

Final Exam: Issues in American Politics and Government

The exam for this course consists of an oral exam with a written synopsis. The oral examination takes about 25–30 minutes. The synopsis should be about 800-1200 words (2-3 type-written pages). During the oral examination, about one half of the time will be spent on the synopsis and the other half will be spent on topics covered in the course as a whole. The exam will take place in English and the synopsis must be written in English.

For the written synopsis, each student should select a contemporary political issue, debate, controversy, or policy question in the United States, briefly describe the issue and why it is controversial in the United States, and then assess the role of different institutional, legal, cultural, historical, and/or attitudinal factors involved in the controversy. Factors to consider in your analysis might include:

- Political institutions and the relationships between institutions
- Federalism and the division of responsibilities between local, state, and national governments
- The role of particular politicians and political actors (e.g., activists, parties, interest groups, etc.)
- Public opinion, partisanship, ideology, and American political values or culture
- Issues of constitutionality, legality, and judicial review
- Framing and arguments on each side of the controversy
- Inequalities of race, gender, income, class, etc.
- American history and the contents of extant legislation and prior political debates

The synopsis does not need to address all of these facets of the debate. Instead, the document should highlight the factors most important to: the existence of the controversy, political debate surrounding the controversy, and any relevant policy activity.

Students will have the opportunity to present, defend, and receive feedback on the written synopsis during the final class sessions.