of Cabinet secretaries, appropriations by Congress, appointment and confirmation, and operation of organization
- Comparing diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and levels of education of United States' presidents

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13. Evaluate constitutional provisions of the judicial branch of government of the United States, including checks by the judicial branch on other branches of government, limits on judicial power, and the process by which cases are argued before the United States Supreme Court.

- Explaining the structure and jurisdiction of court systems of the United States, including lower courts and appellate courts

- Identifying the impact of landmark United States Supreme Court cases on constitutional interpretation

Examples: *Marbury versus Madison, Miranda versus Arizona, Tinker versus Des Moines, Gideon versus Wainwright, Reno versus American Civil Liberties Union, United States versus Nixon, McCulloch versus Maryland, Wallace versus Jaffree, Wyatt versus Stickney, and Powell versus Alabama* 🗨️

- Describing the shifting political balance of the court system, including the appointment process, the ideology of justices, influences on court decisions regarding executive and legislative opinion, public opinion, and the desire for impartiality
- Contrasting strict and loose constructionist views of the Constitution of the United States

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14. Describe the role of citizens in American democracy, including the meaning, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship; due process and other rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States; and participation in the election process.

- Explaining how the balance between individual versus majority rule and state versus national authority is essential to the functioning of the American democratic society

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15. Explain the role and consequences of domestic and foreign policy decisions, including scientific and technological advancements and humanitarian, cultural, economic, and political changes.

- Evaluating financial, political, and social costs of national security