

POLS101 | American Government

Course Text

No need to track down a textbook; this text is provided digitally as part of the course enrollment:

Patterson, Thomas. *We the People: An Introduction to American Government*. 15th ed., McGraw Hill, 2024.

Course Description

This course examines the structure of United States government by analyzing its domestic and foreign duties in relation to its democratic foundations and values. In addition, this course discusses how the American people influence and interact with both federal and state institutions.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the essential components of the American branches of government
2. Analyze primary sources to compare and contrast historical perspectives
3. Explain the importance of and evolution of civil rights throughout United States' history
4. Delineate between the policies of different political parties
5. Identify and recall the basic foundations of American foreign policy
6. Distinguish voting patterns throughout United States history
7. Create a civic engagement communication and defend a current community issues of personal importance
8. Think and critically write about policy and presidential documents essential to understanding the political trajectory of the United States of America

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for American Government.

Academic Integrity Statement

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an honest, truthful and responsible manner. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication and academic misconduct. Failure to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy can result in a failure and/or zero on the attempted assignment/examination, a removal from the course, disqualification to enroll in future courses, and/or revocation of an academic transcript.

Course Completion Policy

In order for a course to be considered complete, **all required coursework must be attempted, submitted, and graded.** Required coursework consists of graded assignments. Any Academic Integrity Policy violations may prevent a course from being considered complete.

Assessment Types

StraighterLine courses may include any combination of the assessment types described below. Review the descriptions to learn about each type, then review the Course Evaluation Criteria to understand how your learning will be measured in this course.

Benchmarks

Benchmarks test your mastery of course concepts. You have 3 attempts, and your highest score counts.

Note: Cumulative Benchmarks (final exams) only allow 1 attempt.

Capstones

Capstones are project-based assessments that help you apply concepts to real-world scenarios. You have 2 attempts, and your highest score counts.

Checkpoints

Checkpoints are quick knowledge checks on important course concepts. All are open-book, and most have 1-3 attempts.

AI Use-Case Policies

StraighterLine Capstone assessments operate under one of three AI Use-Case Policies. These designations are selected intentionally to support learners in developing digital literacy, ethical reasoning, and authentic communication skills. Each model requires students to engage meaningfully with the course outcomes while adhering to academic standards.

Independent Work Requirement: Capstones with this designation must be completed independently without using AI tools. The goal is for learners to showcase their own understanding and skills without AI assistance. Students are expected to generate and submit original work developed solely through their own reasoning and effort.

AI-Assisted Planning Option: Capstones with this designation may allow AI tools to support brainstorming and assessment planning. If allowed, students will be asked to document any AI assistance by noting how it informed their work. Documentation must be included within the assignment or in a designated reflection field. Examples include describing how an AI tool helped organize an outline, generate ideas, or surface sources for further exploration.

AI-Integration Requirement: Capstones with this designation require AI tools as part of the learning process. Students will be asked to reflect upon their AI interactions and AI contributions to the assessment. Reflections must include which tools were used, how they were used, and what insights students gained from the process. This promotes transparency, ethical use, and metacognitive skill-building.

Course Evaluation Criteria

Your score provides a percentage score and letter grade for each course. A passing percentage is 70% or higher.

There are a total of 1000 points in the course:

Assessment	Points	Learning Outcomes
Checkpoint 1: Critical Thinking and Culture	0	N/A
Benchmark 1: Becoming a Responsible Citizen	10	1
Checkpoint 2: Constitutional Democracy	0	N/A
Checkpoint 3: Federalism	0	N/A
Checkpoint 4: Civil Liberties	0	N/A
Benchmark 2: Core Values	10	3
Benchmark 3: Checkpoints 1-4	100	1, 3, 7
Checkpoint 4: Equal Rights	0	N/A
Checkpoint 6: Public Opinion and Political Socialization	0	N/A
Checkpoint 7: Political Participation	0	N/A
Capstone 1: Political Action	150	7
Checkpoint 8: Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaigns	0	N/A
Benchmark 4: Political Action	10	7
Benchmark 5: Checkpoints 5-8	100	3, 4, 6
Checkpoint 9: Interest Groups	0	N/A
Checkpoint 10: The News Media and the Internet	0	N/A
Checkpoint 11: Congress	0	N/A
Checkpoint 12: The Presidency	0	N/A
Benchmark 6: Shadow and Official	10	1
Benchmark 7: Checkpoints 9-12	100	1, 4, 8
Capstone 2: Comparing Presidential Views on War and Victory	400	2, 8
Checkpoint 13: The Federal Bureaucracy	0	N/A
Checkpoint 14: The Federal Judicial System	0	N/A
Checkpoint 15: Economic and Environmental Policy	0	N/A
Checkpoint 16: Foreign Policy	0	N/A
Benchmark 8: Strengths of the American Political System	10	1
Benchmark 9: Checkpoints 13-16	100	1, 3, 5
Total	1000	

Course Roadmap

This roadmap provides an overview of the checkpoints and lessons covered in this course.

Checkpoint 1: Critical Thinking and Political Culture

- Chapter 1 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 1

Checkpoint 2: Constitutional Democracy

- Chapter 2 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 2

Checkpoint 3: Federalism

- Chapter 3 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 3

Checkpoint 4: Civil Liberties

- Chapter 4 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 4

Checkpoint 5: Equal Rights

- Chapter 5 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 5

Checkpoint 6: Public Opinion and Political Socialization

- Chapter 6 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 6
- Pathfinder: Influence of Public Opinion

Checkpoint 7: Political Participation

- Chapter 7 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 7

Checkpoint 8: Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaigns

- Chapter 8 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 8

Checkpoint 9: Interest Groups

- Chapter 9 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 9

Checkpoint 10: The News Media and the Internet

- Chapter 10 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 10
- Pathfinder: Rise of the Internet and Social Media

Checkpoint 11: Congress

- Chapter 11 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 11

Checkpoint 12: The Presidency

- Chapter 12 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 12

Checkpoint 13: The Federal Bureaucracy

- Chapter 13 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 13

Checkpoint 14: The Federal Judicial System

- Chapter 14 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 14

Checkpoint 15: Economic and Environmental Policy

- Chapter 15 Presentation
- Textbook REading Assignment: Chapter 15
- Pathfinder: Government as Protector of Environment

Checkpoint 16: Foreign Policy

- Chapter 17 Presentation
- Textbook Reading Assignment: Chapter 17
- Pathfinder: Free Trade Versus Protectionism

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