



QualityCore™



U.S. Government Course Objectives

Contents

This booklet provides a list of course objectives for a rigorous U.S. Government course.

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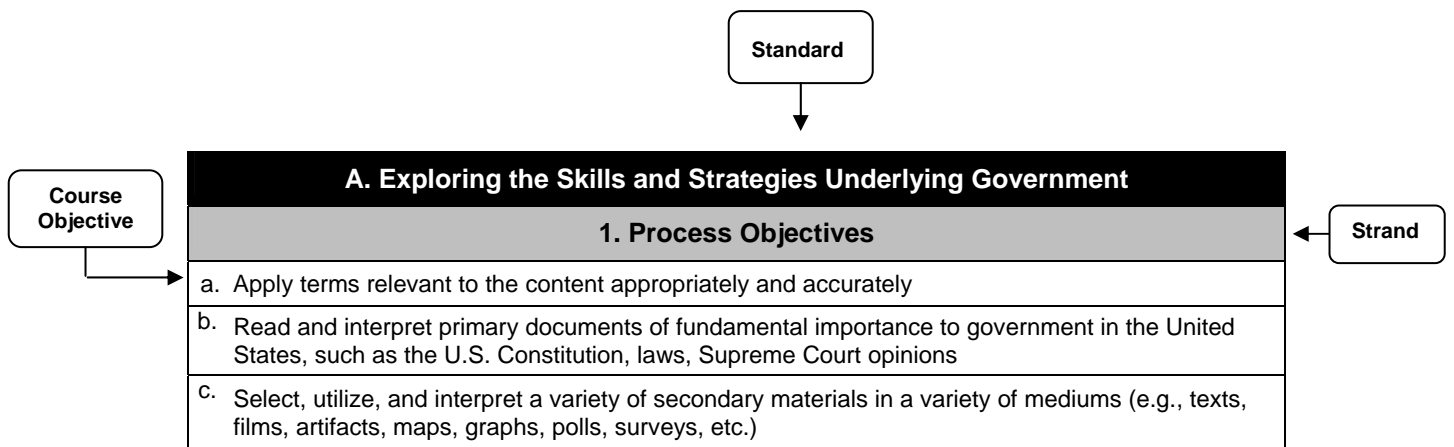
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Origin of Course Objectives

The course objectives listed in this booklet (pp. 2–5) were developed by examining the course objectives, pacing charts, and syllabi submitted by selected social studies teachers participating in an extension of the ACT–Education Trust study *On Course for Success: A Close Look at Selected High School Courses That Prepare All Students for College* (see <http://www.act.org/path/policy/reports/success.html>). The study focused on ten successful high schools where the student population was at least 40% minority and/or 50% low income. Each of the schools produced a significant proportion of graduates who had met or exceeded ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores, scores that predict success in specific entry-level college courses. The course objectives were also reviewed by practicing classroom teachers across the nation.

Organization of Objectives

As shown below, the set of U.S. Government course objectives are organized according to three levels: from general (Standard) to intermediate (Strand) to specific (Course Objective).



The U.S. Government course objectives include 4 standards that address the “big ideas” (i.e., overarching themes or foundational concepts) in the area of government. These standards are listed below.

- A.** Exploring the Skills and Strategies Underlying Government
- B.** The Fundamentals of Government
- C.** Organization and Functions of Government
- D.** Political Participation and Citizenship

The course objectives on the following pages represent what students should know and be able to do in a rigorous U.S. Government course.

U.S. Government Course Objectives

A. Exploring the Skills and Strategies Underlying Government
1. Process Objectives
a. Apply terms relevant to the content appropriately and accurately
b. Read and interpret primary documents of fundamental importance to government in the United States, such as the U.S. Constitution, laws, Supreme Court opinions
c. Select, utilize, and interpret a variety of secondary materials in a variety of mediums (e.g., texts, films, artifacts, maps, graphs, polls, surveys)
d. Analyze and evaluate factors that contribute to different perspectives on the same issues or events, notably point of view, context, purpose, and sources of information or evidence
e. Analyze and evaluate sources in terms of credibility, relevance, and purpose; for their perspective, bias, and authenticity; for their use of rhetorical techniques, such as propaganda or emotional arguments; and to distinguish fact from opinion
f. Utilize research strategies and methods to obtain, organize, and interpret information related to the U.S. government
g. Compose arguments/position papers, and participate in debates on the roles, policies, and/or functions of government, synthesizing primary and secondary sources to justify position
h. Compose an analytical essay containing a thesis, supporting evidence, and conclusion
i. Identify, analyze, and understand elements of processes fundamental to U.S. government, notably cause and effect, past and present, change and continuity
j. Simulate or experience governmental processes and functions (e.g., lawmaking simulation in class, working on a political campaign)
k. Observe and participate in community life (e.g., community service, political activity)
B. The Fundamentals of Government
1. Foundations
a. Define and apply key terms associated with the U.S. government (e.g., <i>politics, government, representative government, constitution, republic, democracy, rule of law, confederacy</i>)
b. Explain the major arguments advanced for the necessity of politics and government as expressed in the political philosophies of Enlightenment figures
c. Identify the fundamental values and principles of U.S. political life, and assess their importance to the maintenance of constitutional democracy (e.g., liberty, equality, individualism, rule of law, majority rule/minority rights, compromise)
d. Describe the characteristics of civil society, and evaluate the extent to which the American colonies exhibited those traits at the time of their declaration of independence from Great Britain
e. Explain the relationship between government and the governed as outlined in the Declaration of Independence, and evaluate how these ideas influenced the formation of government in the United States
f. Analyze the political, social, and economic situations that have typically led citizens to demand the creation/alteration of constitutions, and explain the various purposes served by constitutions

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B. The Fundamentals of Government (continued)
2. The Constitution
a. Define <i>popular sovereignty</i> , and explain how the Constitution upholds it
b. Define <i>limited government</i> , and explain how the Constitution articulates this principle
c. Define <i>separation of powers</i> , and explain how and why the Constitution distributes powers among the three branches of government
d. Define <i>federalism</i> , and explain how and why the Constitution distributes power to the national and state governments
e. Identify and evaluate contentious issues (e.g., educational standards, gun control) between federal and state governments as well as between state and local governments
f. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of government under the Articles of Confederation, and explain how it influenced the development of the Constitution
g. Compare the perspectives of representatives at the Constitutional Convention, and explain how and why the U.S. Constitution emerged as a “bundle of compromises”
h. Evaluate the arguments about ratification as presented by the Federalists and Anti-Federalists
i. Explain why the Constitution is adaptable to changing conditions, and describe the constitutional amendment process
j. Identify past and present issues and events (e.g., Equal Rights Amendment, Women’s Suffrage Movement) that have stimulated efforts to change the Constitution, and evaluate the successes and failures of those efforts
k. Evaluate the importance of rule of law and identify the sources, purposes, and functions of law in the U.S. government
l. Explain the individual rights protected by the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments, analyze the historical and political reasoning for the amendments, and evaluate judicial protection of individual rights over time
C. Organization and Functions of Government
1. The Legislative Branch
a. Describe the constitutionally defined purposes and organization of the legislative branch and its expressed and implied powers
b. Explain how the legislative branch seeks to prevent the abuse of power through its constitutionally defined checks and balances
c. Identify the differing qualifications for membership in Congress, and compare leadership roles in the House and Senate
d. Explain how gerrymandering can shape the membership of the House of Representatives
e. Identify and evaluate historical and political factors that have led the legislative branch to exert varying levels of influence throughout history
f. Explain the role of legislators in setting the public agenda
g. Analyze the role and influence of Congress in determining the federal budget
h. Describe the process of how a bill is created and how it becomes a law
i. Identify the different types of congressional committees, and evaluate the roles they play in the House and Senate in determining legislative agendas and providing oversight
j. Compare political party ideologies and evaluate the influence of those ideologies on the actions of legislators and the legislative process
k. Identify why interest groups lobby members of Congress, and evaluate the influence of interest groups on the legislative process

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C. Organization and Functions of Government (continued)
2. The Executive Branch
a. Describe the constitutionally defined powers of the executive branch
b. Explain how the executive branch seeks to prevent the abuse of power through its constitutionally defined checks and balances
c. Describe the constitutional qualifications required for serving as president
d. Identify the formal and informal roles of the president (e.g., chief executive, commander in chief, chief legislator, party leader, chief diplomat)
e. Identify and evaluate the historical and political factors that have led the executive branch to exert varying levels of power and influence
f. Compare styles of leadership exhibited by presidents, and evaluate the implications for legislative effectiveness and political legacies
g. Analyze and evaluate the influence of party ideology on the actions and policies of the president
h. Describe the organization of the executive branch, and explain the functions of its various offices (e.g., president, vice president, National Security Council, and advisory and general staff)
i. Identify the major executive departments that comprise the <i>cabinet</i> , and describe both the individual roles of the department and the cabinet's role as an advisory body to the president
j. Describe the purposes and functions of the federal bureaucracy, and explain the role of bureaucrats in shaping the public agenda
k. Identify and evaluate how American national interests, values, and principles have impacted and continue to impact the formation and implementation of U.S. foreign and domestic policy
3. The Judicial Branch
a. Describe the constitutionally defined purposes, organization, and powers of the judicial branch
b. Explain how the judicial branch seeks to prevent the abuse of power through its constitutionally defined checks and balances and through judicial review
c. Explain how federal judges are appointed, and discuss the Senate's role in the confirmation process
d. Explain the process by which a case reaches the Supreme Court and how the Court reaches a decision
e. Explain how ideology may influence the judicial interpretation of the Constitution (e.g., loose constructionism versus strict constructionism), and evaluate the potential societal consequences of these interpretations
f. Explain the difference between civil, criminal, and other types of law

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D. Political Participation and Citizenship
1. Political Participation
a. Explain the components of the presidential election process: caucuses, primaries, national conventions, and the general election
b. Analyze and evaluate the origin and functions of the Electoral College
c. Explain the advantages and potential disadvantages of incumbency in an election
d. Explain the importance of fundraising in elections, and evaluate the reasons people and organizations contribute to election campaigns
e. Describe why polls are conducted, analyze the methodology and reliability of polling, and evaluate their influence on government officials and society at large
f. Analyze the development of the two-party system in U.S. politics, identify reasons why third parties might organize, and explain the impact of parties on the American political system
g. Analyze and evaluate the role and influence of the media on American politics
h. Identify and describe the means available to U.S. citizens to monitor and influence the formation and implementation of public policy, and evaluate their effectiveness (e.g., voting, participation in election campaigns, grassroots campaigns, special interest groups, political action committees, lobbying)
2. Citizenship
a. Explain and evaluate the qualifications for citizenship in the United States
b. Compare citizen access to and impact on government at the local, state, and national levels
c. Identify the civic responsibilities of citizens, analyze the significance of shared political and civic beliefs and values, and evaluate the importance of an informed and engaged citizenry to the maintenance of democracy in the United States
d. Analyze changing demographics (e.g., geographic location of population, race, age, class, education), and explain their impact on American society and politics