

Course Information

Political Science	
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Department: Social Studies	Course Length: 1 semester
Grade levels): 10-12	Date Last Reviewed: August 2024
Prerequisite (if applicable) : None	Board Approved (if known):

Course Description and Purpose: Political Science teaches the American political system and focuses on the structure and function of the government and the political factors which determine decision making. In this regard, modern day policy issues will be studied. Subject areas covered in the class will include: the foundations of American government, political ideologies, political parties, interest groups, elections, civil rights, civil liberties, Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court, as well as current events. Students should expect to participate in frequent discussions on American political issues, read about and reflect on current events, complete a variety of writing assignments, and produce both group and individual projects.

Course Standards:

[Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies](#)

Political Science Strand: Knowledge about the structures of power, authority, and governance and their evolving functions in contemporary society is essential if young citizens are to develop civic responsibility. Young people become more effective citizens and problem solvers when they know how local, state, and national governments and international organizations function and interact.

Wisconsin students will...

Social Studies Inquiry Practices and Processes

1. Construct meaningful questions that initiate an inquiry.
2. Gather and evaluate sources.

3. Develop claims using evidence to support reasoning.
4. Communicate and critique conclusions.
5. Be civically engaged.

Political Science

1. Identify and analyze democratic principles and ideals.
2. Examine and interpret rights, privileges, and responsibilities in society.
3. Analyze and evaluate the powers and purposes of political and civic institutions.
4. Develop and employ skills for civic literacy.

Desired Results

Unit 1: Introduction to Political Science and Foundations of American Government\Politics

Learning Objectives:

- Political Science is the branch of knowledge that deals with systems of government; the analysis of political activity and behavior.
- Government is necessary to maintain social order, provide public services, stimulate\regulate the economy, and to provide national security\defense.
- The Social Contract Theory was developed by Enlightenment Philosopher John Locke and it is the belief that people exchange freedom to whatever they want at all times in exchange for order, security, and protection from government.
- The United States is a Democratic Republic\Presidential Democracy which is where the people elect representatives who make policy decisions on their half.
- A Direct Democracy is a system of government where citizens vote themselves on policy decisions.
- Oligarchies, Parliamentary Democracies, Dictatorships, etc. are some of the other types of government that exist in today's world.
- In a Federal system of government, power is shared between the national government, state governments, and local government.
- In a Unitary system of government, the national or central government has the decision making power.

- The Magna Carta, Petition of Right, English Bill of Rights, the Enlightenment, and Iroquois Confederacy are all developments that influenced the founders as they established America's form of government.
- The Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the US Constitution are all critical founding documents. The Declaration of Independence laid out the reasons why the founders felt separating from Great Britain and creating their own country was justified and necessary. The Articles of Confederation was America's first written Constitution and was flawed in that the federal government was too weak. The Constitution established three branches of government with a balance of power between state governments and the federal government.
- The Constitution can be amended or changed. The first ten amendments to the US Constitution was the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights protects essential rights and liberties for the American people.

Unit 2: The Political Spectrum, Political Parties and the Media's Role in Politics

Learning Objectives:

- Conservatives, Liberals, Libertarians, and Moderates (amongst others) are all positions along the political spectrums that have different policy beliefs regarding the level of government involvement and/or the role the government should play in key issues.
- The United States is a Two-Party System made up of the Republican and Democratic parties. Both these parties emerged in the 1800s. Third parties do exist in our political system but struggle to get candidates elected to office.
- The media plays a significant role in American politics by how different sources portray political issues and events in the news.
- The media brings attention to many political issues and perspectives which can influence the ideology, beliefs, and voting patterns of citizens.
- Fake news is described as those news stories that are false: the story itself is fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes.

Unit 3: The Legislative Branch

Learning Objectives:

- The United States has a bicameral legislature with Congress having two houses: The US Senate and House of Representatives. The US Senate has 100 members (2 Senators per state) and the House of Representatives has 435 members (based on the state's population).
- There are different qualifications to run for office in the House of Representatives and the US Senate.
- Congress's membership has become increasingly diverse overtime in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, and occupation.
- In the House of Representatives key leadership positions include the Speaker of the House, Majority Leader, Majority Whip, Minority Leader, etc. In the Senate, key leadership positions include the Majority Leader, Minority Leader, President Pro Tempore, etc. In the House of Representatives, the Speaker of the House and in the Senate, the Majority Leader, are both chosen by the majority party to represent their party.
- The main purpose of Congress is to create laws. Legislative work is divided among different types of committees. Some other powers that Congress have include conducting investigations, vetoing bills, approving of treaties (Senate only), filibustering (Senate only), confirming Cabinet officials, federal judges, and Supreme Court Justices (Senate only).
- Members of Congress can be influenced by their constituents, their political party, the President, lobbyists, Political Action Committees, etc.
- Spending in Congress can occur through earmarks, pork barrel legislation, etc.
- The President and Congress can be at odds when there is divided government (the President and the majority in one or both houses of Congress are from opposing parties) which can cause gridlock or a lack of legislation getting passed.

Unit 4: The Executive and Judicial Branches

Learning Objectives:

- To be president, a person must be at least 35 years of age, a natural born citizen, and must have lived in the United States for at least 14 years.
- The President is Commander-in-Chief of the military and can create foreign policy through negotiating treaties and executive agreements with leaders of other countries.
- The President has domestic policy powers such as appointing federal judges and cabinet officials, signing bills into laws, and implementing executive orders.
- The President can call Congress into special session during times of crisis.

- Executive orders have increased over time as they give the president the power to make policy without having to go through Congress.
- Executive privilege allows a president to keep conversations with other figures in government private that they deem as too sensitive to the public or that could endanger national security.
- Presidential power is limited by the legislative and judicial branch.
- Presidential campaigns are impacted by red, blue, and swing states. Red states tend to vote Republican, blue states tend to vote Democratic, and swing states vary between parties from one election cycle to the next.
- Presidential power has increased over the time for many reasons such as the nation growing, technological developments, expansion of the federal government and size of bureaucracy, etc.
- The President's Cabinet are advisors that are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. They are the leaders of departments within the Executive Branch.
- The United States has a dual court system with both federal and state courts.
- Within the court system, there are multiple types of jurisdiction: original, appellate, and concurrent. Original jurisdiction belongs to the court that holds the trial for the first time. Appellate jurisdiction is for courts that hear appeals of cases. Concurrent jurisdiction is when more than one court have the right to hold a trial (ex. State and federal).
- Within the judicial system, the following are some of the positions that exist: litigant, judge, justice, jury, defendant, plaintiff, and prosecutor. Each plays a different role within the judicial system.
- Federal District Courts have original jurisdiction and hear federal cases by having a trial. The US Court of Appeals has appellate jurisdiction meaning that they hear appeals of cases from Federal District Courts. The US Supreme Court primarily has appellate jurisdiction and hears appeals. They are the highest and most powerful court within the United States and have the final say within the judicial system.
- Within Wisconsin there are four levels of courts. Municipal courts are at the lowest level and deal with ordinance violations. Circuit courts are the next highest level, have original jurisdiction and hear criminal and civil cases that are more serious in nature than ordinance violations at the municipal level. The Wisconsin Court of Appeals has appellate jurisdiction and hears appeals of cases from the lowest two levels. The Wisconsin Supreme Court is the highest court in the state and primarily have appellate jurisdiction. They hear cases that are appealed to them after the Wisconsin Court of Appeals.
- All federal judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Federal judges serve life terms.
- When choosing who to nominate as a Supreme Court justice, The president looks at a variety of factors such as the justice's ideology, political affiliations, judicial philosophy, race, gender, stances on key issues, etc.
- Judicial review gives the power to the US Supreme Court to review laws and executive orders to determine if they are constitutional. If they are deemed unconstitutional, they are overturned.

- When the Supreme Court makes a ruling, there are multiple types of opinions. Majority opinions explain the position and reasoning behind the decision from one of the justices in the majority. The dissenting opinion is written by one of the justices in the majority explaining why they disagree with the majority opinion. Concurring opinions are written by a justice in the majority but explain a different reasoning than the majority opinion as to why they voted with the majority.
- Judicial activism is when judges interpret the Constitution loosely based on modern times and are more willing to have the Supreme Court break with precedent and create policy. Judicial restraint is when judges interpret the Constitution as the founders intended and believe the other two branches, not the judicial branch, should make policy.

Unit 5:

Learning Objectives:

- Civil liberties protect people from government interference and intrusion. They are freedoms that are guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, such as the First Amendment's right to free speech. Civil rights protect people from discrimination by the government, other citizens, or private institutions. They are legal provisions that stem from the idea of equality, such as the right to vote. Civil rights also guarantee equal protection under the law to all citizens, regardless of one's race, religion, gender, national origin, etc.
- The 1st Amendment includes freedom of speech, petition, religion, press, and assembly.
- Free speech is a 1st amendment right that is protected under many circumstances such as political and symbolic speech. Some forms of speech such as slander, direct threats against individuals, speech that creates panic, and speech that incites violence are all examples of speech that is not protected under the 1st amendment.
- Freedom of assembly is granted by the First Amendment and allows for lawful peaceful protests on public property or private property when the property owner grants permission to those involved.
- The Free Exercise Clause states that all people within the United States can freely practice the religion of their choice (or choose to not practice a religion). The Establishment Clause states that the government cannot establish an official religion.
- Throughout US history, freedom of the press has been restricted at times. This has primarily occurred during wartime to prevent national security information from being leaked, ensure national unity, and a variety of other reasons.

- In today's modern age there are many contemporary civil rights and civil liberties issues that are debated in our society with the following issues being a couple of examples: abortion, the right to privacy, government surveillance, how free speech applies to social media platforms, etc.
- The Bill of Rights lays out important rights and liberties that the American people have. It has existed for over 200 years whereas other countries such as China and the former Soviet Union have had documents laying out the rights of their citizens that have been largely ignored and ultimately did not last. The USA's culture of valuing freedom and democracy have played a key role in the Bill of Rights lasting to this day and still being of the utmost importance.

Textbook

United States Government: Democracy in Action. Richard C. Remy. Glencoe McGraw-Hill. ISBN: 0-07-825983-5

Primary Resources

Declaration of Independence
Constitution
Articles of Confederation