

PL SC 083S
First Year Seminar
Teaching Portfolio

Michael J. Nelson
Fall 2015

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.

Michael Nelson
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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

Sample Paper Assignments

Why Have a Constitution?

Topic

In Chapter 3 of *A New Introduction to American Constitutionalism*, Mark Graber discusses several different reasons why constitutions are good things. For the first two essays you write for this course, you will discuss the reasons that Graber gives about why we should have a constitution and how they these reasons affect the constitution as we understand it today. I expect your essays to be about 4-5 pages long.

For the first essay (workshop 9/10, due 9/17), you will explain the “dead hand problem.” What is the dead hand problem? Why is it a problem? Is it ever a good thing? Are there conditions under which it can be either good or bad?

For the workshop, please bring two copies of a draft of at least the portion of your paper where you summarize the dead hand problem (1-2 pages)

For the second essay (workshop 9/29, due 10/6),¹ you make an argument about how we should interpret the constitution, with reference to the dead hand problem. In this essay, you should explain how methods of constitutional interpretation can exacerbate (make worse) or mitigate (make better) the dead hand problem and make an argument about how, given the dead hand problem, we should interpret the constitution. In making your argument, you should refute alternative positions to yours; in other words, explain how you would respond to people who disagree with you.

This essay requires you to have a thesis statement in the introduction to your paper, and you should underline that thesis statement so it is easy for me to find.

For the workshop, please bring two copies of (a) your thesis statement and (b) an outline of your essay.

Guidelines

Please use a standard, easy-to-read 12-point font, double-spacing, and one-inch margins. Remember to cite your sources (both paraphrased and directly quoted). You can use any citation format that you’d like, but you need to be consistent throughout your paper. Should you have questions about citations, please let me know. A good online source of information for citation is Purdue’s Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). You do not need to do any outside research for this paper, but you must cite any ideas that are not your own, including those from Graber’s book.

How will you be graded?

Since there are no exams in this course, these paper assignments are your opportunity to display to me what you’ve learned. In other words, the paper provides you with the chance to show mastery of a variety of topics we’ve talked about in class and to show how well you are able to make connections between our class discussions and the reading.

¹ Note that I am giving you extra time to complete Essay 2 than is noted on the syllabus.

Of course, this invitation to “put the course together” in your paper is not license to try to connect *the entire course* in your paper. Indeed, just as I’m assessing your ability to tie things together, I’m also testing your ability to separate pertinent information from peripheral information. So, not all of the ideas, facts, and concepts that are interesting and important to our class discussions should be included in your paper. Your job is to make selective and intelligent use of the course materials to make the strongest essay possible.

At a basic level, your job is to prove to me that you have a solid understanding of the concepts that are important to an informed understanding of your paper prompt, that you can explain those concepts clearly, and that you have put a reasonable amount of thought into your paper. Make sure that, in addition to making claims about politics, you bolster those claims with (cited) evidence from assigned readings, lecture, and class discussion. Make sure that you present strong and fair arguments for all positions that you discuss, and do your best to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of (reasonable) alternative positions.

No paper should read as if it could just have easily been written by someone who hasn’t been in our course; indeed, since this paper is due during the final exam, your job is to prove that the ideas and concepts that we’ve covered in this course shape the arguments that you make in your paper.

Concluding Thoughts

If you get stuck, just sit down and type for ten minutes without stopping. Don’t think about whether what you are writing is “good” or “bad”, and don’t edit what you’re writing. Just type! You’ll be surprised at how good the resulting pages of material are, and you’ll find out what you think about the topic. From there, you’ll have a great start on your paper.

Don’t wait until the night before to start. There is absolutely nothing that I can say that will prevent some of you from doing this, but know that, at least on average, better grades go to papers that were started earlier. Papers that were started earlier have the benefit of a well-rested author who has time to think carefully about the arguments that he or she is making and the opportunity to change weak arguments and bolster strong ones. Starting early also gives you the opportunity to e-mail me with questions, ideas, and concerns that may arise as you draft your papers.

Edit your papers. While I don’t grade on spelling/grammar/writing style *per se*, these factors certainly color my evaluation of the paper. Of course, if your spelling/grammar/writing style obscures the point that you are trying to make, those errors will necessarily result in a lower grade because they will hinder my understanding of your argument.

Don’t be afraid to use me as a resource as you draft your paper. As always, my goal is not to trick you. If you don’t understand something, or if you aren’t sure how a particular concept applies to your argument, feel free to contact me to set up a time to talk. My goal is that each of you submits an essay that is the best possible reflection of your understanding of our course materials.

“Fixing” the Constitution

Topic

Throughout *Our Undemocratic Constitution*, Sanford Levinson outlines dozens of concerns about the U.S. Constitution. In this essay, select one of those concerns (or write about of your own that Professor Levinson does not discuss). Then:

- 1) Explain what the problem is. What does the U.S. Constitution say about the topic and why are you concerned about it?
- 2) Use the online resources from the library (available on the webpage Helen showed you in class via ANGEL) to find 3 scholarly (ideally peer-reviewed) sources that share your concern. Explain why these authors are also concerned about your constitutional provision and the extent to which their concerns overlap with yours.
- 3) Explain how you propose to solve the problem. For most of you, this will entail explaining a constitutional amendment to change the text of the constitution to solve the problem.

For the workshop, please bring two copies of your paper (2-3 pages).

Guidelines

I expect these essays to be 4-5 pages in length. Please use a standard, easy-to-read 12-point font, double-spacing, and one-inch margins. Remember to cite your sources (both paraphrased and directly quoted). You can use any citation format that you'd like, but you need to be consistent throughout your paper. Should you have questions about citations, please let me know. A good online source of information for citation is Purdue's Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). You must cite any ideas that are not your own, including those from Levinson's book and (especially) those you find through the library's online resources.

How will you be graded?

Since there are no exams in this course, these paper assignments are your opportunity to display to me what you've learned. In other words, the paper provides you with the chance to show mastery of a variety of topics we've talked about in class and to show how well you are able to make connections between our class discussions and the reading.

Of course, this invitation to “put the course together” in your paper is not license to try to connect *the entire course* in your paper. Indeed, just as I'm assessing your ability to tie things together, I'm also testing your ability to separate pertinent information from peripheral information. So, not all of the ideas, facts, and concepts that are interesting and important to our class discussions should be included in your paper. Your job is to make selective and intelligent use of the course materials to make the strongest essay possible.

At a basic level, your job is to prove to me that you have a solid understanding of the concepts that are important to an informed understanding of your paper prompt, that you can explain those concepts clearly, and that you have put a reasonable amount of thought into your paper. Make sure that, in addition to making claims about politics, you bolster those claims with (cited) evidence from assigned readings, lecture, and class discussion. Make sure that you present strong and fair

arguments for all positions that you discuss, and do your best to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of (reasonable) alternative positions.

No paper should read as if it could just have easily been written by someone who hasn't been in our course; indeed, since this paper is due during the final exam, your job is to prove that the ideas and concepts that we've covered in this course shape the arguments that you make in your paper.

Concluding Thoughts

If you get stuck, just sit down and type for ten minutes without stopping. Don't think about whether what you are writing is "good" or "bad", and don't edit what you're writing. Just type! You'll be surprised at how good the resulting pages of material are, and you'll find out what you think about the topic. From there, you'll have a great start on your paper.

Don't wait until the night before to start. There is absolutely nothing that I can say that will prevent some of you from doing this, but know that, at least on average, better grades go to papers that were started earlier. Papers that were started earlier have the benefit of a well-rested author who has time to think carefully about the arguments that he or she is making and the opportunity to change weak arguments and bolster strong ones. Starting early also gives you the opportunity to e-mail me with questions, ideas, and concerns that may arise as you draft your papers.

Edit your papers. While I don't grade on spelling/grammar/writing style *per se*, these factors certainly color my evaluation of the paper. Of course, if your spelling/grammar/writing style obscures the point that you are trying to make, those errors will necessarily result in a lower grade because they will hinder my understanding of your argument.

Don't be afraid to use me as a resource as you draft your paper. As always, my goal is not to trick you. If you don't understand something, or if you aren't sure how a particular concept applies to your argument, feel free to contact me to set up a time to talk. My goal is that each of you submits an essay that is the best possible reflection of your understanding of our course materials.

Data Project

Topic

In the chapter from *Patterns of Democracy* that we read for class, Arend Lijphart discusses the relationship between constitutional amendment procedures and judicial review, arguing that harder-to-amend constitutions are associated with stronger judicial review provisions. Specifically, Lijphart does three things. First, he explains the distribution of both constitutional characteristics in his sample. Second, he discusses a hypothesis that posits a relationship between the two characteristics. Third, he tests his hypothesis, discussing whether or not it is supported by the data and using a chart to display the results of his analysis visually.

In this project, you will do the same thing:

- Pick any two constitutional characteristics from the Comparative Constitutions Project in which you are interested.
- Describe the variation in the characteristics (explaining, for example, how many countries have that characteristic and how many do not).
- Develop a hypothesis about how the two characteristics are likely to be related. You may wish to do some small amount of outside research to justify your hypothesis.
- Test your hypothesis. Use a table to analyze the relationship between the variables and make a plot that displays the result of your data analysis.

Guidelines

You will present the results of your analysis both orally and in an essay.

The presentations must be no more than 5 minutes in length. Your presentation should have slides that present, at the very least, a table of your results and a graph. You must e-mail me your slides before noon on the day in which you present. I have assigned your presentation dates randomly:

November 17	November 19
Winger	Chaturvedi
Rodden	Yoo
Debise	Gold
Mabry	Fitzsimmons
Krol	Harris
Baron	Schuster
Singh	Mccutcheon
Jarvis	Mingle
Mondell	Martinez
Argenziano	Liu
Valade	Stout
Carr	Lin

I expect the essays to be 4-5 pages in length (including tables and figures). Please use a standard, easy-to-read 12-point font, double-spacing, and one-inch margins. Remember to cite your sources (both paraphrased and directly quoted).

This paper should read like a short article from a scholarly journal:

- Start by explaining your topic and why it is important.
- Then, describe your hypothesis and cite sources to justify it.
- Next, explain your variables and how they are measured.
- After that, present your tables and figures and discuss them.
- End with a conclusion.

You can use any citation format that you'd like, but you need to be consistent throughout your paper. Should you have questions about citations, please let me know. A good online source of information for citation is Purdue's Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). You must cite any ideas that are not your own, including those from class texts and (especially) those you find through the library's online resources.

Student Name: _____

Oral Presentation Rubric

First Year Seminar in Political Science

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Content (40 Points)

The speaker outlines the theory relating the two variables:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The speaker explains how both variables are measured:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The speaker outlines what the bar graph should show if the theory is correct:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The speaker correctly interprets the bar plot:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

Presentation (40 Points)

The speaker speaks loudly enough to be understood by all in the room:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The talk is well-organized and easy to follow:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The speaker responds to audience questions clearly and confidently:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The speaker makes eye contact with the audience:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

Slides (20 Points)

The slides are free from spelling and grammatical errors:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

The slides are visually appropriate and easy to read:

No 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Yes

Comments

TOTAL GRADE: ____/100

Why Have a Constitution?

Topic

We've spent this semester discussing what constitutions are, what they do, and when (or whether) they matter. For the fifth essay (workshop **12/3**, due **12/10**), you will make and defend an argument about why countries should (or should not) have constitutions. On the one hand, our recent readings and Epps's book provide strong evidence that constitutions don't matter because they don't, by themselves, protect human rights or ensure that citizens' rights are actually protected. In other words, they are "mere parchment barriers." On the other hand, in one of our first readings for the semester, Graber suggested that constitutions serve many purposes, and perhaps you think it is unfair for us to judge the value of constitutions based only on their ability to protect rights.

In order to be successful, your essay needs to:

- (1) Explain how we should judge whether a constitution is useful. What purpose(s) do constitutions serve? Why can constitutions be good or helpful? Why would we want a constitution?
- (2) Explain (and provide evidence) for whether or not constitutions meet the conditions you explained in Part (1). How (and when) do constitutions fall short of what we would like them to do? Are there ways to make constitutions more effective? You should draw upon our readings for the semester, including Graber, Levinson, Epps, and the articles that we've read, though you may wish to do some outside research (though that is not necessary).
- (3) Respond and refute alternative positions to yours. In other words, explain how you would respond to people who disagree with you. Your essay should also have a thesis statement in the introduction of your essay.

For the workshop, please bring two copies of a draft of your essay (at least 2.5 pages).

For the sixth essay (due **12/17**), you'll have the opportunity to revise one essay for a higher grade during the semester. If you choose to submit a revision, 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.

Remember that your essays in this course account for 60% of your final grade, and Essay 6 (the revision) can replace your grade for that essay. In other words, if you are happy with your grades on Essays 1-5 (and you must write each of those essays), you need not write Essay 6. If your revised essay is worse than your original essay (shudder), your grade will not be harmed. In other words, writing Essay 6 can only help, but not hurt, you.

Guidelines

Please use a standard, easy-to-read 12-point font, double-spacing, and one-inch margins. *I expect that Essay 5 will be about 5 pages in length.* Remember to cite your sources (both paraphrased and directly quoted). You can use any citation format that you'd like, but you need to be consistent throughout your paper. Should you have questions about citations, please let me know. A good online source of information for citation is Purdue's Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). You do not need to do any outside research for this paper, but you must cite any ideas that are not your own, including those from Graber's book.

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Since there are no exams in this course, these paper assignments are your opportunity to display to me what you've learned. In other words, the paper provides you with the chance to show mastery of a variety of topics we've talked about in class and to show how well you are able to make connections between our class discussions and the reading.

Of course, this invitation to "put the course together" in your paper is not license to try to connect *the entire course* in your paper. Indeed, just as I'm assessing your ability to tie things together, I'm also testing your ability to separate pertinent information from peripheral information. So, not all of the ideas, facts, and concepts that are interesting and important to our class discussions should be included in your paper. Your job is to make selective and intelligent use of the course materials to make the strongest essay possible.

At a basic level, your job is to prove to me that you have a solid understanding of the concepts that are important to an informed understanding of your paper prompt, that you can explain those concepts clearly, and that you have put a reasonable amount of thought into your paper. Make sure that, in addition to making claims about politics, you bolster those claims with (cited) evidence from assigned readings, lecture, and class discussion. Make sure that you present strong and fair arguments for all positions that you discuss, and do your best to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of (reasonable) alternative positions.

No paper should read as if it could just have easily been written by someone who hasn't been in our course; indeed, since this paper is due during the final exam, your job is to prove that the ideas and concepts that we've covered in this course shape the arguments that you make in your paper.

Concluding Thoughts

If you get stuck, just sit down and type for ten minutes without stopping. Don't think about whether what you are writing is "good" or "bad", and don't edit what you're writing. Just type! You'll be surprised at how good the resulting pages of material are, and you'll find out what you think about the topic. From there, you'll have a great start on your paper.

Don't wait until the night before to start. There is absolutely nothing that I can say that will prevent some of you from doing this, but know that, at least on average, better grades go to papers that were started earlier. Papers that were started earlier have the benefit of a well-rested author who has time to think carefully about the arguments that he or she is making and the opportunity to change weak arguments and bolster strong ones. Starting early also gives you the opportunity to e-mail me with questions, ideas, and concerns that may arise as you draft your papers.

Edit your papers. While I don't grade on spelling/grammar/writing style *per se*, these factors certainly color my evaluation of the paper. Of course, if your spelling/grammar/writing style obscures the point that you are trying to make, those errors will necessarily result in a lower grade because they will hinder my understanding of your argument.

Don't be afraid to use me as a resource as you draft your paper. As always, my goal is not to trick you. If you don't understand something, or if you aren't sure how a particular concept applies to your argument, feel free to contact me to set up a time to talk. My goal is that each of you submits an essay that is the best possible reflection of your understanding of our course materials.

Sample In-Class Writing Activities

First Year Seminar in Political Science
PL SC 083S

Fall 2015
Writing Workshop #1

I will divide you into groups of three people. In your groups, please do the following:

Part I: Reading For Main Ideas

1. For each paper, you will read each paper aloud as a group. One person is the paper “author,” one person is the “reader,” and one person is the “scribe.” The Reader will read the paper aloud, stopping after each paragraph. At the conclusion of each paragraph, the Author and the Scribe will write what they believe is the main idea of the paragraph, and the Reader will underline what they believe is the topic sentence. Then, without discussing, continue to the end of the paper.
2. When you complete the paper, go back through the paper paragraph by paragraph:
 - a. Does every paragraph have one (and only one) main idea?
 - b. Does everyone in the group agree on what the main idea is?
 - c. Could the main idea be rephrased to make it easier to understand?
 - d. Are the ideas in this paper clear enough that someone who is not in this class would understand them?
3. When you have agreed on each of the main ideas, the Reader should read, in order, the main idea/topic sentence from each paragraph (basically, you are reading one paragraph that is just each topic sentence).
 - a. Do the main ideas flow well from one to the next?
 - b. Is the organization of the paper easy to follow?
4. Repeat this process for the other two papers in your group.

Part II: Timed Brainstorming

1. When you are finished, set a timer for four minutes. Each of you should divide a paper in half, with one labeled “Good” and “Bad.” Then, for four minutes, each of you should write about the prompt for the second half of the paper. When is the dead hand problem good? When is it bad? Your job in this four minutes is to get a list of as many reasons as possible
2. Then, make a master list of reasons, combining what each of you have written.
 - a. Which reasons seem most persuasive to you? Why are they strong reasons?
 - b. Which reasons are less persuasive? Why are they less persuasive?
3. Your job is to come up with reasons you can use to fuel your writing in the second half of the essay. NOTE: Your group doesn’t need to use the same reasons going forward; you’re just helping each other brainstorm.

Part I: Reading For Main Ideas

1. For each paper, you will read each paper aloud as a group. One person is the paper “author,” one person is the “reader,” and one person is the “scribe.” The Reader will read the paper aloud, stopping after each paragraph. At the conclusion of each paragraph, the Author and the Scribe will write what they believe is the main idea of the paragraph, and the Reader will underline what they believe is the topic sentence. Then, without discussing, continue to the end of the paper.
2. When you complete the paper, go back through the paper paragraph by paragraph:
 - a. Does every paragraph have one (and only one) main idea?
 - b. Does everyone in the group agree on what the main idea is?
 - c. Could the main idea be rephrased to make it easier to understand?
 - d. Are the ideas in this paper clear enough that someone who is not in this class would understand them?
3. When you have agreed on each of the main ideas, the Reader should read, in order, the main idea/topic sentence from each paragraph (basically, you are reading one paragraph that is just each topic sentence).
 - a. Do the main ideas flow well from one to the next?
 - b. Is the organization of the paper easy to follow?
4. Repeat this process for the other two papers in your group.

Part II: Cubing

As a group, take a die from the front table. Roll the dice 4 times. Based on the number you roll, do the following (if you roll a number you’ve already done, roll again):

1. Define: In 2 sentences each, define (a) the dead hand problem, (b) textualism, (c) originalism, and (d) Breyer’s theory of active liberty/living constitutionalism
2. Compare: Silently write a paragraph comparing and contrasting Breyer’s and Scalia’s theories of constitutional interpretation. Compare your group members’ paragraphs.
3. Associate: For 1 minute, brainstorm silently of what Breyer’s and Scalia’s theories remind you of. Discuss your lists (and any commonalities among lists).
4. Analyze: Break the two theories into pieces in your group. What do they have in common?
5. Apply: For both Breyer’s and Scalia’s theories, come up with examples about how they could make the dead hand problem better or worse.
6. Argue: Pick one of the two theories and write one paragraph that outlines what you believe are the strongest arguments for and against that theory. Compare your paragraphs among your group members.

Part III: Reflect

When you are finished, write me a short (1-2 paragraph) letter describing your experience. Tell me what was (and was not) useful, how your paper improved as a result of these activities, and how you helped your group members improve their papers.

Part IV: Leave

Have a great day!

Part I: Piece it Together

1. Your group should trade papers with another group.
2. When you have a different group's papers:
 - 1) Cut each paper apart so each paragraph is on its own strip of paper. Where a paragraph breaks across pages, tape the paragraph together.
 - 2) Shuffle paragraphs so that the paper cannot be put back together just by looking at how the paper was cut apart! In other words, if you have Copy 1 and Copy 2 of a paper, put Paragraph 2 from Copy 1 in the Copy 2 pile and Paragraph 2 from Copy 2 in the Copy 1 pile (and so forth). The point here is to make it hard to put the paper back together
 - 3) Return the papers to the original group.
 - 4) Shuffle the paragraphs from each copy so they are out of order.
3. When you receive your papers back:
 - 1) Do not talk.
 - 2) Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph.
 - 3) Do your best to reassemble your group members' papers.
4. Discuss:
 - 1) How easy was it for you to put each other's papers back together? Do the transitions from paragraph to paragraph make it clear how the paragraphs fit together?
 - 2) Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
 - 3) Look at the size of the strips of paper that you have. Are some paragraphs too long? Are some too short?
 - 4) Does each paragraph have one (and only one) main idea? Is that main idea clear, easy to find, and easy to follow?
5. With the help of the author, put the papers back in their original order. Discuss:
 - 1) Are the ideas in this paper clear enough that someone who is not in this class would understand them?
 - 2) Is the problem, as defined by the author, clear and vivid? Does the author explain well why this constitutional problem is something we should care about?
 - 3) Is the solution proposed by the author workable? Would it actually solve the problem? What other solutions might the author consider?

Part II: Reflect

When you are finished, write me a short (1-2 paragraph) letter describing your experience. Tell me what was (and was not) useful, how your paper improved as a result of these activities, and how you helped your group members improve their papers.

Part III: Leave

Have a great day!

First Year Seminar in Political Science
Writing Workshop #4
Fall 2015

In your groups, please do the following:

Part I: Reading For Main Ideas

1. The Author will give the other two people in the group (Readers) her paper.
2. While the Readers silently read the paper aloud, the Author will:
 - a. Write a paragraph that summarizes the argument in the paper Explain both your thesis and how your argument will unfold. E.g. "In my paper, I argue that countries should have written constitutions because _____. I offer ___ pieces of support for my argument. First, _____."
 - b. Make an outline of your paper based on the paragraph you have written.
3. The Readers will:
 - a. Silently read the paper, making notes in the margins about both the content and organization of the paper.
 - b. Write a paragraph that summarizes the argument in the paper Explain both your thesis and how your argument will unfold. E.g. "In this paper, the author argues that countries should have written constitutions because _____. The author offers (or says they will eventually offer) ___ pieces of support for my argument. First, _____"
 - c. Write a new introduction for the paper. Is the author's thesis clear in the first paragraph? Does the Author's introduction cover too much ground? Write a new introduction that you believe would be an improvement on what the author has written.
4. When both the Author and Readers have completed their tasks, compare paragraphs.
 - a. Talk about where disagreement between the Author and the Reader comes from. Do you all agree about the author's thesis? The evidence the author argues? Is the argument well-organized and easy to follow? How could it be improved?
 - b. Discuss the Author's and Reader's introductions. How can the Author improve her introduction?
5. Repeat this activity for the other two people in your group

Part III: Reflect

When you are finished, answer the following questions:

1. Reflect on your experience with this writing workshop. Tell me what was (and was not) useful, how your paper improved as a result of these activities, and how you helped your group members improve their papers.
2. Thinking back over the semester, who has given you the most helpful feedback on your writing? What was the best piece of advice you got from a peer? I will keep these evaluations in mind as I am grading participation in the course.
3. Write 1-2 paragraphs explaining what participation grade you have earned in this course, keeping in mind, as your syllabus says, that attendance is not the same as participation.