

AMERICAN POLITICS  
POLITICAL SCIENCE 313B, Spring 2016

**Professor: Colin J. Bennett**  
**Class Session: Mon and Thurs: 10.00am-11.20am**  
**Office Hours: Mon and Thurs: 11.30am to 1.30pm**  
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### **About the Course**

Some of the most 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 constitutional questions: abortion, gun rights, LGBT rights, affirmative action, freedom of religion, capital punishment 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, legislative politics, group politics, political culture and about a range of other processes and agencies that constitute the complexity of the US political system.

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. 313A is not a prerequisite, but if you have no prior background in US politics, you would be well-advised to consult one of the recommended introductory texts used in that course. I have not required an introductory textbook in this class, preferring to introduce the subject through separate articles, chapters and original sources.

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.

I have presented the class schedule, as well as all readings, in Course Spaces. You should be accessing this page regularly, and taking advantage of the resources I have researched and made readily accessible.

## About the Instructor

My research focuses on the range of issues that are 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](http://www.colinbennett.ca) And you can also follow me on Twitter: @COLINBENNETTO

## Requirements and Evaluation

- 1) A 1.5 hour in-class midterm short answer exam (scheduled for February 4th) (25%)
- 2) A 3000 word case-study on one Supreme court decision and its implications (see instructions below). (40%)
- 3) A five minute presentation on your case, during an assigned period between February 18<sup>th</sup> and April 4<sup>th</sup>. (5%)
- 4) A final examination during the December exam period (30%)

## Readings

There is one required text:

David M. O’Brien, *Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics* (Norton, 2014, 10<sup>th</sup> edition)

All other required readings and materials are linked from Coursespaces, where you can also find the lecture and reading schedule. 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. In preparing for the exams, please bear in mind that attention should be paid to both reading assignments and class notes. I have not set a general textbook in this class. 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. 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.**

## **Keeping in Touch**

I receive many e-mails every day and am responsible for the teaching of a large number of students. Therefore, I am not able to respond to every inquiry in detail. Please take a moment before e-mailing me to ask yourself three questions: 1) Is the answer to the question on the syllabus or on Coursespaces? 2) Can the question wait until next class so others in the class can benefit from the answer? 3) Can the question wait until my office hours?

I will keep my office hours diligently, and will be available at other times if you would like to make an appointment. 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.

## **Student Etiquette**

In the spirit of collegiality, please come to class on time and do not disrupt the class with late arrivals or departures. Please turn off your cell phones during class, as texting is a distraction to those around you. Laptops are permitted in the classroom, but limited to appropriate usage - taking of notes or accessing the materials on Coursespaces. 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.

## THE RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT

This assignment gives you an opportunity to research a contemporary American issue in some depth, and to present a well-written and organized research paper. You are each to write a case study of a particular aspect of American public policy which will be discussed in class. A good case study should do two things: it should describe and analyse how the American political process has addressed an issue, but it should expose some wider characteristic of the entire system. Your job is to tell a story about the evolution of a particular decision, demonstrating how different influences shaped the outcome. From here you should move to a more general or theoretical level. Stand back from the specific issue and ask yourself what this case tells you about how Americans address key issues. You may conclude that it exposes certain strengths and weaknesses of the policy process, or a flaw in the Constitution, or an interesting aspect of representative democracy, etc. Think creatively. Use the approaches and theories discussed in this course, as well as from any other political science courses. The 'A' papers will be those that derive such generalizations.

Each paper will examine one recent Supreme Court case, examining 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. Also try to see the court in a wider societal context. What does the case tell you about the way the Supreme Court does and should exercise its power? What is the relationship between the Court and the other political institutions? What is the role of public opinion? Which theory of judicial interpretation best explains the decision? What have been the consequences of the decision?

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. The O'Brien text also contains plenty of references to appropriate cases. I would expect you to cite at least 6 *scholarly* sources, 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.

**THE FINAL PAPER MAY BE UPLOADED AT ANY TIME FROM APRIL 5<sup>th</sup> UNTIL 5pm on APRIL 8<sup>th</sup>. PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER 5.00pm ON FRIDAY, APRIL 8th AND THE SYSTEM WILL NOT ACCEPT PAPERS POSTED AFTER THAT TIME. NO EXTENSIONS WILL BE GIVEN UNLESS A PROPER MEDICAL NOTE IS PROVIDED.**

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. (Thus no .txt or .pdf files please). Please ensure that your paper is labelled as follows: [lastname]313B.DOC

This paper counts for 40% 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> I will place some of the top student papers from the previous term online, so that you will have an appreciation of the standards, and the better forms of organization and referencing.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please ensure that you are familiar with University and departmental rules about academic integrity:  
<http://www.uvic.ca/library/research/citation/plagiarism/index.php>

I also encourage you to visit *The Writing Centre* 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:  
<http://ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/twc.php>