

CLEP® American Government: At a Glance

Description of the Examination

The American Government examination covers material that is usually taught in a one-semester introductory course in American government and politics at the college level. The scope and emphasis of the exam reflect what is most commonly taught in introductory American government and politics courses in political science departments around the United States. These courses go beyond a general understanding of civics to incorporate political processes and behavior. The exam covers topics such as the institutions and policy processes of the federal government, the federal courts and civil liberties, political parties and interest groups, political beliefs and behavior, and the content and history of the Constitution.

The examination contains approximately 100 questions to be answered in 90 minutes. Some of these are pretest questions that will not be scored.

Knowledge and Skills Required

Questions on the American Government examination require candidates to demonstrate one or more of the following abilities in the approximate proportions indicated.

- Knowledge of American government and politics (about 55–60 percent of the exam)
- Understanding of typical patterns of political processes and behavior (including the components of the behavioral situation of a political actor), the principles used to explain or justify various governmental structures and procedures (about 30–35 percent of the exam)
- Analysis and interpretation of simple data that are relevant to American government and politics (10–15 percent of the exam)

The subject matter of the American Government examination is drawn from the following topics. The percentages next to the main topics indicate the approximate percentage of exam questions on that topic.

30–35% Institutions and Policy Processes: Presidency, Bureaucracy and Congress

- The major formal and informal institutional arrangements and powers
- Structure, policy processes and outputs
- Relationships among these three institutions and links between them and political parties, interest groups, the media, and public opinion

15–20% Federal Courts, Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

- Structure and processes of the judicial system with emphasis on the role and influence of the Supreme Court

- The development of civil rights and civil liberties by judicial interpretation
- The Bill of Rights
- Incorporation of the Bill of Rights
- Equal protection and due process

15–20% Political Parties and Interest Groups

- Political parties (including their function, organization, mobilization, historical development and effects on the political process)
- Interest groups (including the variety of activities they typically undertake and their effects on the political process)
- Elections (including the electoral process)

10–15% Political Beliefs and Behavior

- Processes by which citizens learn about politics
- Political participation (including voting behavior)
- Public opinion
- Beliefs that citizens hold about their government and its leaders
- Political culture (the variety of factors that predispose citizens to differ from one another in terms of their political perceptions, values, attitudes and activities)
- The influence of public opinion on political leaders

15–20% Constitutional Underpinnings of American Democracy

The development of concepts such as:

- Federalism (with attention to intergovernmental relations)
- Separation of powers
- Checks and balances
- Majority rule
- Minority rights
- Considerations that influenced the formulation and adoption of the Constitution
- Theories of democracy

Study Resources

Most textbooks used in college-level American Government courses cover the topics in the outline given earlier, but the approaches to certain topics and the emphases given to them may differ. To prepare for the American Government exam, it is advisable to study one or more college textbooks. A recent survey conducted by CLEP® found that the following textbooks are among those used by college faculty who teach the equivalent course. You might find one or more of these for sale online or at your local college bookstore. HINT: Look at the table of contents

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first to make sure it matches the Knowledge and Skills Required for this exam.

Lowi and Ginsberg, <i>American Government: Freedom and Power</i> (W. W. Norton)
Patterson, <i>The American Democracy</i> (McGraw-Hill)
Wolf et al., <i>Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics</i> (Congressional Quarterly)
O'Brien et al., <i>Government by the People</i> (Prentice Hall)
Jacobson and Kernell, <i>The Logic of American Politics</i> (Congressional Quarterly)
Wilson, <i>American Government</i> (Wadsworth)
Welch et al., <i>Understanding American Government: The Essentials</i> (Wadsworth)
Bardes et al., <i>American Government and Politics Today: The Essentials</i> (Wadsworth)
Edwards et al., <i>Government in America: Brief Edition</i> (Longman)
Fiorina et al., <i>America's New Democracy</i> (Longman)
Janda et al., <i>The Challenge of Democracy</i> (Wadsworth)
O'Connor and Sabato, <i>American Government: Continuity and Change</i> (Longman)

These resources, compiled by the CLEP test development committee and staff members, may help you study for your exam. However, none of these sources are designed specifically to provide preparation for a CLEP exam. The College Board has no control over their content and cannot vouch for accuracy.

<http://congress.indiana.edu> (The Center on Congress)

<http://www.citizenjoe.org>

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/constpap.asp
(Primary documents at Yale)

<http://www.montereyinstitute.org/nroc/nrocdemos.html>
(Online course — click on American Government link)

Visit www.collegeboard.com/clepprep for additional American government resources. You can also find suggestions for exam preparation in Chapter IV of the *CLEP Official Study Guide*. In

addition, many college faculty post their course materials on their schools' websites.

Sample Test Questions

The following sample questions do not appear on an actual CLEP examination. They are intended to give potential test-takers an indication of the format and difficulty level of the examination and to provide content for practice and review. For more sample questions and info about the test, see the *CLEP Official Study Guide*.

1. Which of the following best explains the consistent growth of the federal bureaucracy over the past hundred years?

- (A) Increases in federal income tax since 1925
- (B) The inability of Congress to cut programs
- (C) The success of Democratic presidents in promoting their policies
- (D) Public demand for, and expectation of, social services
- (E) United States Supreme Court rulings requiring Congress to assist those living in poverty

2. Public opinion is given a lot of attention in democracies because the democratic form of government rests on

- (A) underwriting by the wealthy
- (B) access to politicians
- (C) the consent of the governed
- (D) mobilization of the poor
- (E) the capabilities of bureaucrats

3. An oral statement that is false and intended to damage an individual is known as

- (A) slander
- (B) libel
- (C) testimony
- (D) argument
- (E) free speech

4. Which of the following is clearly a task charged to the Federal Reserve as a regulatory agency?

- (A) Protecting market users and the public from fraud, manipulation and abusive practices related to the sale of commodity and financial futures and options

- (B) Eliminating and preventing what regulators perceive to be harmfully anticompetitive business practices, such as coercive monopolies
- (C) Disclosing campaign-finance information and overseeing the public funding of presidential elections
- (D) Developing government-wide, cost-minimizing policies and offering superior workplaces, expert solutions, acquisition services and management policies
- (E) Providing financial services to depository institutions, the United States government and foreign institutions, as well as playing a key role in operating the nation's payments system
5. Although the Constitution does not explicitly give Congress the right to enact a military draft, which clause in the Constitution allows Congress to do so?
- (A) Necessary and proper clause
- (B) Take care clause
- (C) Taxing and spending clause
- (D) Due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment
- (E) Equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment
6. The formation of numerous interest groups during the post-Civil War industrialization shows the
- (A) influence of debates about slavery on the public
- (B) growing influence of women's rights groups
- (C) minimal influence of the federal government on group formation
- (D) influence of social tensions and economic stress on group formation
- (E) shift in federal government funding for interest groups

Credit Recommendations

The American Council on Education has recommended that colleges grant 3 credits for a score of 50, which is equivalent to a course grade of C, on the CLEP American Government exam. Each college, however, is responsible for setting its own policy. For candidates with satisfactory scores on the American Government examination, colleges may grant credit toward fulfillment of a distribution requirement, or for a particular course that matches the exam in content. Check with your school to find out the score it requires for granting credit, the number of credit hours granted and the course that can be bypassed with a passing score.

Answers to Sample Questions: 1-D; 2-C; 3-A; 4-E; 5-A; 6-D.