

Course Title: American Government Through Supreme Court Cases

Instructor: Christy Buss

Email: christybuss001@gmail.com

Class Time: Mondays 1:00-1:50 PM EST

Course Description:

In *American Government Through Supreme Court Cases* students will delve into the U.S. Constitution and learn about the U.S. government through analyzing landmark Supreme Court cases, gaining a deeper understanding of how legal precedents shape American life. This course emphasizes critical thinking and analysis, teaching students how to approach constitutional questions from multiple perspectives. Students will focus on identifying constitutional issues, understanding the rules, provisions, or laws that apply, and evaluating the arguments presented by opposing parties in each case.

The course will begin with an introduction to each branch of government and delve into how the Supreme Court has decided questions regarding the scope of the power of each of those branches. Then we will focus on the legal cases that surround the Bill of Rights, such as the extent of the protections on speech, the requirements of a legal search and seizure, the right to due process, and much more. A good deal of time will be spent wrestling with the post-Civil War amendments and their aftermath, including the rise of Jim Crow laws, the civil rights movement, landmark Supreme Court decisions (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Loving v. Virginia*, *Shelby County v. Holder*), and the ongoing questions of justice and equality in modern America.

Through the study of these influential cases, students will develop the ability to see constitutional matters through the lens of the judicial process, understanding how the Supreme Court interprets the Constitution to address complex societal issues. The class will not only explore how decisions are made but will also encourage students to think about the broader implications of those decisions in context.

As the Supreme Court has become a central figure in shaping public policy, students will be trained to analyze and evaluate constitutional questions, preparing them to understand the role of the courts in contemporary legal and political debates. By the end of the course, students will have the tools to critically engage with constitutional issues, making connections between historical rulings and current events.

Objectives

- To understand the U.S. Constitution and develop a broader perspective on Constitutional issues
- To have a thorough understanding of how the various branches of government interact and how they relate to one another
- To understand the roles of the federal government and state governments with regard to constitutional questions

- To critically analyze key Supreme Court cases that have shaped American constitutional law
- To explore how judicial precedents, or previous rulings, influence future decisions and public policy
- To evaluate the role of the Supreme Court in shaping American society
- To improve argumentation skills and develop the ability to evaluate and synthesize arguments
- To develop critical legal analysis and apply legal reasoning to contemporary issues
- To critically engage with primary source materials

Text:

There is no required text for the course. Readings and videos will be chosen by the instructor and made available via the Google classroom.

A full expanded syllabus will be sent in the summer, but the course will include the following:

1. *Marbury v. Madison* - What does the Supreme Court do?
2. *McCulloch v. Maryland* - What does Congress do?
3. *Trump v. United States* - What does the President do?
4. 1st Amendment Freedom of Speech
5. 1st Amendment Freedom of the Press
6. *Miranda v. Arizona*
7. Due Process
8. *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board of Education* - 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause
9. Civil Rights
10. *Dred Scott v. Sandford* - 14th Amendment's birthright citizenship clause
11. *Grutter v. Bollinger/ Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* - Racial Discrimination and Affirmative Action
12. *Shelby County v. Holder* - Voting rights and the 15th Amendment
13. *District of Columbia v. Heller* - 2nd Amendment

Homework:

Outside of class students will be responsible for completing the weekly reading assignments and videos and then writing a short response and posting it in the online classroom.

Final Project:

Students will be expected to complete a final project each semester. The students will have a great deal of flexibility and can work with the teacher to choose their preferred medium for the project. Some ideas include a video presentation, a paper, a creative project such as a cartoon, etc.