

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**  
**Constitutions, Rights, and Power: An Introduction to Political Science**

PL SC 083S  
Fall 2015  
TR 2:30-3:45PM  
014 Life Sciences Bldg.

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Office: Pond Lab 232  
Office Hours: TR 1:00-2:00 PM  
(and by Appointment)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course aims to introduce first year students to the discipline of political science and to university life through an examination of constitutions. In the first part of the course, we will focus on the U.S. Constitution. We'll discuss how judges decide cases and interpret constitutions, and we'll also visit the library to learn about the resources it offers and how to incorporate source materials into our writing. In the second part of the course, we'll broaden our scope worldwide and discuss how constitutions vary worldwide. We'll compare constitutions and use data from the Comparative Constitutions Project as a foray into data analysis and the process of doing research. In the final part of the course, we'll talk about how, why, and whether constitutions "matter." We'll engage the literature on rights, both in the U.S. and internationally, as we seek to determine whether constitutions are effective barriers to human rights abuses and the expansion of governmental power. In this part of the course, we'll discuss how to present research, both orally and graphically, building on the writing skills we built in the first part of the course and the data and research skills we learned in the second part of the course.

**OBJECTIVES**

The aims of this course are fourfold.

1. *Introduce* you to all of the major subfields of political science (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Normative Theory, and Quantitative Methods). At the end of the course, you will be able to explain what makes political science unique as a discipline and to name some current controversies in each subfield of the discipline.
2. *Develop* your ability to communicate in writing and orally. At the end of the course, you will be able to articulate an argument clearly, following common grammatical and stylistic conventions.
3. *Provide* you with experience working with, interpreting, and presenting data. At the end of the course, you will be able to use statistical software to calculate descriptive statistics, create cross-tabulations, and to summarize data visually. You will also be able to interpret descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and graphical summaries of data correctly. Additionally, you will be able to read peer-reviewed research studies and explain how authors' arguments can (and are) tested using empirical methods.

4. *Connect* you with services on campus that will help you become a successful Penn State student. At the end of the course, you will be able to direct yourself and others to campus resources including academic advising, career advising, counseling, and library research.

### **HOW DO I SUCCEED?**

To succeed in this class, you *must*:

- Do the readings before class
- Participate in class
- Work hard to improve your writing
- Come to office hours. *Do not be shy about coming to office hours. Do not be shy about asking for help.* I want you to succeed, but can only help you if you help yourself: take advantage of my office hours.

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

- 1) Mark Graber. 2013. *A New Introduction to American Constitutionalism*. Oxford University Press.
- 2) Charles Epp. 1998. *The Rights Revolution*. University of Chicago Press.
- 3) Sanford Levinson. 2006. *Our Undemocratic Constitution*. Oxford University Press.
- 4) A series of supplementary readings will be distributed to students online.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The requirements for this course involve both (1) the completion of reading and writing assignments on your own outside of our class meetings and (2) your active and informed contributions to our course discussions when we meet. Our class time will be divided among lectures, discussions, in-class activities, and visits to helpful resources for you on campus.

SIX ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS (10% Each). You will write six short essays throughout the course of the semester. You'll workshop most of these essays with your peers before you submit them. I'll give you specific details about each essay as the semester progresses. You'll have the opportunity to revise one essay for a higher grade during the semester; if you choose to do this, you must submit (a) the original essay with my comments, (b) the revised essay, and (c) a one-page memo outlining the changes you've made.

DATA PRESENTATION (10%). Midway through the semester, we'll work on a project that explores constitutions in other countries. You'll analyze data using statistical software for the paper portion of the project (which will be one of your essay assignments), and you'll present your results to the class. This presentation will be graded separately from your essay. We'll discuss more details in class.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES AND SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (10%). Periodically, we'll do short, in-class activities that you'll turn in or I may ask you to prepare a short reading response to prepare for

a class discussion. These will be graded on a pass/fail basis, but your completion of these assignments will factor into your final grade.

**PARTICIPATION (20%).** The final portion of your grade is based on your ability and willingness to contribute to our class. Everyone’s experience in this course is enhanced by regular attendance and active participation; conversely, everyone’s experience suffers if individuals do not participate. Remember that a sincere question often adds as much (if not more) to our understanding of the course material as an explanation of the week’s readings. So, don’t be afraid to speak up!

Our class schedule includes a guest speaker, as well as trips to the library and the career services center. These days of class are exceptions to the “I don’t take attendance” policy. On these days, your attendance will directly factor into your participation grade. Likewise, your participation in in-class writing workshops will factor into this portion of your grade.

Please remember that attending class and sitting silently is not, by definition, “participation.” Also, please note that I do not penalize you directly for missing class (though multiple absences will adversely affect your grade through a lower participation score).

#### **SUMMARY OF DEADLINES AND ASSESSMENT**

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Essay #1 (What is a constitution?)	September 17
Essay #2 (How should we change the U.S. Constitution?)	October 1
Essay #3 (How is the U.S. different?)	October 29
Data Presentation	November 17 or 19
Essay #4 (What do the data say?)	November 19
Essay #5 (Do constitutions matter?)	December 10
Essay #6 (What do we know?)	Finals Week

#### **EXPECTATIONS/PROCEDURES**

**RESPECT.** In this course, we are all engaged in the endeavor of building a stronger understanding of political science, which is probably very different than what you learned about government in high school. Everyone comes to this course with a different background. It is important that we all treat each other with the utmost respect.

**OFFICE HOURS.** Please come. I’m here to help. If my office hours conflict with another commitment, please e-mail me to find a time that works for both of us to meet. I’m really serious about this; coming to office hours with serious questions is the best predictor of success in this course.

**WORKING TOGETHER.** I encourage you to work together as you think through your essay prompts and draft your essays. Indeed, you’ll workshop your essays with your peers! There is no better

way to master this material than to work together on it. However, every keystroke of what you type and every mark you make with a pencil or pen must be your own work.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Assignments not submitted by the assigned due date and time are late. Late submissions will be accepted; however, they will be subject to a one-half grade (5%) per day (including weekends) late penalty. All assignments must be completed in order to pass this course. I do not accept assignments over e-mail.

EXTENSIONS. Extensions will be granted in only the most severe circumstances. If you foresee the need for an extension, one needs to be requested and granted at least 24 hours before the due date. No one is entitled to an extension; they will be offered only at my discretion.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. I take violations of the University's academic dishonesty policy very seriously; it is printed on the next page. Please review the policy and let me know if you have any questions.

GRADING SCALE. The course will follow a standard grading scale:

93-100	A	80-82	B-
90-92	A-	77-79	C+
87-89	B+	70-76	C
83-86	B	60-69	D

REGARDING GRADES. I do not *give* grades. You *earn* grades. It is essential that you are proactive regarding your performance in this course; *do not wait* until grades are posted and then ask how your grade could be improved. At that point, barring a mathematical error on my part, it cannot be. If, at any point, you are unsure of your current standing in the course, please come to my office hours. I may (or may not) offer extra credit assignments to the entire class during the semester. I am sometimes asked about extra-credit or additional assignments after the final grades have been tallied by students who are unhappy with their grades. I will not offer such assignments to the class or individual students.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: <http://laus.la.psu.edu/current-students/academics/academic-integrity/college-policies>

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/>

Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

## **SCHEDULE**

Below, you'll find a list of all class meetings, the topic we'll discuss, and the reading assignment. You should complete the reading assignment before you come to class and bring any questions that you have with you to our class meetings. In the event that deviations from this schedule are necessary, they will be announced in class.

### **Week 1 (Aug. 24)**

Tuesday: Introduction to Class

- Reading: None

Thursday: What is a Constitution?

- Readings: Graber, Ch. 1-2

### **Week 2 (August 31)**

Tuesday: Why Have a Constitution?

- Readings: Graber, Ch. 3.

Thursday: **No Class**

**Week 3 (Sept. 7)**

Tuesday: What Does a Constitution Mean?

- Readings: Graber, Chapter 4.

Thursday: Paper #1 Writing Workshop

- Readings: None

**Week 4 (Sept. 14)**

Tuesday: What Does a Constitution Mean?

- Readings: Graber, Chapter 4.

Thursday: How “Good” is the American Constitution? The Legislature

- Readings: Levinson, Ch. 1-2
- **Paper 1 Due**

**Week 5 (Sept. 21)**

Tuesday: How “Good” is the American Constitution? The Executive

- Readings: Levinson, Ch. 3

Thursday: Guest Speaker

- Readings: None

**Week 6 (Sept. 28)**

Tuesday: Paper #2 Writing Workshop

- Readings: None

Thursday: How “Good” is the American Constitution? The Judiciary

- Readings:
  - Levinson, Ch. 4
  - Tushnet. 2011. “Abolishing Judicial Review.” *Constitutional Commentary*
- **Paper 2 Due**

**Week 7 (Oct. 5)**

Tuesday: Library Tour. Meet at the library, room TBA.

- Readings: None

Thursday: What Should be Done to “Fix” the Constitution?

- Readings:
  - Levinson, Chapter 7
  - Graber, Chapter 8

### **Week 8 (Oct. 12)**

Tuesday: How are Constitutions Different?

- Readings:
  - Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, Chapter 12
  - Graber, Chapter 7

Thursday: Career Center Trip. Meet at the Bank of America Career Center.

### **Week 9 (Oct. 19)**

Tuesday: How is the American Constitution Different?

- Readings: Law and Versteeg. 2012. “The Declining Influence of the American Constitution.” *New York University Law Review* [Pg. 764-809]

Thursday: Paper #3 Writing Workshop

- Readings: None

### **Week 10 (Oct. 26)**

Tuesday: Working with Data I

- Readings: Skim the codebook for the Comparative Constitutions Project

Thursday: Working with Data II

- Readings: TBD
- **Paper 3 Due**

### **Week 11 (Nov. 3)**

Tuesday: The Rights Revolution in the United States

- Readings: Epp, Ch. 1-4

Thursday: Guest Speaker

- Readings: None

### **Week 12 (Nov. 9)**

Tuesday: The Rights Revolution in Other Countries

- Readings:
  - Group I: Ch. 5-6 [India]

- Group II: Ch. 7-8 [Britain]
- Group III: Ch. 9-10 [Canada]

Thursday: Does It Matter What Constitutions Say? Part I

- Readings: Lupia et al. “Why do Constitutions Differ in their treatment of Same-Sex Marriage?” *Journal of Politics*.

### **Week 13 (Nov. 16)**

Tuesday: Data Presentations

- Readings: None

Thursday: Data Presentations

- Readings: None
- **Paper 4 Due**

### **Week 14 (Nov. 30)**

Tuesday: Does It Matter What Constitutions Say? Part II

- Readings:
  - Poe, Tate, and Keith. 2009. “Is the Law a Mere Parchment Barrier to Human Rights Abuse?” *American Journal of Political Science*
  - Chilton and Versteeg. 2015. “The Failure of Constitutional Torture Prohibitions.” *The Monkey Cage*

Thursday: Paper #5 Writing Workshop

- Readings: None

### **Week 15 (Dec. 7)**

Tuesday: Do Treaties Matter?

- Readings:
  - Fariss. Forthcoming. “The Changing Standard of Accountability and the Positive Relationship between Human Rights Treaty Ratification and Compliance.” *British Journal of Political Science*.

Thursday: What Have We Learned?

- Readings: TBD
- **Paper 5 Due**

**Paper 6 due during Finals Week**