

Iowa Core – Davenport Schools
Priority Essential Concepts and Skills for U.S. Government or AP U.S. Government & Politics
with Details and Examples

Introduction

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

Definition of Social Studies
National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The founders of our country emphasized that the vitality and security of a democracy depends upon the education and willingness of its citizens to participate actively in society. This level of participation requires civic competence. In other words, it is imperative that our future generations gain an understanding of the core concepts of social studies. Life in the United States within our democratic system is constantly changing which creates varying social circumstances. As a result, citizens need to adapt to such changes in order to sustain vital democratic traditions. Meeting this need is the mission of the social studies.

In social studies, students develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions, including but not limited to:

- Possessing basic knowledge and ways of thinking drawn from many academic disciplines
- Expressing ideas in written form
- Reading reflectively and critically
- Analyzing their own and others' opinions on social issues
- Becoming motivated to participate in civic and community life as active and informed citizens

As we work to carry on the ideals of the founders, we are compelled to revisit our fundamental beliefs and institutions and to construct new social contexts and relationships. The Iowa Core for Social Studies reflects the belief that the informed social studies student comprehends and applies to personal and public experiences the core content perspectives of the many academic fields of the social studies. Our entire social experiences, as well as our republic, are established upon the principles of individual citizenship. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the education of those future citizens.

For that reason, the Iowa Core for Social Studies has been structured around five core social studies content areas. They are:

- Behavioral Sciences
- Economics
- Geography
- History
- Political Science/Civic Literacy

For each area, knowledge and skills have been identified and defined in terms of detailed understandings that students should be able to apply. It is of key importance that students possess the knowledge and skills associated with the economic, political, and social forces that make up the human systems in which they live. In addition, they must possess the historical knowledge which created the spatial, temporal, and cultural perspectives present in our world.

The Iowa Core for Social Studies is premised upon a rigorous and relevant K – 12 social studies program. Engaging students in the pursuit of active informed citizenship will require a broad range of understandings and skills. It will also require an articulated curriculum which connects students to the social world through informed instructional experiences led by teachers who are committed to active civic participation. This represents a bold step toward a vision of social and civic literacy for all of Iowa’s students.

Political Science/Civic Literacy

NOTE: The Essential Concepts and Skills listed in Social Studies – Political Science/Civic Literacy are the same as the Essential Concepts and Skills listed in 21st Century Skills – Civic Literacy.

Political science is the study of power and authority through the examination of political processes, governmental institutions, and human behavior in a civil society. In this context the study of civics is understood to include the form and function of government. Civic literacy encompasses civics but also addresses the individual's social and political participation.

U.S. Government or AP U.S. Government & Politics Course Priorities - Details and Examples

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand the rights and responsibilities of each citizen and demonstrate the value of lifelong civic action.*

Examples:

- Understand rights, roles, and status of the individual in relation to the general welfare.
- Understand that constitutional democracy requires the participation of an attentive, knowledgeable, and competent citizenry.
- Understand personal, political, and economic rights are secured by constitutional government, the rule of law, checks and balances, an independent judiciary, and a vigilant citizenry.
- Understand ways citizens participate in the political process at local, state, and national levels.
- Understand the importance of becoming knowledgeable about public affairs.
- Understand the importance of voluntarism as a characteristic of American society.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand how the government established by the Constitution embodies the enduring values and principles of democracy and republicanism.*

Examples:

- Understand the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society.
- Understand the role of government in major areas of domestic and foreign policy.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand the purpose and function of each of the three branches of government established by the Constitution.*

Examples:

- Understand the purpose of government and how its powers are acquired, used and justified.
- Understand the necessity of politics and government.
- Understand the purposes, organization, and functions of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches and the independent regulatory agencies.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand the differences among the complex levels of local, state and national government and their inherent, expressed, and implied powers.*

Examples:

- Understand the design and features of the Constitution prevent the abuse of power by aggregating power at the national, state, and local levels and using a system of checks and balances.
- Understand provisions of the Constitution and principles of the constitutional system help to insure a government that will not exceed its limits.
- Understand the limits the United States Constitution places on the powers of the states and on the powers of the national government over state governments.
- Understand the policies of state and local governments provide citizens with ways to monitor and influence the actions of members of government and hold them responsible for their actions.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand strategies for effective political action that impact local, state, and national governance.*

Examples:

- Understand participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.
- Understand the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand how law and public policy are established at the local, state, and national levels of government.*

Examples:

- Understand the purposes and functions of law.
- Understand the processes by which public policy concerning a local, state, or national issue is formed and carried out.
- Understand issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand how various political systems throughout the world define the rights and responsibilities of the individual.*

Examples:

- Understand ideologies, structures, institutions, processes and political cultures of different political systems in the world.
- Understand the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments.

Essential Concept and/or Skill: *Understand the role of the United States in current world affairs.*

Examples:

- Understand conditions, actions and motivations that contribute to conflict and cooperation within and among nations.
- Understand the significance of foreign policies and events in the United States' relations with the world.
- Understand the idea of national interest and how it is used as a criterion for shaping American foreign policy.
- Understand the effects that significant world political developments have on the United States.
- Understands the influence that American ideas about rights have had abroad and how other peoples' ideas about rights have influenced Americans.

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