The California Government Challenge Exam Guidelines

The California Government Challenge Exam is provided for students who have completed a course in American Government in another state. Because the CSU Institutions Requirement includes California Government, this exam can allow students to avoid retaking American Government.

The California Institutions Requirement, as required in CSU Executive Order 405 and Title 5: 40404, requires the teaching of “the Constitution of the United States, the operation of representative government under that Constitution, and the process of California State and local government” including the “political philosophies of the framers of the Constitution and the nature and operation of the United States political institutions and processes under the Constitution as amended and interpreted; the rights and obligations of citizens in the political system established under the Constitution; the Constitution of the State of California within the framework of evolution of Federal-State relations and the nature and processes of State and local government under the Constitution; and contemporary relationships of State and local government with the Federal government, the resolution of conflicts and the establishment of cooperative processes under the constitutions of both the State and nation and the political processes involved.”

By passing the challenge exam you are demonstrating that you have independently studied to understand the structure, institutions and procedures of state government as well as the interaction of the state with the Federal Government. This is a substantial amount of information and, as a result, passing the exam requires that you demonstrate substantial amount of knowledge on the essays that are chosen for you. There are several California Government Texts available in the library. Please consult them as you prepare to take the exam.

About the Essay Questions

Each of the questions explores a different aspect of state government. You will notice that each includes multiple parts. Make sure that you fully answer all of the parts of the essay. Remember, a paragraph is not an essay. You should plan on about at least 500 words for each essay. Most students who do not pass the challenge exam fail because they have not demonstrated a through understanding of the concepts involved.

For example, look at the first essay:

California’s government still is strongly influenced by the Progressive Movement that dominated the state in the early decades of the 20th century. Describe the Progressive Movement, how it developed and three aspects of California government today and how those aspects reflect that progressive legacy.
You would want to describe the Progressive Movement’s origins, that is what was the problem that it sought to address and how did it go about doing so. Then you would want at least a paragraph each on the three aspects of modern California Government, describing how each operate and how that reflects the Progressive Legacy. In answering this question you will be demonstrating your understanding of the movement that shaped modern California Government and three aspects of current governmental process.

Here is another essay:

James Madison once praised the US Constitution for protecting minorities from the ‘tyranny of the majority.” Minority rights refer to decisions made in accordance with the principle that majority rule should not unreasonably and unfairly infringe upon the rights of minorities. Proposition 13 (1978) applied this principle to government spending. What did Proposition 13 do and how does it illustrate that the minority can block the will of the majority. Recently California voters decided to amend the Proposition to require a simple majority to pass a budget. Why was this felt to be necessary?

To answer this correctly, you would need to know what Proposition 13 was, why people supported it and what effect that it had on Government. Then another paragraph explaining how it provides a minority to block the will of the majority. Then look why the state changed that back to requiring only a simple minority. In doing so, you will be demonstrating that you understand how citizens outside of government can take direct action to change the state Constitution, how the state led the nation in what came to be called “The Tax Revolt,” the problems that it caused for the state government.

If you have any additional questions on the exam, please contact the Politics Department (826-4494 - politics@humboldt.edu) and they will direct you to one of the faculty who can assist you in preparing to take the exam.