Hello, and welcome!

Do you vote, pay taxes, or use a seatbelt? Whether we recognize it or not, politics and the government’s reach are all around us. The basics of our daily lives are built on a foundation of laws and rights. These can be state, federal, local, or all three. And they often have their origins in the Constitution. Understanding how the government functions, why it exists, and how it impacts us can be complicated. And that’s okay. By the end of this course, you will be able to explain the basic functions of the U.S. government. You will better understand the forces that shape our policy and politics. And you will be better prepared to participate in this nation’s civic institutions.

We invite you to take a minute to learn about the course by reviewing the information that follows. This way, you will be better able to understand the expectations of the course as a whole. Then you can determine how to manage your time and efforts as you navigate through it.

We are so excited that you’re on this journey.
We can’t wait to see what you will achieve!
Course Description and Competencies

What to Expect

This course contains five modules. And each module contains a set of smaller units. These will help you better understand American politics and the U.S. Constitution. Topics include the development of American democracy, the structure of the U.S. government, political participation, and civil rights. They also include public opinion and media.

Throughout the course, you will find a variety of interactive elements. These include knowledge checks to help deepen your understanding of the content. Engaging with these activities reinforces new learning. It also complements the knowledge you bring to this area of study.

This course covers the following competencies:

1. The graduate describes the influence of competing political ideologies on the development of the United States government.

2. The graduate explains how the structure and powers of the United States government interact to form public policy.

3. The graduate examines the influence of political parties, citizens, and non-governmental organizations on elections and other political processes inside a participatory democracy.

4. The graduate examines the struggle to balance individual liberty, public order, and state’s rights.

5. The graduate examines the influence of the media, public opinion, and political discourse on American democracy.

The objective assessment allows you to demonstrate three core competencies from the course. You will have two attempts to pass the exam.
# Course Outline

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<tr>
<th>Module:</th>
<th>Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:</th>
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| 1 | **The Constitution** | - Describe the influence of Enlightenment ideas on the founding documents  
- Explain the development and influence of social contract theory  
- Outline the structure and powers of the government under the Articles of Confederation  
- Discuss separation of powers outlined in the Constitution  
- Explain the system of checks and balances  
- Describe the principles of federalism |
| 2 | **Checks and Balances** | - Examine the main powers of each branch of the federal government  
- Describe how the legislative branch makes laws  
- Explain reapportionment, redistricting, and gerrymandering  
- Explain the differences between expressed, implied, reserved, and concurrent powers  
- Describe the growth of the federal government’s power relative to the states |
| 3 | **Participation** | - Describe the various factors that shape House and Senate elections  
- Discuss how the Electoral College works and its impact on presidential candidate strategy during the general election  
- Explain how social movements have influenced American politics  
- Examine the factors that influence voter registration in elections  
- Explain how voting laws and amendments have influenced political participation |
| 4 | **Civil Rights** | - Describe civil rights that are protected under the Constitution  
- Discuss the struggles that many Americans and others face in securing and protecting civil rights  
- Explain how certain Amendments offer protections and privacy to citizens  
- Explain the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause  
- Explain how federal laws and Supreme Court decisions have protected or expanded individual rights, and in some cases restricted them |
| 5 | **Media’s Role** | - Examine the media’s role in shaping opinion and political discourse  
- Discuss the role of the media as a political watchdog organization  
- Describe the factors that shape our political views and beliefs  
- Analyze differences in public opinion among various groups  
- Explain how political actors and policy are influenced by public opinion |
Technology Requirements

We want you to have the tools to succeed! Since this course includes at least one proctored test, please be sure to have a working microphone, speakers, and an external webcam. Unfortunately, an internal webcam (built into many laptops) is not acceptable. (Note: The external webcam is required only for exams that have proctors. You do not need one for practice tests and other non-proctored assessments.) For other details about the technology you’ll need, review the Computer System and Technology Requirements. If you have questions about your setup, contact support@academy.wgu.edu.

You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader DC. If you haven’t already, download this free software. You may encounter an interactive form that contains fields that you can select or fill in. Review how to fill in a PDF form.

Key Contacts

Your Fellow Learners

Check out the American Politics and the U.S. Constitution Lobby in the course site! In this online community, you can ask questions and explore ideas. You can connect with your fellow learners. When you use this site, you will realize that other learners may have the same questions you have. You can all benefit from learning together!

Tutor.com

If you need academic support, don’t hesitate to contact Tutor.com. There, you have access to thousands of tutors. And they are available 24/7 from any internet-ready device. You can also benefit from instructional videos, study tools, and other assistance.

Technical Support

If you encounter technical issues, be sure to contact the Help Desk. Just submit a Support Request for assistance.

Program Support

Do you have questions about your account? Student Support has answers. They can help with billing, switching courses, and other requests. You can contact them at (888) 320-0540 or support@academy.wgu.edu.

Accommodations

WGU provides compliant and accessible learning experiences. If you require accommodation, please contact us at the start of the course. You can email StudentAffairs@academy.wgu.edu or call (888) 320-0540. We are committed to ensuring that all students with disabilities have equal access to WGU’s services and materials. We strive to use best practices for accessibility. Our goal is to conform to existing U.S. laws. These include the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Our learning management system (LMS) platform is Open edX. Open edX’s commitment to accessible content is published on their Website Accessibility Policy.