

AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS AND HISTORY, POLS110

IVC, SPRING 2026 (8 WEEKS, ONLINE)¹

Professor: Steven Paul Cauchon

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COURSE OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

This course is designed for students to study the basic concepts in the political and historical traditions of America and California by analyzing national, state, and local political institutions from colonial times to the present. The course examines the evolution of concepts and ideas that are fundamental to our political culture. It emphasizes the concepts citizens should understand in order to vote intelligently and otherwise effectively participate in the political process. This course is designed specifically to satisfy the CSU History, Constitution, and American Ideals requirement. The course is not open to students with credit in POLS 102.

TEXTS

- Glen Krutz and Sylvie Waskiewiz (2019), *American Government 3e*: ISBN-13: 978-1-951693-38-1. [Access to the text is free here](#) and via Canvas.
- Thomas Reeves (2000), *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History (1st ed.)*. ISBN 0195044843. Access is free via IVC Library digital reserves via Canvas.
- Steven Reti (2021). *Introduction to California Government and Politics*. Access to PDF is free to access via Canvas.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Describe different instruments of US foreign policy, give examples of their use, explain the role of different institutions in crafting foreign policy, describe different explanations for why a particular policy was made, and evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of that policy.
- Describe the system of checks and balances in American government and evaluate how it affects legislation.
- Identify, compare, and contrast the various positions on the ideological spectrum, and apply the core values and beliefs of each position to contemporary political issues.

¹ All course materials and lectures are protected by copyright and may not be reproduced or distributed without my written consent.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Assess the contribution of the American colonial experience to contemporary American political culture
- Analyze the motivations of the founders of the Constitution
- Distinguish among and analyze federal, confederate, and unitary forms of government; analyze the use of each in U.S. history
- Analyze the civil liberties and the civil rights and relate them to historical and contemporary political issues
- Distinguish among the major issues regarding slavery from the colonial period to the adoption of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments
- Analyze American pluralism from its ethnic, gender, and socio-economic perspectives
- Analyze the role played in American politics historically and contemporarily by major ethnic minority groups and people of both genders
- Analyze the evolution of the political party system as it relates to specific historical issues, differentiate between liberal and conservative policy options, and analyze the basic motivations in public policy-making
- Differentiate among the various components of the American electoral machinery and analyze how various ethnic and socio-economic groups relate to them.
- Analyze the development, importance, and effects of public opinion polling and the media in American politics
- Analyze the evolution, political power, and functions of interest groups
- Assess the importance and the influence of the media on the American political process, past and present
- Analyze the legislative, executive, and judicial branches from the perspective of their historical development and as to how they relate to the diverse citizenry
- Analyze the development of the function and the power of the bureaucracy and its interaction with politicians and the public
- Analyze fiscal and monetary policy from the perspective of their political and social consequences
- Analyze the evolution of the American economy and the economic and social consequences of industrialization
- Analyze the evolution of social policy from political and social perspectives
- Analyze American foreign policy in its expansionist and imperialist era through its current superpower status
- Analyze the historical development of California through its Spanish, Mexican, and American eras
- Assess the social consequences and the public policy implications of California's evolving economic and demographic patterns
- Analyze and distinguish among state, county, city, and special district government.

CREDIT HOUR STATEMENT: Students enrolled in this course should expect to spend at least nine hours a week engaged in the below assignments and course content.

COURSE GRADING & REQUIREMENTS²

Discussion Posts (Weekly)	(20%)
Course Exam #1 (See schedule below)	(25%)
Course Exam #2 (See schedule below)	(25%)
Course Exam #3 (See schedule below)	(25%)
CA State & Local Gov't Capstone (See schedule below)	(5%)

DISCUSSION POSTS (20%): Discussion forums open each Monday with **initial posts due Wednesday by 11:00 PM** and **peer replies due Saturday by 11:00 PM**. To ensure our conversations are grounded in evidence, your initial post must **cite the textbook and/or the module's associated video(s)** (see Canvas for specific instructions). Please be aware that **your first submitted post is the one that will be graded**, even if it is blank or incomplete, and posts cannot be edited after submission. **Plagiarism and AI-detection tools** are used for all discussion posts. Because discussion forums are time-sensitive and depend on peer interaction, **missed posts cannot be made up**. However, to support you throughout the semester, **your lowest discussion post grade will be dropped automatically**. Students requesting an extension or makeup for this assignment will be referred to the syllabus policy.

COURSE EXAMS (75%): Exams may include multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, short-answer questions drawn from the readings, lectures, and supplemental videos for that Learning Unit. Exams are taken through a Canvas-supported online proctoring system; further instructions will be provided in Canvas. Students must have a compatible computer or laptop and stable internet connection, though no camera, microphone, or personal identification is required. Except for the final Course Exam, each exam remains open until the next exam becomes available, and a late penalty is automatically applied each day it is late; because this applies to all situations, **do not message about missed deadlines**. Only catastrophic situations with verifiable documentation presented during office hours may receive further consideration, and **all extension or make-up request messages will be referred to this policy**. If you experience technical issues before or during the exam, you must first contact Canvas Support and then provide me with the case number so I can investigate. Once an exam is started, it cannot be reset or made up, and **personal technical issues are not grounds for accommodation**. For reliable computers and internet access, I strongly recommend using the campus library. For dates, please see the Assignment Schedule

CA STATE & LOCAL GOV'T CAPSTONE (5%): Students will complete a capstone project in which they research a state or local gov't agency and develop a solution to a related public problem, applying key concepts and historical perspectives from the course. This assignment requires students to appear on camera. Additional instructions will be provided in Canvas after Course Exam #1.

² Please note that if extra credit is given, no category can exceed 100% in one's grade calculation. I reserve the right to make changes to the below assignments in order accommodate class progress and/or scheduling changes. Check Canvas for more details about each assignment.

EXPECTATIONS & IMPORTANT POLICIES³

COMMUNICATION

- **The best way to contact me is through Canvas Inbox.** I will generally respond to messages Monday – Friday between 7am – 5:30pm within 24 hours of receiving them. If you do not receive a response, please resend, or call my office: 760-355-6288. Make sure your phone message is also sent via Canvas Inbox as my ability to respond to voicemails and texts are limited.
- Canvas Inbox is for short questions clarifying assignments, grading inquiries, or specific lecture items. **In-depth questions about course readings, an entire lecture, etc. are appropriate for office hours.** For general questions, please **consult the syllabus first** and use the **Canvas Q/A forum to consult your peers.**
- Scores of all assignments & exams will be posted on Canvas. If you wish to discuss your grade, please communicate via Canvas or office hours. Once grades are posted, **use Inbox, not “assignment comments,” in Canvas to communicate as I no longer see these comments after an assignment is graded.**
- If you need accommodations due to disabilities, unforeseen circumstances, etc. be proactive—I can better assist you before, rather than after assignments are due. Any disability accommodation must have approval from our disability services office before the assignment becomes available for it to be applicable.

DROP POLICY

- In distance education, coursework is used to determine your attendance. Students who fail to submit substantive coursework by due dates or **complete certain assignments in the first weeks may be dropped from the class.** Please refer to the below class schedule for specific attendance & coursework requirements.

STUDENT CONDUCT & ONLINE NETIQUETTE

- To learn, we must be open to the views of people different from ourselves. Therefore, please honor the uniqueness of your fellow classmates and appreciate the opportunity we must learn from one another. Please **respect each other’s opinions** and refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments **of any kind.**
- Netiquette is internet manners, online etiquette, and digital etiquette all rolled into one word. Our rules of netiquette: (1) identify yourself, (2) include a subject line, (3) avoid sarcasm, (4) respect others’ opinions and privacy, (5) acknowledge and return messages promptly, (6) copy with caution, (7) do not spam or junk mail, (8) be concise, (9) use appropriate language, (10) use appropriate emoticons (emotional icons) to help convey meaning, and (11) use appropriate intensifiers to help convey meaning [do not use ALL CAPS or multiple exclamation marks (!!!!)].

LATE WORK POLICY & MISSING ASSIGNMENTS

- Students are responsible for any work lost or late due to technical problems. Please see each assignment’s detailed policy above.
- Students can’t make up or submit late assignments that are due in final week of our course due to grade submission deadlines. Any accommodation for this week must be submitted before the end of the final week, via office hour.

³ See end of syllabus for more details on college and course policies

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Dates highlighted in green are first 8-week session, yellow for second 8-week session.

MODULE, WEEK, & DATE	LEARNING UNIT, TOPIC & LEARNING OBJECTIVES	READING	ASSIGNMENT
	LEARNING UNIT #1		
WEEK #1			
Module #0 2/16 4/20	Introduction to the Course 1. Discuss how to be successful in this course 2. Learn about your instructor and your fellow peers	Syllabus	Complete syllabus quiz to avoid being dropped
Module #1 2/16 4/20	What is Politics & Why Does it Matter? 1. Explain what government is and what it does/ought do 2. Discuss sources and solutions to collective action problems & conflict 3. Describe American political culture & the power of ideas, narratives, and authority 4. Discuss the is/ought distinction & apply it to American inequality	<i>American Government</i> , Chapter 1	Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm
WEEK #2			
Module #2 2/23 4/27	The Constitution & Its Origins 1. Critically think about circumstances & narratives about the founding of the United States	<i>American Government</i> , Chapter 2 Reeves, Chapter 1	Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Examine the Articles of Confederation and identify the goals, divisions, & compromises that shaped Constitution. 3. Briefly review key aspects of the U.S. Constitution. 4. Reflect on how we should think about the Constitution and its democratic shortcomings today. 5. Examine how progressivism was beginning to capture the nation's attention in the early 1900s 		
Module #3 2/23 4/27	<p style="text-align: center;">American Federalism & Progressivism</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the foundations of American federalism & the ways in which it divides power between national and state governments. 2. Describe the historical expansion of federalism & the ways in which the national government can influence the states. 3. Explain historical trends in immigration at the state & federal level. 4. Analyze the restrictive & integrative approaches used by states & local governments. 5. Identify the early trials and triumphs of American Progressivism. 	<p><i>American Government</i>, Chapter 3</p> <p>Reeves Chapters 2 & 3</p>	
WEEK #3			
Module #4 3/2 5/4	<p style="text-align: center;">Fundamental Liberties & WWI</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain how the Bill of Rights relates to the federal government and to the states. 2. Describe how the First Amendment protects both 	<p><i>American Government</i>, Chapter 4</p> <p>Reeves, Chapter 4</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm</p>

	<p>church and state, as well as individuals' religious freedom.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Show how the protections of freedom of speech and of the press have been tested. Discuss the extent of an individual's right to privacy and bear arms. Analyze the impact of WWI on American politics. 		
<p>Module #5 3/2 5/4</p>	<p>Political Parties</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe political parties and what they do. Outline how parties operate as an organization, in government, and in the electorate. Describe how interest groups use lobbying activities to get the public policy they want. Compare public and private interest groups. 	<p><i>American Government, Chapter 9</i></p>	
<p>Module #6 3/2 5/4</p>	<p>Interest Groups & the Roaring 20s</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how interest groups use lobbying activities to get the public policy they want. Compare public and private interest groups. Examine how the "Roaring 20's" led to the belief that American prosperity was limitless. 	<p><i>American Government, Chapter 10</i> <i>Reeves, Chapter 5</i></p>	<p>Course Exam #1 Due Friday by 5 pm</p>
LEARNING UNIT #2			
WEEK #4			
<p>Module #7 3/9 5/11</p>	<p>Public Opinion & the Great Depression</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze how well American citizens measure up to notions of an "ideal democratic citizen." 	<p><i>American Government, Chapter 6</i> <i>Reeves, Chapter 6</i></p>	<p>Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Describe the principle-agent problem in American politics. 3. Discuss how Americans become politically socialized. 4. Describe & evaluate different techniques used to gauge public opinion. 5. Examine the impact of the Great Depression on American social and economic policy 		
Module #8 3/9 5/11	<p style="text-align: center;">Voting, Elections, & WWII</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze the reasons why Americans vote—or don't vote. 2. Discuss campaigns, how they are financed, & and their impact on democratic politics 3. Explore how POTUS is elected 4. Analyze how POTUS is really elected. 5. Explore how WWII cemented the US's status as a global superpower. 	<i>American Government, Chapter 7</i> <i>Reeves, Chapter 7</i>	
WEEK #5			
Module #9 3/16 5/18	<p style="text-align: center;">The Media & Post WWII Challenges</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the roles and responsibilities of journalists. 2. Describe the link between media and politics. 3. Discuss the relationship between citizens and the media. 4. Examine the challenges facing the US after WWII. 	<i>American Government, Chapter 8</i> <i>Reeves, Chapter 8</i>	Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm
WEEK #6			

<p>Module #10 3/23 5/25</p>	<p>The Struggle for Equal Rights & the So-called Best Years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Summarize key events and outcomes in the struggle for equality of African Americans. 2. Outline the criteria used by the courts to determine if and when the law can treat people differently. 3. Identify tools used by citizens to expand the promise of civil rights. 4. Explain the different paths to equality taken by other gender, racial, & marginalized groups 5. Analyze how the so-called Best Years depended on one's racial and socio-economic status. 	<p><i>American Government,</i> Chapter 5</p> <p><i>Reeves,</i> <i>Chapters 9 and 10</i></p>	<p>Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm</p> <p>Course Exam #2 Due Friday by 5 pm</p>
<p>LEARNING UNIT #3</p>			
<p>WEEK #7</p>			
<p>Module #11 3/30 6/1</p>	<p>Congress & the Era of Upheaval</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain Congressional power and how it's internal/external checks & balances work. 2. Describe the tensions between local representation and national lawmaking. 3. Examine how party leadership can influence the legislative process. 4. Explore how the political and social upheaval of the 60s lead to the rise of Richard Nixon 	<p><i>American Government,</i> Chapter 11</p> <p><i>Reeves,</i> <i>Chapters 11 and 12</i></p>	<p>Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm</p>

<p>Module #12 3/30 6/1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Executive</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare the modern presidency with the founders' expectations for a limited executive. 2. Identify strategies and tools presidents employ to overcome the constitutional limitations of the office. 	<p><i>American Government, Chapters 12</i></p>	
<p>Module #13 3/30 6/1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Bureaucracy and Dynamic Conservatism</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain the characteristics of what the federal bureaucracy is and does 2. Compare the spoils & civil service system & discuss the attempts to privatize or eliminate parts of the bureaucracy 3. Analyze how the so-called Years of Disillusionment lead to the rise of Dynamic Conservatism. 	<p><i>American Government, Chapters 15</i></p> <p><i>Reeves, Chapter 13</i></p>	
<p>4/6</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BREAK</p>		

WEEK #8			
Module #14 4/13 6/8	The Courts & The Close of the 20th Century <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain how the courts operate. 2. Outline the institutional rules and political influences that shape the Supreme Court. 3. Evaluate Hamilton’s claim that the judiciary was the “least dangerous branch of government.” 4. Examine how the end of the 20th Century relates to ongoing issues in the 21st. 	<i>American Government</i> , Chapter 13 <i>Reeves, Chapters 14 and 15</i>	Discussion Wed/Sat by 11 pm
Module #15 4/13 6/8	California State & Local Gov’t <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outline the unique features of California’s state & local gov’t 2. Discuss how one can have an impact on state & local politics 	<i>American Government</i> , Chapter 14 Reti, Chapters 1 and 10	
Module #16 4/13 6/8	California State of Mind <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the unique history of California through the lens of Governor Pat Brown 2. Examine the impact that water, infrastructure, and social movements had had on California politics 	Watch California State of Mind Via Canvas	Final Exam Due Friday by 5 pm CA Capstone due Sunday by 11 pm

GENERAL POLICIES & INFORMATION

GRADE SCALE

A+ = 100 – 97%
A = 96.9 – 94%
A- = 93.9 – 90%
B+ = 89.9 – 87%

B = 86.9 – 84%
B- = 83.9 – 80%
C+ = 79.9 – 77%
C = 76.9 – 74%

C- = 73.9 – 70%
D+ = 69.9 – 67%
D = 66.9 – 60%
F = 59.9% and Below

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

IVC values critical thinking and communication skills and considers academic integrity essential to learning. Using **AI tools** as a replacement for your own thinking, writing, or quantitative reasoning goes against both our mission and academic honesty policy and will be considered academic dishonesty, or plagiarism unless you have been instructed to do so by your instructor. In case of any uncertainty regarding the ethical use of AI tools, students are encouraged to reach out to their instructors for clarification.

Plagiarism is to take and present as one's own the writings or ideas of others, without citing the source. You should understand the concept of plagiarism and keep it in mind when taking exams and preparing written materials. If you do not understand how to correctly 'cite a source', you must ask for help. **Cheating** is defined as fraud, deceit, or dishonesty in an academic assignment or using or attempting to use materials, or assisting others in using materials, or assisting others in using materials, which are prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment in question. Anyone caught cheating or will receive a zero (0) on the exam or assignment, and the instructor may report the incident to the Campus Disciplinary Officer, who may place related documentation in a file. Repeated acts of cheating may result in an F in the course and/or disciplinary action. Please refer to the General School Catalog for more information on academic dishonesty or other misconduct. Acts of cheating include, but are not limited to the following: (a) plagiarism; (b) copying or attempting to copy from others during an examination or on an assignment ;(c) communicating test information with another person during an examination; (d) allowing others to do an assignment or portion of an assignment, (e) use of a commercial term paper service.

DISABLED STUDENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Any student with a documented disability who may need educational accommodations should notify the instructor or the Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSP&S) office as soon as possible. The DSP&S office is located in Building 2100, telephone 760-355-6313 if you feel you need to be evaluated for educational accommodations.

STUDENT COUNSELING AND HEALTH SERVICES

Students have counseling and health services available, provided by the pre-paid Student Health Fee.

- **[Student Health Center](#)**. A Student Health Nurse is available on campus. In addition, Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District provide basic health services for students, such as first aid and care for minor illnesses. Contact the IVC **[Student Health Center](#)** at 760-355-6128 in Room 1536 for more information.
- **[Mental Health Counseling Services](#)**. Short-term individual, couples, family and group counseling services are available for currently enrolled students. Services are provided in a confidential, supportive, and culturally sensitive environment. Please contact the IVC Mental Health Counseling Services at 760-355-6310 or in the building 1536 for appointments or more information.

ATTENDANCE

- A student who fails to attend the first meeting of a class or does not complete the first mandatory activity of an online class may be dropped by the instructor as of the first official meeting of that class. Should readmission be desired, the student's status will be the same as that of any other student who desires to add a class. It is the student's responsibility to drop or officially withdraw from the class. See [General Catalog](#) for details.
- Regular attendance in all classes is expected of all students. A student whose continuous, unexcused absences exceed the number of hours the class is scheduled to meet per week may be dropped. For online courses, students who fail to complete required activities for two consecutive weeks may be considered to have excessive absences and may be dropped.
- Absences attributed to the representation of the college at officially approved events (conferences, contests, and field trips) will be counted as 'excused' absences.

STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Students have the right to experience a positive learning environment and due process. For further information regarding student rights and responsibilities please refer to the IVC General Catalog available at

http://www.imperial.edu/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=4516&Itemid=762

INFORMATION LITERACY

Imperial Valley College is dedicated to help students skillfully discover, evaluate, and use information from all sources. Students can access tutorials at

<http://www.imperial.edu/courses-andprograms/divisions/arts-and-letters/library-department/info-lit-tutorials/>

VETERANS CENTER

The mission of the IVC Military and Veteran Success Center is to provide a holistic approach to serving military/veteran students on three key areas: 1) Academics, 2) Health and Wellness, and 3) Camaraderie; to serve as a central hub that connects military/veteran students, as well as their families, to campus and community resources. Their goal is to ensure a seamless transition from military to civilian life. The Center is located in Building 600 (Office 624), telephone 760-355-6141.

EXTENDED OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM AND SERVICES (EOPS)

The Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS) offers services such as priority registration, personal/academic counseling, tutoring, book vouchers, and community referrals to qualifying low-income students. EOPS is composed of a group of professionals ready to assist you with the resolution of both academic and personal issues. Our staff is set up to understand the problems of our culturally diverse population and strives to meet student needs that are as diverse as our student population. Also under the umbrella of EOPS our CARE (Cooperative Agency Resources for Education) Program for single parents is specifically designed to provide support services and assist with the resolution of issues that are particular to this population. Students that are single parents receiving TANF/Cash Aid assistance may qualify for our CARE program, for additional information on CARE please contact Lourdes Mercado, 760-355- 6448, lourdes.mercado@imperial.edu.

EOPS provides additional support and services that may identify with one of the following experiences:

- Current and former foster youth students that were in the foster care system at any point in their lives
- Students experiencing homelessness
- Formerly incarcerated students

To apply for EOPS and for additional information on EOPS services, please contact Alexis Ayala, 760-355-5713, alexis.ayala@imperial.edu.

STUDENT EQUITY PROGRAMS

- The Student Equity Program strives to improve Imperial Valley College's success outcomes, particularly for students who have been historically underrepresented and underserved. The college identifies strategies to monitor and address equity issues, making efforts to mitigate any disproportionate impact on student success and achievement. Our institutional data provides insight surrounding student populations who historically, are not fully represented. Student Equity addresses disparities and/or disproportionate impact in student success across disaggregated student equity groups including gender, ethnicity, disability status, financial need, Veterans, foster youth, homelessness, and formerly incarcerated students. The Student Equity Program provides direct supportive services to empower students experiencing insecurities related to food, housing, transportation, textbooks, and shower access. We recognize that students who struggle meeting their basic needs are also at an academic and economic disadvantage, creating barriers to academic success and wellness. We strive to remove barriers that affect IVC students' access to education, degree and certificate completion, successful completion of developmental math and English courses, and the ability to transfer to a university. Contact: 760.355.5736 or 760.355.5733 Building 100.
- The Student Equity Program also houses IVC's Homeless Liaison, who provides direct services, campus, and community referrals to students experiencing homelessness as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act. Contact: 760.355.5736 Building 100.