George Mason University
School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs
Govt 422

Constitutional Interpretation
Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00 pm - 4:15 pm – AQ 213Ent 178
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 meet 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:

Gillman, H., Graber, M., Whittington, D., American Constitutionalism Volume 1, (New

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

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 readings. The numbers of pages I have assigned are reasonable in length, but are dense. Knowledge of the readings will be crucial for understanding the course and for participating in class discussions.

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 Three (both sessions): Assignment: Text, supra, Chapter 2 (The Colonial Era).

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 Eight (first session): Mid-term exam. (second session): Text, supra, Chapter 6 (Secession, Civil War, and Reconstruction.

Week Nine (first session): Assignment: Text, supra, Chapter 6 continued; (second session): Text, supra, Chapter 7 (The Republican 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.