

POLI 298-001
Second Year Seminar:
The Constitutional Convention as a Four Act Drama
TH 12:30-1:45

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Course Overview:

Despite the primacy of the U.S. Constitution to American politics, Americans know very little about this document. This class addresses this problem through an intensive analysis of James Madison's Notes on the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Unlike other treatments of this text that focus on the most controversial issues, the approach taken in this course treats the Convention as a four act drama. Approaching the Convention in this way allows students to participate in the proceedings. Students will be assigned a single delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and they will be responsible for presenting that delegate's position on numerous issues to the class over the course of the semester. Student performances culminate in a two-week recreation of the Constitutional Convention at the end of the semester. Outcomes for this seminar include a greater understanding of the U.S. Constitution and enhanced ability to speak clearly and effectively.

Course Requirements:

There are six requirements for this course: 1) Class Participation; 2) Attendance; 3) Completions of the readings as assigned in the syllabus throughout the semester; 4) Delegate Journal; 5) Four, short presentations; and 6) Participation in the recreation of the Constitutional Convention.

Class Participation. This class meets every Tuesday and Thursday from 12:30-1:45 p.m. in room 203 of the Maxwell Library. Every class begins with the opportunity for students to raise questions about the assigned readings. It is my hope that these questions will spur discussion. Note that the operative word is discussion. The more we are able to discuss the text in an informed, open, and insightful manner the less I will have to lecture and the better the learning experience will be for all of us. Class participation is worth twenty percent of your final grade.

Attendance. The only way you are going to learn the material is by coming to class. I do understand, however, that this is not always possible. Therefore, I am giving you three free absences. On the fourth absence, your final grade will be lowered one full letter grade. I will take attendance at the beginning of every class and just for your information, I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.

Readings. The reading assignments are designed to assure a common base from which the discussion will grow. This means that the assigned readings are to be completed prior to class on the specific day. If you fail to complete the assigned readings you will have a difficult time following the discussion and my ability to clarify points will be greatly diminished. There is only one book required for this course, James Madison's *Notes of the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*. The text is on sale in the bookstore.

Delegate Journal. Each of you will be assigned an individual delegate that you will be responsible for. In order to assist with this, you are required to keep a journal for your delegate. In these journal I want you to keep a record of your delegate's position on the issues discussed at the convention, identify key quotes made by your delegates, and offer your own thoughts on why your delegate took a particular position, why they may have been silent on an issue, and if silent, suggest what they might have said given what they say elsewhere. Your journals are to be typed and you will turn the journal on the days of your short presentations. The journal is worth ten percent of your final grade.

Short Presentations. You are required to deliver four short (five minute) presentations over the course of the semester. These presentations afford you the opportunity to present to me and the class your

delegate's position(s) on the issue(s) encountered in each of the four acts. These presentations will be evaluated on both the substance and clarity of your presentation. Each presentation is worth ten percent of your final grade for a total of 40 percent.

Convention Recreation. On the last two days of class we will attempt to recreate the Constitutional Convention of 1787. I will serve as General Washington and set the agenda for each days proceedings. You will be responsible for arguing and taking the positions of your assigned delegate. The keys here are to stay in character, be informed about your character as well as the issues/topics, and to have fun. Your performance is worth thirty percent of your final grade.

Grading:

As indicated in the course requirements, your final grade consists four components. Your grades will be calculated as follows:

Class Participation	20%	Delegate Journal	10%
Four Short Presentations	40%	Convention Recreation	30%

Course Outline:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1/18	Administrative
1/23	Article of Confederation & Perpetual Union
1/25	U.S. Constitution as Originally Ratified
1/30	Madison's Preface; Act I, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 3-73)
2/1	Act I, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 27-73)
2/6	Act I, Scenes 4-6 (pp. 73-117)
2/8	Act I, Scenes 4-6 (pp. 73-117)
2/13	Act I, Scenes 7-9 (pp. 117-154)
2/15	Act I, Scenes 7-9 (pp. 117-154)
2/20	Act I Presentations
2/22	Act II, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 154-237)
2/27	Act II, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 154-237)
3/1	Act II, Scenes 4-6 (pp. 237-385)
3/6	Act II, Scenes 4-6 (pp. 237-385)
3/8	Act II Presentations
3/13-22	No Class (Spring Break)
3/27	Act III, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 385-569)
3/29	Act III, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 385-569)
4/3	Act III, Scenes 1-3 (pp. 385-569)
4/5	Act III Presentations
4/10	Act IV, Scenes 1-2 (pp. 569-632)
4/12	No Class (MWPSA Conference)
4/17	Act IV, Scenes 1-2 (pp. 569-632)
4/19	Act IV, Scenes 3-4 (pp. 632-659)
4/24	Overview & Prepare
4/26	Act IV Presentations
5/1	Convention Recreation
5/3	Convention Recreation

Academic Honesty:

Cheating of any kind, including copying the work of another student or claiming another person's work as your own (plagiarism) is unacceptable in this class. This includes copying papers off the internet. Anyone who violates the College's Academic Honesty Policy will be punished according to the policy. If you have any questions or would like a copy of this policy, please see your instructor.

Miscellaneous:

Make sure that all cellular phones and pagers are turned off or muted before you come to class. They are a distraction to your Professor and your fellow students and will not be tolerated in this class.