George Mason University  
School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs  
Govt 422.002  
**Constitutional Interpretation**  
Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30 am - 11:45 am – West 1004  
Syllabus -- DRAFT

Teacher: Robert L. Deitz, rdeitz@gmu.edu (phone: (703) 993-3480). I am in my office (Rm 674 in Founders Hall, Arlington) most week days. Office drops ins are always welcome. I know it is a challenge for undergrads to meet in Arlington. I can speak with students before or after class; if necessary I can travel to Fairfax to meet with students. One way or another, we can always talk. To schedule an appointment, please phone or email.

**Required text:**


**Required readings:**

On the Web:

The Articles of Confederation (accessed at http://www.usconstitution.net/articles.html).

U.S. Constitution (in Appendix 1 of the Text or accessed at http://www.constitution.org/constit_.htm).

**Course Description**

The structure and organization of the U.S. government are set forth in the United States Constitution. All authority of the federal government ultimately flows from its text. The Constitution addresses two very different
structural issues: the relationship among the three branches of government; and the relationship between the federal government and the states. The course will examine how the Constitution is organized, the powers that it confers upon the three branches and the powers that it reserves to the states. This course will be challenging, because while a text will be used, it will incorporate primary documents: the text of the Constitution itself, of course; the predecessor Articles of Confederation; and case law. In this respect, the course will mimic aspects of a law school class in constitutional law.

Learning outcomes

An understanding of the U.S. Constitution, its structure, and how it allocates powers among the three branches and between the federal and state governments.

Evaluation

Student evaluations will be comprised of the following: Week Five quiz: 10%; Week Eight mid-term: 35%; Final Exam: 45%; class participation: 10%. The quiz will be short answer. The mid-term and final exams will be in-class, essay-style tests; students will be able to choose the questions they wish to answer from an extensive menu.

Advice

It is crucial that students keep up with the readings and attend class. The numbers of pages I have assigned are reasonable in length, but the readings can be dense. Knowledge of the readings will be crucial for understanding the course, for participating in class discussions, and for success in the exams and quiz.

Schedule

Week One (both sessions): Introduction. What this course is about. What does each of the three branches of government do? Discussion of the Articles of Confederation. Assignment: The Articles of Confederation.

Week Two (both sessions): Assignment: Text, supra, Chapter 1 (Introduction to American Constitutionalism).

Week Four (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 3 (The Founding Era).

Week Five (first session): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 4 (The Early National Era); (second session): Quiz.

Week Six (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 4 continued.

Week Seven (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 5 (The Jacksonian Era).


Week Ten (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 7 continued.

Week Eleven (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 8 (The New Deal and Great Society Era).

Week Twelve (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 9 (Liberalism Divided).

Week Thirteen (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 10 (The Reagan Era).

Week Fourteen (both sessions): Assignment: Text, *supra*, Chapter 11 (The Contemporary Era).

Final Exam.

**Academic Accommodation for a Disability**
If you are a student with a disability and need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.