

JRD GE Rationale for POL 10: American Government

Tom Knecht
Political Science

Introduction to the American Government is an excellent choice for the JRD GE. As the attached syllabus outlines, we analyze justice, injustice, and civil rights issues through the term using a biblical and theological perspective.

Certification Criteria

- 1. develop biblically and theologically grounded understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity. These will enable students to understand justice and reconciliation in terms of the gospel and appropriate disciplinary frameworks, recognize sin, rebellion, and brokenness as such, and discern their responsibility in the work of justice and reconciliation within their own local context;**
 - We explore biblically and theologically grounded understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity in many lectures and readings. One of the required readings is Amy Black's book, *Beyond Left and Right: Helping Christians Make Sense of American Politics* (I'm considering a switch to her newer book, *Honoring God in Red and Blue*). Both books do a great job of discussing how Christians should act in the public square in a manner that is accessible and challenging without being polarizing. I use Black's work as a discussion starter for most class sessions.
- 2. examine personal actions, social norms, and systemic practices involving race and racism in the United States as they relate to historic and contemporary patterns of belonging and exclusion, attending to how historical particularities and differences in power shape the responsibilities different parties have in the work of justice and reconciliation in light of God's kingdom;**
 - The course traces racism and antiracism from the founding to contemporary politics. Among other things, we look at what it means to be a citizen, how race is a political construction, whether "colorblindness" is a good or bad thing, how federalism leads to racial inequality, and how the separation of powers and checks and balances provide opportunities and challenges in the search for civil rights.
- 3. model Christlike dialogue reflecting God's desire for justice and reconciled relationships among all image-bearers, especially when confronting challenging or sensitive issues.**
 - We spend a lot of time in my classes discussing the difference between deliberation and debate. Deliberation is the thoughtful exchange of ideas with the possibility of preference change; debate is trying to win points in an argument with no chance of ever changing our minds. I want this to be a deliberative class, but there are limits. I explain that God calls us to seek justice and love others, which I see as a non-

negotiable commandment. However, we can disagree on how best to love our neighbor and achieve justice. We can even disagree about how to define justice.