

**Course Proposal for Revised General Education Course**  
**PLS 1153G: American Government and the Constitution**

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**1. Catalog Description**

- a. PLS 1153G
- b. American Government and the Constitution
- c. 3-0-3
- d. F, S
- e. Amer Govt
- f. An introduction to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and political system, with an emphasis on the role citizens play in government and politics. Topics covered include the Constitution, civil rights and civil liberties, government institutions, political parties, voting and elections.
- g. No prerequisites
- h. Writing active

**2. Student Learning Objectives**

- a. General Education and University-Wide Assessment Goals:
  - i. Students will complete exams or writing assignments requiring them to identify, analyze, and evaluate:
    - (1) how major political philosophers and the Constitution's framers shaped the U.S. Constitution.
    - (2) the articles and amendments of the Constitution, and the evolution of federalism in the U.S.
    - (3) trends, court rulings and laws about civil rights and civil liberties.
    - (4) the roles political parties and interest groups play in U.S. policy-making and elections.
    - (5) U.S. voting behavior, including public opinion, ideology, and political socialization.
    - (6) the U.S. electoral system, including campaign finance, the presidential nomination system, and the Electoral College.
    - (7) the institutions of government—Congress, the President, the Bureaucracy, and the Judiciary.

These objectives are associated with the goals of critical thinking, writing, and citizenship.
  - ii. Students will participate in class discussions about current problems in American government, and ideas for solving those problems. (speaking, critical thinking, citizenship)
  - iii. Students will complete writing assignments requiring them to develop, defend, and evaluate their opinions about American government, political issues, and political problems. (critical thinking, writing, citizenship)
- b. Additional learning objectives:

By completing this introductory course, students will gain background needed for

taking advanced courses in Political Science and other related disciplines.

### 3. Course Outline

#### **Section 1: Foundations of American Government and Politics**

- a. Week One: American Democracy
  - i. The political origins of American democracy
  - ii. Characteristics of democracy
  - iii. Contemporary theories of American democracy
- b. Week Two: Origins of the American Constitution
  - i. The Constitution's framers and their role in the creation of the U.S.
  - ii. Events leading up to the constitutional convention
  - iii. Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation
  - iv. Constitutional convention
  - v. Fundamental disputes and compromises that shaped the Constitution.
- c. Week Three: The Constitution and Amendments
  - i. An examination of the basic features of the Constitution
  - ii. Overview of the powers of Congress, the President, and the Judiciary
  - iii. Overview of the amendments
- d. Week Four: Federalism and the Growth of Government
  - i. Unitary, federal and confederate forms of government
  - ii. Centralized vs. decentralized government
  - iii. National v. state powers
  - iv. Grant in aid programs
  - v. Unfunded mandates
- e. Week Five: Civil Liberties
  - i. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights
  - ii. Freedom of religion, speech, and the press
  - iii. Rights of criminal defendants
  - iv. Right to privacy
- f. Week Six: Civil Rights
  - i. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the equal protection clause
  - ii. Race, the Constitution, and public policy
  - iii. Women, the Constitution and public policy
  - iv. The civil rights umbrella
  - v. Affirmative action

#### **Section 2: The Institutions of Government**

- g. Week Seven: Congress
  - i. Organization and leadership
  - ii. Representation and Congress
  - iii. The job of a representative
  - iv. Congressional elections and incumbency

- v. The legislative process
  
- h. Week Eight: Presidency
  - i. Evolution of the office and the powers of the presidency
  - ii. Domestic and foreign policy powers
  - iii. Presidential character
  - iv. Evaluating presidents
  - v. Relationship between the President and Congress
- i. Week Nine: Bureaucracy
  - i. Organization of the federal bureaucracy
  - ii. Policymaking role
  - iii. Civil service reform
  - iv. Problems with the bureaucracy
- j. Week Ten: Judiciary
  - i. Examination of the scope of judicial power
  - ii. Judicial review
  - iii. Judicial activism and judicial restraint
  - iv. Structure and composition of the federal courts

**Section 3: People and Politics**

- k. Week Eleven: Public Opinion and Political Socialization
  - i. Examination of public opinion and policy
  - ii. Political ideology
  - iii. How Americans learn to participate in politics
- l. Week Twelve: Political Parties
  - i. Historical development of the two party system
  - ii. Role played by third parties and independent candidates
  - iii. Party identification
  - iv. Declining role of political parties in the U.S.
  - v. Primaries and caucuses
- m. Week Thirteen: Campaigns
  - i. Discussion of the nomination process
  - ii. Campaign strategy
  - iii. Media and politics
  - iv. Campaign finance laws and campaign finance reform
- n. Week Fourteen: Elections and Voting Behavior
  - i. Examination of the voter registration system
  - ii. Voters and nonvoters
  - iii. How Americans vote
  - iv. Electoral College

- o. Week Fifteen: Interest Groups
  - i. Examination of the role played by interest groups in the political process.
  - ii. Increasing power of interest groups
  - iii. Types of interest groups
  - iv. Interest group strategies and activities
  - v. PACs

**4. Evaluation of Student Learning**

- a. Evaluation will be based primarily on exams and writing assignments. Exams may consist of objective or essay questions. Writing assignments will produce approximately 10 pages of written work, and may include assignments such as position papers, policy research, journal writing, and homework assignments. Critical thinking and writing skills will be evaluated through these exams and writing assignments. Also, the exams and writing assignments will evaluate students' abilities to gather and present information about the U.S. government, and understand the role politics and government play in their lives.

Grades will be based on:

Exams	65%
Writing assignments	25%
Class Participation	10%

- b. A variety of writing assignments will be used in this course. These assignments are designed primarily to assist students in mastering course content, and secondarily to strengthen their writing skills. Therefore, this course should be considered writing active.

**5. Rationale**

- a. As a Political Science course, American Government and the Constitution is taught from the perspective of social science, and therefore, belongs in the Social and Behavior Science/Constitution segment of the general education program. As noted in the outline, American Government and the Constitution focuses on developing students' critical thinking and writing skills to analyze the U.S. government and political system. The course has a strong focus on understanding the social and historical context of American government, as well as political behavior and political institutions. Furthermore, the course concentrates on students' responsibilities as citizens, providing students with the tools to understand and develop their own ideas and opinions about politics.
- b. This is an introductory course; therefore there are no prerequisites.
- c. This course is a revision of PLS 1153C and should maintain the same curriculum i.d. as PLS 1153C.
- d. This course is required for majors in Political Science and Social Science Teacher Certification. Students enrolled in teacher certification programs are required to

take either PLS 1153G or HIS 3600G. This course is an elective for the Pre-Law Studies minor.

**6. Implementation**

- a. Any qualified member of the Department of Political Science may be assigned this course.
- b. One of the following textbooks will be used:
  - 1. Edwards, Wattenberg, and Lineberry's *Government in America*, (2000)
  - 2. Janda, Berry, and Goldman's *The Challenge of Democracy*, (2000)
- c. No additional costs
- d. Spring 2001

**7. Community College Transfer**

A community college course may be judged equivalent to this course.

**8. Date approved by the department:** 3/22/00

**9. Date approved by the College Curriculum Committee:** 4/7/00

**10. Date approved by CAA:** 10/19/00

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**Revised Course Proposal**  
**PLS 1193G: American Government and the Constitution, Honors**

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**1. Catalog Description**

- a. PLS 1193G
- b. American Government and the Constitution, Honors
- c. 3-0-3
- d. F, S.
- e. Amer Govt Hnrs
- f. An introduction to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and political system, with an emphasis on the role citizens play in government and politics. Topics covered include the Constitution, civil rights and civil liberties, government institutions, political parties, voting and elections.
- g. Admission to the University Honors Program
- h. Writing active

