

INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL AND LEGAL EXPERIENCES

Introduction and Description:

IPLA is an elective offered to students of varying abilities in eleventh and twelfth grade. The course is affiliated with the Eagleton Institute and the New Jersey Bar Association. The course uses materials and approaches from these institutions as well as other sources. All students will be asked to actively and responsibly participate in all activities and simulations (ie. Mock Election, Mock Trial, Local Government Projects, et al). The course offers four major units of study:

- I. The election Unit
- II. The Constitution Unit
- III. Decision Making and Local Government Unit
- IV. The American Legal System Unit

This political Science/ Law related course goes beyond simple classroom, desk oriented learning. Besides being educated in various aspects of the political, governmental and legal process, the student may help educate his peers in various civic responsibilities through speakers, forums, simulations and class trips.

Students choosing this course are expected to have a genuine interest in studying the process as well as be prepared to experience and participate in the process through projects like voter registration drives and by volunteering for public and political organizations. The student taking this course must be ready to complete assignments inside and outside the classroom and communicate the experience with the instructor and the class.

Rationale:

Recent surveys and national studies show a sharp decline in voting and civic participation especially among the 18-25 year old age group. The course makes an attempt to confront this serious problem by not only exposing students to the process but have them see that they have a stake in it. It is the ultimate goal of this course to produce active and cognizant citizens, who are aware of how to make a difference in this country and the larger world.

The IPLA class serves a dual purpose in our schools. It educates the students who elect to take the course and provides an important civic purpose to the entire student body and larger community. It provides voter registration for seniors and new residents, candidate assemblies, information forums, mock debates, mock elections and mock trials. In basic terms, the IPLA program makes the high school student more aware of their role as active participants in the American Democratic system.

IPLA provides essential reinforcement of various group and individual skills. The course places emphasis on critical reading and writing which includes current periodicals

like magazines and newspapers. The written projects are varied between article essays, reaction papers, legal briefs, and research papers. Each marking period includes major group activities that will require participation from the entire class.

The Constitution and the Bill of Rights will be studied, analyzed and presented through the “We the People” student text. The “We the People” program accompanies the text, which is provided by the Center for Civic Education and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, by act of Congress. The students analyze and familiarize themselves with six units of study within the text. They eventually specialize in one unit of study for a formal competition conducted by the sponsor of the program. In the competition students demonstrate the quality of their learning before a panel of experts. This type of format provides an excellent learning opportunity in the form of cooperative learning groups who must think on their feet during the questioning stage of the program. The unit produces students who are more aware of these great legal documents and it provides the students with the essential foundation of solid participatory citizenship.

The course is important in terms of career education as well. Certainly any student interested in law, politics, lobbying, the media and government processes would be advised to take this course. A minimum accumulative grade of sixty percent is required in order to attain five credits toward graduation at the conclusion of a four marking period school year. The unique contract grading system (see sample) employed in the course allows students to cater the level of responsibility and assessment to their own expectations and interests.

IPLC is more than just another social studies course. It is realistic experience in how the American governmental system works at various levels. Through the various student centered projects and discussion, students will raise their social consciousness and encourage them to act upon this new awareness.

Suggested Teaching Plan

The philosophy of IPLC class is student centered. It is helpful for the teacher to expand his or her role to that of coordinator/facilitator of the program rather than classroom teacher. The materials designed by the institute for Political and Legal Education and Center for Civic Education do not lend themselves to a teacher centered classroom environment. Lectures should definitely be the exception, not the rule. Most of the concepts in this course are assimilated by students through assigned text book readings and outside readings. It is strongly recommended that study including critical thinking be reinforced in this course.

Students should be encouraged to master the skill of summarizing important concepts derived from discussions and other classroom activities. Students will be encouraged to reflect and react to many of the class activities and speakers through reaction essays and papers.

WEST WINDSOR – PLAINSBORO HIGH SCHOOL
COURSE PROFICIENCIES

Introduction to Legal and Political Experience (IPLE)

Description: Legal and Political Experience, an elective social studies course for students in grades eleven and twelve, attempts to provide real life and practical experiences. An emphasis is placed on the role of state, local, and federal governments in determining the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Students will have the opportunity to participate in workshops in and conferences with community members with a variety of political backgrounds. It is crucial that parents and student understand that this course is an **activity based, student-centered** course.

Textbooks: Street Law, West Publishing Co., 1995; Politics: The American Way, Allyn and Bacon, 1979; American Government, Mc Gruder, Allyn and Bacon, 1997.

Expectations: Students electing this course are expected to have a genuine interest in politics and the legal system of the country; to participate in local campaigns and workshops; to read extensively from works of fiction and non-fiction to acquire knowledge and understanding of important ideas and experts in the fields of politics & law; to acquire a factual knowledge of theories and historical events that have contributed to the development of the political system; to respond orally and in writing to questions and ideas; to work independently, investigating and developing research projects; to develop and enter into a learning contract; and to contribute to class and small group simulations and activities.

Measurable

Proficiencies: To demonstrate proficiency in the content and skill areas of this course, the student will:

1. Acquire and use vocabulary and jargon related to politics and the legal system
2. Develop a working knowledge of the Constitution and Bill of Rights which can be expressed orally and in writing.
3. Respond orally and in writing to ideas and questions related to study, and to observe the conventions of standard English;
4. Complete the requirements of a learning contract
5. Produce and defend, both orally and in writing, research based projects
6. Participate in local community activities, political campaigns, and other political activities
7. Visit and report on local court proceedings;
8. Work cooperatively with classmates in a variety of enrichment activities, including discussion, research, and debate.

Methods of evaluation used to determine levels of understanding and mastery of skills will include: (a) tests and quizzes (b) rubrics in a variety of activities, including but not limited to position papers, reaction papers, scored discussions, mock trials and debates, and journal entries.

Minimum successful completion of the course will be indicated with a "D" grade. Percentages and letter grades are aligned as follows: "A", 100-90; "B", 89-80, "C", 79-70, "D", 69-60, "F", 59 and below.

Student

Responsibility: It is the responsibility of the student to share the above information with parents and/or guardians. **Students are required to fulfill the conditions of their contract.**

IPLE OVERVIEW

Unit I Elections

- ✓ Politics, liberty and authority, voting behavior
- ✓ Role of candidates, contributors, campaigns, voters and media in the political process
- ✓ How do political relationships effect elections?
- ✓ What do election outcomes mean for the future?

Issues: Taxes, Security, Economy, Environment

Unit II The Constitution

- ✓ Philosophical and historical foundations
- ✓ Creation of the constitution
- ✓ Values and Principles that shape institutions
- ✓ Bill of Rights development and expansion
- ✓ Freedoms and Protections
- ✓ Roles of citizens in our Democracy

Unit III Local Government and the Decision Making Process

- ✓ Levels of government and application
- ✓ Process and application
- ✓ Role players at each level
- ✓ Problems and potential solutions

Unit IV The Law

- ✓ What is Law?
- ✓ Judicial Interpretation
- ✓ Criminal Law-procedures and application
- ✓ Corrections
- ✓ Juvenile Law
- ✓ Civil Law-procedures and application
 - Negligence
 - Strict Liability
 - Intentional