About the Course

Most of the enduring and contentious issues in contemporary US politics are shaped profoundly by the Constitution, and by the interpretation of that document by the US Supreme Court. Political Science 313B introduces students to US politics through the perspective of some of those issues: affirmative action, LGBT rights, abortion, gun rights, capital punishment, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and privacy. By the end of the course, you should have gained a solid appreciation of the US constitutional system, and the operation of legislative, judicial and executive institutions within that system. Through the cases and controversies, you will learn not just about the Constitution and the Supreme Court, but also about federalism, the separation of powers, the legislative process, group politics, political culture and about a range of other agencies that constitute the US political system and shape public policy.

The course is designed to be compatible with Political Science 313a, which introduces students to US politics from the perspective of parties and elections, and well as with Political Science 313C which focuses on US politics and native Indian affairs.

This course will help you to develop your research, writing and analytical skills. Your term paper will give you the opportunity to build independent research skills and develop a well-organized analytical paper, which tells a coherent story about a key recent decision by the US Supreme Court (see instructions below), and about its implications for US democracy.

About the Instructor

I studied US politics during my PhD at the University of Illinois, and have been teaching courses such as this for many years. My scholarly research focuses on the range of issues captured by the broad term “personal privacy protection.” I have written about theories of privacy and surveillance, the various policy instruments at domestic and international levels, the political economy of personal information and the complicated and diverse attitudes of citizens toward the introduction of new technologies and the implications for their privacy. In the American context, these interests require me to follow the various intrusions upon the civil liberties protected by the US Bill of Rights, and the responses of US legislative and judicial institutions. More about my publications and research interests can be found at: www.colinbennett.ca
Requirements and Evaluation

1) A 1.5 hour in-class midterm short answer exam (scheduled for October 10) (25%)
2) A 3000-3500 word case-study on one Supreme court decision and its implications (see instructions below) (30%) – due DECEMBER 2nd.
3) A five-minute presentation on your case, during an assigned period between October 17 and November 28 (5%)
4) A final examination during the April exam period (40%)

Readings

There is no textbook in this class. All readings (chapters, articles, original sources) are linked from Course Spaces. It goes without saying that you will find the class discussion more rewarding if you read the assignments before the scheduled class period. Please note that the readings are defined as “activities” on CourseSpaces, and the system will log who has downloaded them, and when. I have also suggested a few recommended texts and websites that students in prior classes have found valuable, and which you should consult for your term papers.

Attendance

In preparing for the exams, please bear in mind that attention should be paid to both reading assignments and class notes. Much of what you will need to understand to pass this class will be conveyed during the lectures. I will be using PowerPoint and posting those slides online after the lecture/discussions. But the lectures and discussions will go substantially beyond the information found in the readings and in the slides, so you are expected to attend every class and read the assignments before the scheduled class period. The UVic Academic Calendar states: “Students are expected to attend all classes in which they are enrolled.” Students must complete all assignments (see Course Requirements) in order to get credit for the course.

Course Communication

CourseSpaces will be used for communication with the class as a whole, including announcements, course materials, readings, and assignment details. Please monitor and check CourseSpaces frequently. More details on each assignment and on the reading schedule will be provided on CourseSpaces.

I receive many emails each day and am responsible for the teaching of a large number of students this term. Therefore, I am not able to respond to every student inquiry in detail. I will keep my office hours diligently, and will be available at other times if you would like to make an appointment. If I have to cancel for some reason, I will communicate alternative times when I am available. Office hours are a great opportunity for me to get to know you one-on-one and to have an extended conversation about your work. Through CourseSpaces, I will also post a sign-up process for individual consultations on your term papers.
Student Etiquette

In the spirit of collegiality, please come to class on time and do not disrupt the class with late arrivals, early departures or constant exits and entries during the lecture period. Please turn off your cell phones during class. Laptops are permitted in the classroom, but limited to appropriate usage - taking of notes or accessing the materials on the Course Spaces site. It is inappropriate to surf the web, use Facebook or play games during class. Extracurricular computing is a disturbance to the people sitting around you.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Instructors and academic units have the responsibility to ensure that standards of academic honesty are met. By doing so, the institution recognizes students for their hard work and assures them that other students do not have an unfair advantage through cheating on essays, exams, and projects. It is expected that students will respect these ethical values in all activities related to learning, teaching, research and service. Therefore, plagiarism and other acts against academic integrity are serious academic offences. The University’s policy on Academic Integrity is found here:

http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2017-09/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html

Academic Accommodations

In cases of a disability or religious obligations the University of Victoria allows for special arrangements to be made to meet your academic obligations during the term. Please consult the 2017-18 Calendar for the procedures. Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course are required to consult the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as the term starts and no later than one week after the course starts. The RCSD will then contact me with details of the specific accommodation required in each student’s case.

The Course Experience Survey (CES)

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience. The survey is vital to providing feedback regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. The survey is accessed via MyPage and can be completed on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device.

I will remind you about the CES nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity during the course, especially the following three questions:

1. What strengths did your instructor demonstrate that helped you learn in this course?
2. Please provide specific suggestions as to how the instructor could have helped you learn more effectively.
3. Please provide specific suggestions as to how this course could be improved.
THE RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Most contentious issues in US politics end up in the US Supreme Court. Each paper will examine one recent Supreme Court case, examining how it evolved, what other institutions were involved, how it went through the court system and how the Supreme Court resolved it. You should read the court reports, and try to understand why the particular decision was reached from a constitutional perspective. **But this is not a legal analysis.** It will be a paper in which you describe the evolution of a particular issues, and see the Supreme Court in a wider societal and political context. What role did other federal and state institutions play? What is the role of public opinion, and outside interest groups? What does the case tell you about the way the Supreme Court does and should exercise its power in the US political system? The case should serve as a window into the larger social and political conflict. The ‘A’ papers will be those which discuss the case to advance a wider thesis about American politics.

A wide variety of material may be useful (from newspaper and magazine articles to more scholarly and analytical works, including articles in Law journals). You should all look at original sources, including the Supreme Court reports, and the various multimedia resources on [www.oyez.org](http://www.oyez.org). I have listed some recommended texts and resources on CourseSpaces. I would expect you to cite at least 6 scholarly sources (articles and/or books), beyond the required readings.

During the first two weeks of the class, you should select one of the Supreme Court cases listed in CourseSpaces where it says “CHOOSE YOUR ESSAY TOPIC HERE.” I have listed a number of recent and contentious cases that are broadly related to the issues discussed in the second half of the class. You are encouraged to think about this assignment now. This is a full research project that cannot be adequately completed unless considered over the entire term.

During the second half of the course, I will be calling on each of you in class to describe your case briefly during the discussion of the relevant constitutional issue. This brief presentation is worth 5% of your grade and it should be taken seriously, because these descriptions will be integrated into the wider themes of the week. Thus, each student should briefly describe:

- How the case reached the court: not just a description of the judicial process, but also an understanding of the larger social and political context.
- Who were the litigants, and who did they represent?
- What were the constitutional issues?
- What did the court decide and with what justifications? (majority, concurring and dissenting opinions)
- What were the wider implications?
THE FINAL PAPER MAY BE UPLOADED AT ANY TIME FROM NOVEMBER 4th UNTIL 5pm on DECEMBER 2ND. PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER 5.00pm ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2ND AND NO EXTENSIONS WILL BE GIVEN UNLESS AN OFFICIAL MEDICAL NOTE IS PROVIDED. I ENCOURAGE THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE PRESENTING YOUR PAPER TOPICS EARLIER IN OCTOBER TO SUBMIT THE PAPER EARLIER THAN THE FINAL DUE DATE.

I will respond to your work electronically, and send back a corrected copy with track changes and comments. No paper copies will be accepted or returned. And only submit papers with a .doc or .docx extension. (No .txt or .pdf files please). Please ensure that your paper is labelled as follows: [lastname]313B.DOC

This paper counts for 30% of your grade, and cannot be completed adequately in less than 12 pages (c. 3,000 words, not including footnotes and bibliography). Please do not go over 3500 words. Papers should be typed (double-spaced) and should include in-text citations and a bibliography.

Citations guides can be found at the library website:
http://www.uvic.ca/library/research/citation/guides/index.php  Ensure that you support your arguments with clear references. I prefer in-text citations and bibliographies (the APA style). But you may need to use a footnote or two for more complex legal citations. But this is not a legal paper, and so you should not try to use the complex referencing styles of the law journals. Each of you will be using at least 6 scholarly references, (books or articles) in addition to other sources. You should all read the cases, listen to the oral arguments and understand the reasoning of the justices.

I also encourage you to visit The Centre for Academic Communication for assistance with your term paper. Assistance from the writing centre can make a huge difference in your confidence and writing skills. For an appointment, visit their website at:
https://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/cac/