Course Synopsis

This course will explore the philosophic, political, and constitutional history leading up to the framing and ratification of the Constitution of the United States. In so doing, we will also address the intersection between theory and politics as political actors interpreted the Constitution using competing conceptions of principles such as freedom, democracy, community, and citizenship. As such, the course will be divided into two sections. The first section will focus on one of the most prominent extra-constitutional features of American politics, political parties. While the Constitution is silent on parties, a party system quickly emerged to fundamentally structure the political process, thereby raising important political, legal, and constitutional questions that must be addressed. The second section will focus on the philosophic foundations of the American founding and address different ways in which the founding can be interpreted in contemporary politics and create competing conceptions of American constitutionalism.

Course Goals

- **Gain factual knowledge**
  - Much of the course will focus on historical information that will be vital in understanding the development of the ideas, practices, and institutions that shaped the meaning of the Constitution. While I do not require extensive memorization of historical facts, I will expect you to learn important factual information (such as key arguments in Supreme Court cases and political speeches). The midterm exam and presentation will be the primary means of assessing this goal.

- **Learn fundamental principles, generalizations, and theories**
  - This course will offer competing theories of constitutionalism. It will be essential that you understand how these various theories produce different, often times competing, generalizations about the nature of the Constitution and politics. The final writing assignment will be the primary means of assessing this goal.

- **Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view**
  - Guaranteed, you will disagree (sometimes deeply) with some of the political views of individuals in the text and your fellow classmates. Rather than simply dismissing their positions as irrelevant or misguided (putting it nicely), we will endeavor to engage with them, and each other, in a charitable and meaningful way. The writing assignments will be the primary means of assessing this goal.
Required Texts


All other readings will be available on Canvas

Assignments and Grading

Presentation (25 points)

There will be a group presentation, with each group presenting and leading the discussion of one Supreme Court case. One of the primary points we will investigate is how the justices understand the nature and role of parties within the constitutional system. The presentation will need to include the context and content of the Supreme Court decision as well as the political ramifications of the decision on the party system and/or political parties (is this a pro-party decision?). This latter point may not be immediately clear so you will need to think through the political, legal, and constitutional implications of the case.

Exam (50 points)

There will be one midterm exam consisting of both multiple choice and short answer-identifications of key concepts or arguments. **Please note the midterm will be administered during class. No make-up exams will be allowed unless prior arrangements are made.**

Writing Assignments (150 points total)

There will be three total writing assignments throughout the semester. For the first two assignments (25 pointes each), you will submit shorter papers (3-4 pages, double-spaced) based on readings and a prompt. The first assignment will be due in class on October 30th and the second is due November 11th. The final writing assignment will be the final for the course. For the paper, you will choose two chapters on an interpretive approach to the Founding in Gibson’s book (chapters 2-7) and compare and contrast their approaches. Based on your readings this semester, what are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? Finally, which approach do you find more convincing for understanding the founding and why? The final paper must be 7-8 pages, double-spaced. The final paper is due Thursday December 12th by 4:00 pm in the Political Science office. I will accept early submissions. On all writing assignments, there is a 5-point deduction for each day it is submitted late.

Grading Scale

A 100-94
A- 93-90
B+ 89-87
B 86-84
B- 83-80
C+ 79-77
C 76-74
C- 73-70
D+ 69-67
D 66-64
D- 63-60
F 59-0
Tentative Reading Schedule

Week 1:
08/26: Introduction to course
08/28: The Constitution (Canvas)
08/30: NO CLASS

Week 2:
09/02: LABOR DAY
09/06: James Madison, *Vices of the Political System in the United States* (Canvas)

Week 3:
09/09: James Madison, *Federalist No. 10* (Canvas)
09/11: Alexander Hamilton to Edward Carrington, 1792 (Canvas)
09/13: George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 1792; Jefferson’s Response to Washington (Canvas)

Week 4:
09/16: John Beckley’s Letters to William Irvine, 1796 (Canvas)
09/18: George Washington’s Farewell Address, 1796 (Canvas)
09/20: Thomas Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address, 1801 (Canvas)

Week 5:
09/25: Colegrove v. Green (1946) (Canvas)
09/27: Reynolds v. Sims (1964) (Canvas)

Week 6:
09/30: Timmons v. Twin City Area New Party (1997) (Canvas)

Week 7
10/11: MIDTERM 1 IN CLASS
Week 8: Ancient Constitutions

10/14: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III.7-Book IV.12 (Canvas)
10/16: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book V.8-VI.4 (Canvas)
10/18: NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

Week 9: Republic Size

10/21: Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws, 1748* (Canvas)
10/25: David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary, 1758* (Canvas)

Week 10: Republic Size

10/28: James Madison, *Federalist No. 10*; Brutus *Essay No. 1* (Canvas)
10/30: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* vol. I, part I, ch. VIII (Canvas)

SHORT PAPER 1 DUE
Prompt: Montesquieu, Hume, Madison, and Tocqueville all make normative arguments about the appropriate size of a republic. Briefly summarize these arguments and discuss which argument you find most compelling and why.

11/01: James Madison, *Federalist No. 51* (Canvas)

Week 11: Liberal Constitutionalism

11/04: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Canvas)
11/06: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Canvas)
11/08: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Canvas)

Week 12: Liberal Constitutionalism

11/11: Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (Canvas)

SHORT PAPER 2 DUE
Prompt: One of the major interpretive claims about the American Founding is Locke’s influence on the founders, especially Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence. Having read both Lock and the Declaration, in what ways is the Declaration a Lockean document? In what ways does the Declaration deviate from Locke?

11/13: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, 1776* (Canvas)

Week 13: Analyzing the Founding

11/18: *Interpreting the Founding: Chapter 1*
11/20: *Interpreting the Founding: Chapter 2*
11/22: *Interpreting the Founding: Chapter 3*
Week 14: Analyzing the Founding

11/25: *Interpreting the Founding* Chapter 4
11/27: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
11/29: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 15: Analyzing the Founding

12/02: *Interpreting the Founding* Chapter 5
12/04: *Interpreting the Founding* Chapter 6
12/06: *Interpreting the Founding* Chapter 7 and Epilogue

**FINAL DEADLINE:**

Final Paper: Thursday December 12th by 4:00 pm in the Political Science office

**NO EMAIL SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ALLOWED**