

## Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2019 AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government and Politics Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	314,825		
• Number of Readers	1,039		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	40,633	12.9
	4	39,135	12.4
	3	93,713	29.8
	2	78,210	24.8
	1	63,134	20.1
• Global Mean	2.73		

The following comments on the 2019 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Stephen Meinhold, Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina Wilmington. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

**Question #1****Task:** Concept Application **Topic:** Congressional Behavior**Max. Points:** 3**Mean Score:** 1.84***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This question expected students to be familiar with the legislative process of Congress and how an ideologically based interest group interprets civil liberties in the United States Constitution. Students were also expected to apply this knowledge to a scenario about how a law passed by Congress affects the ability of religiously based interest groups to participate in politics.

***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?***

Student performance applying their knowledge of course content in the context of the provided scenario was strong. In part A most students described an action that could be taken by Congress to address the Johnson Amendment, a law that prohibits religiously based groups from participating in politics. A common response suggested that Congress could pass legislation that would eliminate the original law in its entirety. An alternative response was that Congress could pass a Constitutional Amendment that might later be ratified by states to address the issue in the scenario. Both of these responses applied appropriate content understanding in the context of the scenario and received credit. In part B students had to demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of the legislative process in Congress and explain some of the potential barriers to the congressional action. The knowledge required for part B included an understanding of the ideological positions of the two major political parties and how this interacts with the structure of Congress to make passing a bill or amendment more difficult. For instance, the bicameral structure of Congress can sometimes prevent action if the two chambers are divided by party. The rules of specific chambers, for example the filibuster, might also be noted as a tool for a minority party to prevent action in the Senate. This part of the question proved most challenging to students as it required a more reflective understanding of how ideology and institutions can intersect and produce an outcome. In part C students needed to connect the grievance expressed by the interest group in the scenario to the concept of freedom of speech in the First Amendment, and many students showed an ability to do this.

***What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?***

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
Part A: Assuming that holding hearings or having interviews with interest group members is a correct action	“An action Congress could take would be to pass legislation which would allow religious leaders to contribute money to political campaigns and speak in favor of/against candidates running for office.”
Part B: Not understanding that issues/ideology can drive partisanship on specific issues	“...if the Senate is controlled by Republicans, they may pass the new bill in order to benefit a conservative interest group. However, if the House is controlled by the Democrats, they may not pass the bill due to the majority being liberal.”
Part C: Assuming the 14th Amendment or the Commerce	“As established by <i>Citizens United v. FEC</i> donating money to campaigns is considered political speech, which is protected by the First Amendment. Therefore, by restricting religious leaders’

Clause is a right harmed by the Johnson Amendment	ability to donate money to campaigns, the Alliance Defending Freedom can argue that their rights are being violated.”
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**Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?**

Teachers should emphasize the application of political concepts and processes from the course to scenarios in context. Students should be able to recall relevant course information and apply it to new scenarios.

**What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?**

AP Classroom, which contains the Personal Progress Checks and AP Question Bank, will have questions paired with specific course content, practices and skills, i.e. concept application, which teachers can use as formative assessments to help prepare their students.

The Online Teacher Community includes a library of resources that can be searched by disciplinary practices, skills, content, and resource type. Visit <https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/group/apgopo-us/resource-library/>

Teaching and Assessing Module Unit 2: Concept Application. Visit <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/professional-development/online-pd/teaching-modules?course=ap-united-states-government-and-politics>

**Question #2****Task:** FRQ Quantitative Analysis**Topic:** How Political Parties Change and Adapt**Max. Points:** 4**Mean Score:** 2.30***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This question expected students to identify data presented in a quantitative stimulus. Responses also needed to describe similarities and/or differences from the stimulus and connect how that data would shape a presidential candidate's message when moving from the primary to the general election. Finally, responses also needed to explain how the data from the stimulus would influence the policy-making process. Since this task involved the integration of the skill of quantitative analysis and content knowledge, responses were expected to use the data in their responses. Students were also expected to demonstrate understanding of how the legislative and executive branches interact and how partisan differences can affect that interaction.

***How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?***

The task of data analysis in this question required students to demonstrate increasingly higher order thinking skills, applying their substantive knowledge of course content and integrating the skill of data analysis. Students were required to read and interpret the data and then use the data to show an understanding of the political process.

***What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?***

Most students were able to identify data in the bar graph, and many were able to also detect a trend within the data. However, some students were not able to analyze and apply the data to course content. A common gap in knowledge was a lack of understanding of the presidential election process and the complexities of the policy making interactions between the president and Congress.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
Difficulty or failure to read a stacked area horizontal bar graph	"Most people's political affiliation with the idea that elected officials should compromise are Democrats"
Describing a difference given a set of complex data	"Republicans generally feel as if officials in government should stick to their principals and not give into compromise. Democrats on the contrary, generally believe that sticking to principles in not as important as compromise is."
Explaining a shift from nomination phase of a presidential election to the general election phase.	"After securing a presidential nomination, the first thing candidates want to do is try to appeal to more voters by shifting their positions. Based on the graph and data provided, a Republican candidate might try to show more support in compromise, to appeal to the independent voters especially 57% of independent voters believe in and support compromise, so if the candidate shifts to support compromise a little more, he/she can pick up more independent voters."

<p>Explaining how the institutions of government interact in the policy making arena given data on voter preferences for the president and Congress.</p>	<p>"The data in the bar graph shows that Democrats are more likely to compromise than are Republicans. If this data were to be taken in with how the government is divided today, it would show how the gridlock today affects the policy making process. For example, we have a Republican president, and the senate is controlled by Republicans, but the House is controlled by Democrats, the Democrats in the House might want to pass legislation regarding abortions, but it is obvious that the president does not like the legislation and will likely veto it. The Democrats are more likely to push for a compromise so that they get their abortion legislation, but the president also gets something out of the deal, like votes on a piece of his legislation. However, the president Republican, and is more likely to stick to his principles based on the data, so he might not compromise on the legislation at all. This ultimately causes gridlock in the policy making process."</p>
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***What advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?***

Classroom teachers help students to identify and understand the different types of graphs, charts, and data that they will encounter in political science research and in the everyday media. Using resources like the Gallup Poll or Pew Research Center will provide students with exposure to various types of data and data visualization

Teachers should connect data and content, giving students multiple opportunities to experience different data sources as they fit into the curriculum. In the case of this FRQ, students needed to know how to read an unusual graph and show how the data in it might affect political processes and behaviors, along with how institutions interact with each other in the policy making process.

A good source from AP Central in the Teaching and Assessing Modules discusses common student challenges with describing data and identifying patterns and trends. Unit 2: Data Analysis and Concept Analysis can be asses through your College Board login or AP Course Audit. This module will help classroom teachers to discuss common student challenges with describing data and identifying patterns and trends.

***What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?***

AP Classroom, which contains the Personal Progress Checks and AP Question Bank, will have questions paired with specific course content, practices and skills (i.e. quantitative analysis), that teachers can use as formative assessments to help prepare their students.

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Teaching and Assessing Module Units 2 and 4: Data Analysis. Visit <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/professional-development/online-pd/teaching-modules?course=ap-united-states-government-and-politics>

**Question #3****Task:** SCOTUS Comparison **Topic:** Government Responses to Social Movements**Max. Points:** 4**Mean Score:** 1.74**What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?**

This question expected students to read a case summary of a nonrequired Supreme Court case (*Hernandez v. Texas*) and compare it to a case required in the course (*Brown v. Board of Education*). Students were asked to identify the common clause of the United States Constitution that applied to both cases. Students were then to explain how the facts in both cases led to the Supreme Court reaching a similar decision in both. Finally, students were expected to demonstrate an understanding of the tactics an interest group would use to advance its agenda in favor of the nonrequired case (*Hernandez*).

**How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?**

- The task of comparing the required case content to a nonrequired case presented in the question necessitates students to demonstrate increasingly higher order thinking skills, applying their substantive knowledge of case facts, decisions and holdings, while integrating comparison skills.
  - The majority of responses indicated that the student had at least a rudimentary understanding of the required case, and more advanced students were able to effectively compare the two cases.
  - The skills of comparison and application of knowledge into a scenario were required to successfully answer the questions. Most students were able to get at least some credit for the comparison skill in parts A and B. Students had the most difficulty explaining how the non-required case applied to a scenario in context in part C, in this case how an interest group could use the decision in *Hernandez* to advance its agenda.

**What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?**

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
Most students could identify the equal protection clause, but the most common error was that the due process clause was referenced instead. Many responses also included a reference to the “separate but equal” clause, which students mistakenly thought was part of the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment rather than the precedent established in <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> .	“In both <i>Brown v Board</i> and <i>Hernandez v Texas</i> , the equal protection clause of the 14 <sup>th</sup> amendment was used as the basis of the decision.”
Most students were familiar with the required case, but the most common error was that the students entered into a discussion of the ruling(s) rather than the facts of the case(s). Many students discussed the precedent and reasoning in	<p>“[A] young African-American girl faced discrimination as she was not allowed to go to a school near her home that was all-white.”</p> <p>“In <i>Hernandez</i>, there was discrimination ... when an all-white jury convicted A Mexican-American man of murder.”</p>

<p><i>Brown</i>, rather the facts that led to a similar decision in <i>Texas v. Hernandez</i>.</p>	<p>“In both cases there was evident discrimination that violates the equal protection clause.”</p>
<p>Students often struggled to explain how an interest group could advance their agenda using the precedent. Students often described the agenda (“stop racism,” “stop discrimination,” “prove racism exists,” etc.), but they struggled to identify a specific interest group strategy and/or how that strategy could be used to advance an agenda.</p>	<p>“An interest group could write amicus curiae briefs for the Supreme Court ... in which they cite the Hernandez decision as reason for the court to rule a certain way ... resulting in a decision that fulfills the interest group’s agenda.”</p>

**Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?**

- Teachers should emphasize that when a question asks for “the clause” from the Constitution or a constitutional amendment, there is only one right answer. In this case, equal protection clause.
- Teachers should emphasize the difference between the facts of a case and the reasoning, decision, and majority opinions in a case.
- Teachers should emphasize that, when asked to compare facts from two cases, students should include facts from both in their responses. Students should not assume that, since the facts for the unknown case are included in the prompt, they do not have to include them in their response.

**What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?**

AP Classroom, which contains the Personal Progress Checks and AP Question Bank, will have questions paired with specific course content, practices and skills (i.e. SCOTUS Comparison), which teachers can use as formative assessments to help prepare their students.

The Online Teacher Community includes a library of resources that can be searched by disciplinary practices, skills, content, and resource type. Visit <https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/group/apgopo-us/resource-library/>

Teaching and Assessing Module Unit 3: Supreme Court Case Analysis. Visit <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/professional-development/online-pd/teaching-modules?course=ap-united-states-government-and-politics>

**Question #4****Task:** Argument Essay**Topic:** Relationship Between the Federal Government and the States**Max. Points:** 6**Mean Score:** 3.34***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This question expected students to demonstrate an understanding of federalism and its impact on policymaking as well as an understanding of foundational documents related to the concept of federalism (the Articles of Confederation, *The Federalist* #10, and Brutus 1).

Students were expected to articulate a defensible claim/thesis and establish a line of reasoning, support the thesis with evidence from a foundational document or the course, use reasoning to explain why the evidence provided supports the thesis, and respond to an alternate perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal. Students were expected to write in the form of an argumentative essay, demonstrating each of the skills mentioned above.

***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?***

The different tasks within this question required students to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills, applying their substantive knowledge about federalism while using the argumentation practice from the course. This type of question requires the content knowledge from the course to be integrated with the practices, and most students were successful in demonstrating some substantive knowledge and some of the practices associated with the argumentative essay. Most students were successful in providing a correct piece of specific and relevant evidence related to the prompt. Students generally demonstrated an understanding of federalism, with most students being able to articulate how it connects to policymaking. Students also were generally successful in articulating a defensible claim with a line of reasoning to support the thesis. Students who provided a correct thesis were generally able to provide at least one piece of evidence that supported the thesis, with most being able to provide a correct piece of evidence from one of the provided foundational documents. Students were least successful in providing reasoning to explain why their evidence supported their thesis and in responding to an alternate perspective.

***What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?***

For the thesis portion of the question the most frequent error was simply restating the prompt without establishing a line of reasoning. For the evidence portion of the question the most frequent error was mixing up foundational documents (e.g., mentioning *Federalist* 10, but describing *Federalist* 51 instead). For the reasoning portion of the question, the most frequent error was restating the thesis or the prompt rather than explaining why the evidence supported the thesis. For the alternate perspective portion of the question, the most frequent errors were not first providing a correct description of an alternate perspective before responding to it, or correctly describing an alternate perspective without responding to it.



<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response restates the prompt rather than establishing a line of reasoning for their claim/thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[E]xpanded powers of the national government benefits policy making, because a singular leadership is more effective than separated powers.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorrectly using foundational documents, including using the title of one document with a description of a different document</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In Federalist 10, it talks about how majority faction can take over in a small government or a state government. This means that faction can form and develop in a small government.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restating the thesis or the prompt rather than explaining why the evidence supported the thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So with the national government having more expanded powers over a larger populated area, majority factions are much less likely to form and suppress opinion of the minority that the national government would take into consideration when creating new policy.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not describing an alternate perspective and responding to it using refutation, concession, or rebuttal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A strong central government might become tyrannical, however national government contains checks and balances... enough to keep the national government loyal to the people and the Constitution.”</li> </ul>

**Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?**

- Emphasize the benefit of beginning the response with a clear thesis that goes beyond restating the prompt, taking a clear position that establishes a line of reasoning. For example, “a stronger federal government benefits policymaking *because ...*”
- Spend time conducting structured, mini-lessons that break down each section of the argumentative essay: design exercises based around thesis creation, with a heavy emphasis on crafting thesis statements that take a clear position and establish a line of reasoning; create a lesson centered around how to accurately describe the information contained within the foundational documents, and practices designed to analyze and explain how the information found in these documents relate to both course concepts and more current events in order to better develop reasoning skills.
- Each section of the essay should be addressed as a separate skill for which students should work toward mastery. After students become comfortable with each section, then classroom practices and assessments can be designed to integrate the various elements of a successful argumentative essay.

***What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?***

AP Classroom, which contains the Personal Progress Checks and AP Question Bank, will have questions paired with specific course content, practices and skills, i.e. argumentation, which teachers can use as formative assessments to help prepare their students.

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Teaching and Assessing Module Units 1 and 5: Argumentation. Visit <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/professional-development/online-pd/teaching-modules?course=ap-united-states-government-and-politics>