

**College of San Mateo**  
**Official Course Outline**

**1. COURSE ID:** PLSC 215    **TITLE:** Contemporary Issues In American Politics    **C-ID:**

**Semester Units/Hours:** 3.0 units; a minimum of 48.0 lecture hours/semester

**Method of Grading:** Grade Option (Letter Grade or P/NP)

**Recommended Preparation:**

Eligibility for ENGL 838 or 848 AND any READ 400-level course.

**2. COURSE DESIGNATION:**

**Degree Credit**

**Transfer credit:** CSU; UC

**AA/AS Degree Requirements:**

CSM - GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS: E1. Option 2- Group 1: American history and institution

CSM - GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS: E5b. Social Science

**CSU GE:**

CSU GE Area D: SOCIAL SCIENCES: DSI - Social Institutions

CSU GE Area D: SOCIAL SCIENCES: US 2

**IGETC:**

IGETC Area 4: SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES: Social and Behavioral Sciences

**3. COURSE DESCRIPTIONS:**

**Catalog Description:**

Learn how the American political system—and the constitutions of the United States of America and the state of California—function through analyzing and debating contemporary political issues.

**4. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME(S) (SLO'S):**

Upon successful completion of this course, a student will meet the following outcomes:

1. Effectively communicate understanding of the roles played by state actors (such as the 3 branches of government) and non-state actors (such as interest groups, political parties and the news media) on the development and implementation of policy.
2. Critically analyze theories on the impact of federalism, the separation of powers and economic inequality on the development and implementation of policy.
3. Discuss the impact of ethnic, cultural and economic diversity on political issues and policy.
4. Evaluate the ethical issues and conflicts inherent to contemporary political issues.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the rights and duties of a citizen through participation in the political system.

**5. SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

Upon successful completion of this course, a student will be able to:

1. Effectively communicate understanding of the roles played by state actors (such as the 3 branches of government) and non-state actors (such as interest groups, political parties and the news media) on the development and implementation of policy.
2. Critically analyze theories on the impact of federalism, the separation of powers and economic inequality on the development and implementation of policy.
3. Discuss the impact of ethnic, cultural and economic diversity on political issues and policy.
4. Evaluate the ethical issues and conflicts inherent to contemporary political issues.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the rights and duties of a citizen through participation in the political system.

**6. COURSE CONTENT:**

**Lecture Content:**

1. Democratic Theory: The relationship between individuals and their government.
2. Separation of Powers: The powers and responsibilities of the 3 branches of government.
3. Checks and Balances: The interaction of the institutions making up the 3 branches of government.
4. Federalism: The interaction of the federal and state governments.
5. Local Government: The interaction of state and local governments.
6. Civil Liberties: Individual rights and limits on the powers of government.
7. Civil Rights: Diversity, equity and discrimination.
8. Economic Inequality: The distribution of economic resources and their impact on the political system.

9. Interest groups
10. Political Parties
11. The Media
12. Voting and Elections
13. Public Policymaking: The interaction of interest groups and government institutions.
14. Contemporary Political Issues, in the areas above, and in those below:
  1. The Economy
  2. The Environment
  3. Criminal Justice
  4. Education
  5. Political/Constitutional Reform
  6. Foreign Policy

**Lab Content:**

This is not a lab course. There is no course lab content.

**TBA Hours Content:**

No TBA Hours. No TBA Hours Content.

**7. REPRESENTATIVE METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:**

Typical methods of instruction may include:

1. Lecture
2. Discussion
3. Guest Speakers
4. Other (Specify): Lecture/discussion. Individual and group presentations. Written or oral reports on specific issues in contemporary American politics. Assignments in issues source books and in library research. Attendance at meetings of public interest organizations such as the World Affairs Council of Northern California or the Commonwealth Club of California. Guest speakers in class on topical issues. Participation in the activities of interest groups, political parties, or political campaigns.

**8. REPRESENTATIVE ASSIGNMENTS**

Representative assignments in this course may include, but are not limited to the following:

**Writing Assignments:**

Research papers, analytical essays, short-answer questions on assigned readings, letters to elected representatives, reports on political events attended, reports on participation in political activities.

**Reading Assignments:**

Textbooks, websites, reports, newspapers, newsmagazines.

**Other Outside Assignments:**

Oral presentations.

**9. REPRESENTATIVE METHODS OF EVALUATION**

Representative methods of evaluation may include:

1. Class Participation
2. Class Work
3. Exams/Tests
4. Group Projects
5. Home Work
6. Oral Presentation
7. Papers
8. Projects
9. Quizzes
10. Research Projects
11. Written examination

**10. REPRESENTATIVE TEXT(S):**

Possible textbooks include:

1. McKenna, G., and Feingold, S.. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Political Issues*, ed. McGraw-Hill, 2012
2. Canon, D.TI; Coleman, J.J.; Mayer, K.R.. *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*, 3 ed. W.W. Norton & Co., 2011
3. Stinebrickner, B.. *Annual Editions: American Government 12/13*, ed. McGraw-Hill, 2012

Possible periodicals include:

1. . *CQ Researcher*, Volume 2012

2. . *Time Magazine*, Volume 2012
3. . *Newsweek*, Volume 2012
4. . *The Economist*, Volume 2012

**Origination Date:** August 2010  
**Curriculum Committee Approval Date:** December 2012  
**Effective Term:** Fall 2013  
**Course Originator:** Lee Miller

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