

## POS 2041 US Government Focused Essay Options for Unit Exams

**Carefully read and reflect upon the instructions below.**

### **Section III (15 points) – Focused Essay**

Response to the question or situation posed should be (1) logical in terms of structure and presentation, (2) coherent in terms of language, (3) competent in terms of content and definition and (4) effectively illustrated with appropriate ideas and/or facts. All of these dimensions will impact evaluation of your work. ***Two (2) options will be provided from which the student must respond to one (1).*** Questions are based on major themes considered during the appropriate unit of the course.

### **Unit I – Political Theory & Performance**

1. We have characterized all societies as organized around five major **social institutions** (belief, kinship, economic, educational and political). Assume that a society had an economy characterized by an abundance of goods and services. Would the other institutions be necessary? ***Explain why or why not each institution would or would not be necessary.***
2. Define the concept of “**political performance**” and select what are, from your perspective, the **four** (4) most important indicators of political performance in the current U.S. political system. ***Explain your selections.***
3. We have reviewed anthropology, economics, political science, psychology and sociology as disciplines of the traditional **social sciences**. ***Compare*** the different focus of **each** discipline and ***explain*** how **each** can be employed to study the government of the United States.
4. ***Define*** the concept of “**power**” and select what are, from your perspective, the **four** (4) most important types of power (governmental or non-governmental) employed in the United States. ***Explain your selections.***

### **Unit II – Political Participation**

1. As we have seen, “**political campaigns**” can involve numerous approaches and dimensions. In an effort to apply your knowledge and critical thinking skills, ***list and illustrate five*** (5) factors you would consider necessary in running a successful political campaign.

2. Since 1800 the United States has been characterized by a “**dominant two-party political system.**” *List and describe five (5) reasons for the development of such a system.*

3. The “*Electoral College*” system has been used for presidential elections since 1789. Do you think this is a fair and effective method for selecting the President of the United States? *If yes, explain five (5) reasons why. If no, explain five (5) reasons why not.*

4. One of the main concerns of American democracy is the extent to which citizens exercise their “**right to vote.**” *List and describe five (5) factors that impact voter participation in the United States.*

### **Unit III – The Legislative and Executive Branches**

1. In terms of voting and positions on various issues members of the U.S. House and Senate are influenced by many “**pressures.**” *Describe, and using specific examples to illustrate, discuss any five (5) pressures that might impact the judgment of members of the House and Senate.*

2. “**Presidential performance**” has been the subject of many studies and ratings scales. Select any President of the United States and, using five (5) constitutional or historical areas of power to *illustrate, evaluate* this president’s performance in office as **outstanding, average** or **poor.**

3. The “**chair**” of a congressional committee typically has more power than other legislators. *Describe, and using specific examples to illustrate, discuss any five (5) powers that can be employed by a committee chair in the House and Senate.*

4. The “**President of the United States**” has often been described as the most powerful political official on the planet. Using any five (5) constitutional or historical areas of presidential power to *illustrate, evaluate* whether or not this description is accurate.

### **Unit IV – The Judicial Branch**

1. The “scope of **judicial power** exercised by the U.S. Supreme Court” has expanded considerably since the *Marbury v. Madison* decision of 1803. Demonstrate your understanding of this history by *explaining* and *illustrating with specific cases* the Supreme Court’s operational power as related to:

- (a) the two areas of original jurisdiction mentioned in Article III of the U.S. Constitution
- (b) the branches of government in the United States
- (c) the levels of government in the United States
- (d) the rights of individuals

2. ***Using historical cases to illustrate explain*** how “decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court” have impacted American society in any five (5) of the following areas:

- (1) voting rights
- (2) freedom of speech
- (3) freedom of the press
- (4) freedom of religion
- (5) obscenity and pornography
- (6) search and seizure
- (7) rights of criminal defendants
- (8) capital punishment
- (9) right to privacy
- (10) equal protection of the laws

3. Engraved into the front of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. is the phrase “**EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW.**” Define the terms (a) equality, (b) justice and (c) law. Is this idea a reality in the United States of America? If yes, **explain why**. If no, **explain why not**.

4. The use of judicial power has often shifted between the “activist” and the “restrained” approaches to the interpretation of the law. **Activism** maintains that the U.S. Supreme Court should go beyond the words of the Constitution or a law to consider the broader implications of its decisions for society. **Restraint** maintains that the U.S. Supreme Court should not go beyond the words of the Constitution in making judgments. **Select any four** (4) cases listed below and (a) **identify** which approach (activism or restraint) was intended and (b) **explain why you agree or disagree** with the Court’s decision.

- (1) *McCulloch v Maryland* (1819)
- (2) *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896)
- (3) *Youngstown Sheet and Tube v Sawyer* (1952)
- (4) *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954)
- (5) *Engel v Vitale* (1962)
- (6) *Miller v California* (1973)
- (7) *Roe v Wade* (1973)
- (8) *District of Columbia v Heller* (2008)