COURSE APPROACH

This course provides an introduction to major theoretical and practical issues in American constitutional law and politics. In particular, the course will focus on the role of the Supreme Court in the American political and legal process.

The class is conducted “modified law school” style; sessions will mainly involve class discussion of excerpts from landmark cases, other assigned readings, and professor-prepared discussion questions. At times I will provide an overview of key legal doctrines and developments through lecture. At times class members will discuss questions or hypothetical problems in small groups, and student volunteers may play the roles of advocates or judges.

You will get maximum value from the course by doing the assigned reading for each session completely and actively, and coming to class prepared to engage in a lively discussion.\footnote{You will get more out of class – and contribute more to class – by attending as many of the class sessions as you can. However, to accommodate students who occasionally miss class due to illness or other important and unavoidable conflicts, I will experiment this quarter with “podcasting” all class sessions.}

We will have FUN!

READINGS AND SYLLABI

The text for the class is O’Brien, \textit{Constitutional Law and Politics, Volume One} (Seventh Ed. 2008 \textit{W. W. Norton \\& Co., Ltd.})\footnote{Students occasionally wonder whether previous editions of the O’Brien book can be used instead of the most recent edition. As with all legal issues “it depends.” Certainly it is true that most of the readings in the new edition can be found in older ones. However, there are some new materials, and page numbers are different. Students especially motivated by cost-saving concerns may be willing to go to the trouble of comparing older and newer editions and cross-correlating page numbers. (However, the 7th Edition has been around enough that relatively cheap used copies are usually available…)} (Please note that \textit{Volume Two} of O’Brien’s book \textit{is NOT used} for this class.)

You will also read -- and will want to copy onto hard copies, if you want to refer to them during course exams -- (1) past exam questions and (2) extensive case excerpts for the last two or three course weeks. These readings will be available free from an online webpage. (A later section of this document gives instructions for accessing the class webpage…)
Please bring the appropriate text(s) to each class.

There are two Assignment Syllabi for this course. The first Syllabus, distributed in class the first day and available after that on the class webpage, covers Phase I of the course and provides the majority of assignments through the midterm (and the materials potentially testable on that exam). A second Assignment Syllabus, covering subsequent assignments, will be distributed separately and posted on the webpage.

EXAMINATIONS

We will have an in-class midterm during a portion (lasting between two and two-and-a half hours) of the class on Tuesday, November 2nd. (The midterm will be the only class-related activity that day.)

As noted earlier, the midterm will cover materials assigned on the first syllabus. You will also take a final examination during the designated exam time for the course: Friday, December 10th, starting at 7 PM and ending around 10:05 PM.

IMPORTANT: PLEASE LOOK AT YOUR EXAM SCHEDULE IMMEDIATELY, and ensure that you are not cross-scheduled to take two final exams at the same time or scheduled to take multiple final exams within an unreasonably tight time frame. I REGRET THAT I WILL BE UNABLE TO GIVE MAKEUP FINAL EXAMS TO ACCOMMODATE THESE PROBLEMS.

Both examinations will pose short-answer essay questions, in the format illustrated through past exam questions posted on the class webpage. Both exams will be open book / open note. The midterm is worth 40% of course points; the final is worth 60%.

The final exam will be non-cumulative. More details on examination coverage and format will be given via separate handouts, elaborated through in-class announcements.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

I invite you to take on an additional practice that will significantly enhance your learning in the course: as you interact with general informational media (i.e., newspapers, magazines, newsletters, online databases, etc.) I invite you to notice media reports discussing current controversies relating to the constitutional issues and dynamics we are studying in the course. (Making the connection between class materials and the “real world out there” can be an important learning boost!)

When you identify media reports that you believe would be interesting to the class—ideally, reports that contain enough information to understand the context and legal basis of the constitutional controversy—I would very much appreciate your giving me a
hard-copy version (or sending me an email with the text of the media report in the body of the email) so that I can consider sharing it with the class at an appropriate time.

**CLASS WEBPAGE ACCESS INSTRUCTIONS**

Visit my law-school website ("www.cwsl.edu"). (2) Click on “Meet the Faculty”. (3) On the alphabetical list, click on “Glenn C. Smith”. (4) Click on “Class Webpages” (at right of page) or scroll down to find the icon for “Political Science 104A, Fall 2010.”

**MY AVAILABILITY**

***For UCSD office hours: Tuesdays, 2 PM to 4:30 PM, in SSB 363.

***For “virtual office hours,” or to arrange office hours at a mutually convenient time other than regular office hours, email me at “gsmith@cwsl.edu”. [WHEN YOU EMAIL ME, please INCLUDE A REFERENCE TO “P SC 104A” in the subject line, so that I will know your message is not spam.]

***Additionally, you are welcome to meet with me, call me (619-525-1495), or email me (gsmith@cwsl.edu) during the following law-school office hours:

–Mondays & Wednesdays, 12:30 PM to 1 PM & 3 PM to 4 PM
–Tuesdays, 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM

**NOTE:** It is always a good idea to verify my law-school office hours via email (gsmith@cwsl.edu) or an advance phone call to my Law School office (619-525-1495).

My law school office is located at 225 Cedar St., Room 314 (Directions: I-5 South; Take “Front St./Civic Center” exit; take left fork, which will exit on Cedar St. at 2nd Avenue. 225 Cedar is on the right, between 2nd and 3rd Avenues.)

***For law-school-planning questions: Past experience indicates that some of the students in this course plan to attend law school after graduation. As a full-time law professor guest teaching this course, I am committed to serving such students by providing general counseling about law school and legal careers, arranging visits to law school classes taught by others at my home institution, and in appropriate cases writing law-school letters of recommendation. (Please note that I am not recruiting students to law school in general—it is not for everyone—or to my law school in particular. In fairness, I simply wish to make sure all potentially interested students know of my policy on this. Please also note that the one area in which I am NOT a useful resource is questions about the procedures and dynamics of the law-school admission process...)

**In appropriate cases, I am also willing to write recommendation letters for graduate study, UCDC internships, foreign study, and other related opportunities.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance to you!