

**PSC 322: Constitutional Law**  
**Fall 2017 Online – Prof. Dave Prentiss**

**Course Description:** Constitutional Law is about political power and people's rights. As the fundamental and supreme law of the United States, the Constitution (1) establishes the institutional structure and powers of the national government, (2) defines the relationship and relative powers between the national government and state governments, and (3) imposes specific restrictions on both national and state government power through the legal recognition of individual rights.

In all of these areas, disagreements arise over the interpretation and application of constitutional provisions. These disputes inevitably take the form of court cases that make their way to the Supreme Court for resolution. The decisions of the Supreme Court are often controversial because of what is at stake: who has what power, and what rights do people have.

In this course, we will study how the Supreme Court decides who has what power, and what rights people have. You can think of this subject as an ongoing debate over really important issues that determine what kind of government we live under and what rights we have. We will join in the debate and have our own dialogue about these important questions.

**Course Objectives:** Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Describe and explain the principles of constitutionalism and the relationship between the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence as well as the connection between both and the political philosophy of John Locke;
- Describe, explain and evaluate the arguments for and against originalist and non-originalist approaches to constitutional interpretation;
- Describe and explain the constitutional principles of federalism, separation of powers, judicial review, incorporation and enumerated powers;
- Describe, explain and evaluate the Supreme Court's decisions regarding criminal procedure, capital punishment and the Second Amendment;
- Describe, explain and evaluate the Supreme Court's decisions relating to the commerce clause and the tax and spend power.

**Course Texts:** There are no textbooks to purchase for this class. All reading materials will be provided on MyCourses.

**Course Assignments:** (1) discussion board (responding to questions provided by the instructor and engaging with classmate postings); (2) quizzes; and (3) thinking papers (writing in response to specific questions that will require you to think about the concepts and issues contained in the readings).

**If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [dprentiss@umassd.edu](mailto:dprentiss@umassd.edu)**