



Form Codes: SA600, SB600

EXAM INFORMATION

This exam was developed to enable schools to award credit to students for knowledge equivalent to that learned by students taking the course. This exam covers topics such foundations of government and politics, Constitutional Structure and Development, Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations, Presidency and Executive Branch, Civil Liberties and Civil Rights, Domestic Policy and Foreign Policy.

The exam contains 100 questions to be answered in 2 hours.

EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE

The following is an outline of the content areas covered in the examination. The approximate percentage of the examination devoted to each content area is also noted.

I. Foundations of Government and Politics 9.5%

- a. Core concepts and terminology (e.g., republic vs. democracy, enlightenment)
- b. Democratic principles underlying the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. constitutional system
- c. Political culture (traditionalism, individualism, moralism), ideology, and values in the United States
- d. Approaches to studying American politics (e.g., institutional, behavioral, historical)

II. Constitutional Structure and Development 12%

- a. Articles of Confederation and Constitutional Convention
- b. Founding context and constitutional debates (e.g., The Bill of Rights)
- c. Constitutional principles and allocation of authority
- d. Separation of powers and checks and balances
- e. Amendment process and constitutional change

CREDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT) has evaluated the DSST test development process and content of this exam. It has made the following recommendations:

Area or Course Equivalent: American Government

Level: Lower-level baccalaureate

Amount of Credit: 3 Semester Hours

Minimum Score: 400

Source: www.acenet.edu

III. Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations 10.5%

- a. Division of powers across levels of government (e.g., reserved/state vs. national authority)
- b. Intergovernmental relations and policy tools (e.g., grants, mandates, preemption, cooperative arrangements)
- c. Constitutional basis and development of federalism (e.g., *McCulloch v Maryland*, *Gibbons v Ogden*)

IV. Congress 10.5%

- a. Structure and representation (e.g., upper house vs. lower house)
- b. Organization and internal operations (e.g., committees, leadership, rules)
- c. Lawmaking and budgetary authority (e.g., Origination Clause)
- d. Parties, polarization, and incumbency

V. Presidency and Executive Branch 10.5%

- a. Constitutional requirements, powers, and roles of presidency
- b. Expansion of presidential power and informal powers (e.g., foreign policy decision-making)
- c. Structure and agency organization of federal bureaucracy and cabinet
- d. Ethics of executive power (e.g., principal-agent problems and reforms)

VI. Federal Courts and Judicial Process 10.5%

- a. Federal court structure
- b. Federal jurisdiction (e.g., original and appellate jurisdiction, civil and criminal cases)
- c. Judicial review and constitutional doctrine
- d. Judicial decision making and appeals process
- e. Nominations and confirmation of justices

VII. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights 14%

- a. Bill of Rights incorporation and constitutional protections
- b. Civil liberties: speech, press, assembly, religion, and petition
- c. Civil liberties: criminal procedure and privacy protections
- d. Civil rights: equal protection and equality under the law
- e. Civil rights: landmark laws and litigation

VIII. Political Participation and Representation 9.5%

- a. Political opinions and socialization
- b. Elections, electoral systems, and districting
- c. Evolution of the two-party system
- d. Interest groups (e.g., lobbying, influence, Political Action Committees (PAC))
- e. Media and political communication as the fourth pillar of democracy (e.g., campaigning, spin)
- f. Media regulation and digital challenges (e.g., yellow journalism, media bias, misinformation)

IX. Domestic Policy 7%

- a. Policymaking stages and implementation
- b. Social policy and welfare state
- c. Economic tools and budget politics

X. Foreign Policy 6%

- a. National Interests and strategy (e.g., Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt Corollary)

- b. Actors and institutions
- c. Diplomatic tools
- d. Economic tradecraft and trade diplomacy
- e. Military power and deterrence
- f. Foreign policy constraints

REFERENCES

Below is a list of reference publications that were either used as a reference to create the exam, or were used as textbooks in college courses of the same or similar title at the time the test was developed. You may reference either the current edition of these titles or textbooks currently used at a local college or university for the same class title. It is recommended that you reference more than one textbook on the topics outlined in this fact sheet.

You should begin by checking textbook content against the content outline provided before selecting textbooks that cover the test content from which to study.

Sources for study material are suggested but not limited to the following:

Kernell, S., Jacobson, G., Kousser, T., Vavreck, L., & Johnson, T. R. (2026). *The logic of American politics* (12th ed.). CQ Press.

Lowi, T. J., Shepsle, K. A., Ginsburg, B., Ansolabehere, S., & Han, H. (2024). *American government: Power & purpose* (18th ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Ginsberg, B. (2025). *We the people* (15th ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Krutz, G., & Waskiewicz, S. (2025). *American government* (4th ed.). OpenStax.

All test questions are in a multiple-choice format, with one correct answer and two incorrect options. The following are samples of the types of questions that may appear on the exam.

1. Which constitutional principle explains why powers not granted to the federal government are retained by the states?
 - a. Reserved Powers
 - b. Supremacy Clause
 - c. Enumerated powers
2. Which Supreme Court case established the principle of judicial review?
 - a. Gibbons v. Ogden (1824)
 - b. Marbury v. Madison (1803)
 - c. McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)

3. Federalism in the United States refers to which distribution of government authority?
 - a. Authority divided between national and state governments
 - b. Authority concentrated entirely in the national government
 - c. Authority exercised exclusively by state governments
1. British colonists in North America in the late seventeenth century were greatly influenced by the political thought of
 - a. John Locke.
 - b. James Madison.
 - c. Thomas Jefferson.
2. The Constitution is considered as an institutional solution to collective action dilemmas. How does the bicameral legislature exemplify this?
 - a. The Senate was designed to override House decisions automatically
 - b. Both chambers represent states equally, simplifying majority rule
 - c. Both chambers must agree, forcing bargaining between different interests

Answers to sample questions:

1-A; 2-B; 3-A ; 4-A; 5-C