

Professor Tom Hansford
Office: COB2 312
Phone: 228-4037
E-mail: thansford@ucmerced.edu

Office Hours:
W 10:30am - 12:30pm,
and by appointment

SPRK 1-15
The Public Constitution
Spring 2019

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to explore what the U.S. Constitution means to the American public while simultaneously introducing students to academic research. We will examine how people understand, conceive of, evaluate, and respond to the Constitution. We will also consider, at an introductory level, the skills necessary to conduct research on public opinion (and social phenomena more generally).

Course-Specific Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students should:

1. Understand how to ask analytical, empirically answerable questions on the topic of public knowledge and attitudes regarding the U.S Constitution.
2. Have an introductory level of knowledge regarding how social scientists theorize and test theories with contemporary social scientific tools.
3. Demonstrate an ability to communicate non-normative research questions, analytical theoretical arguments, and empirical results in a politically charged research domain – public knowledge, evaluation, and application of constitutional principles.

Required Readings:

The schedule below lists the specific articles that you will be assigned to read. All of them are electronically available.

Assignments/Grades:

Your grade for the class will be allocated as follows:

Class participation:	30%
Research proposal:	10%
Presentation of research proposal:	5%
Research design:	15%
Research report:	30%
Presentation of research report:	10%

Class Participation – Prior to class, you must read the required readings for the week. You are then expected to discuss your insights, criticisms, and questions with the rest of the group when

we meet. This course does not follow a lecture format! The success of the seminar depends upon your participation (assesses CLOs 1, 2, & 3).

Research proposal - Each student will be required to write a one-page research proposal in which they 1) state an analytical and actionable research question on the topic of public opinion and the Constitution and 2) propose at least one hypothesis that represents a precise though tentative "answer" to the question (assesses CLOs 1, 2, & 3).

Research proposal presentation – Each student will make a 5-minute oral presentation of their research proposal (assesses CLO 3).

Research design - Each student will write a two-page research design in which they describe how they will collect evidence that bears on their hypothesis. This evidence can take the form of 1) a synthesis of published studies, 2) a basic analysis of existing, publicly available survey data, 3) an original survey, 4) interviews, or 5) experimental data resulting from collaboration with the instructor on lab-administered survey experiments (assesses CLOs 2 & 3).

Research report - Each student will write a five-page research report in which they present and discuss the evidence obtained through the method discussed in their research design (assesses CLOs 2 & 3).

Research report presentation – Each student will make a 10-minute oral presentation of their results (assesses CLO 3).

Your final grade for the course will be assigned in the following manner:

A	93% - 100%
A-	90% - 92%
B+	87% - 89%
B	83% - 86%
B-	80% - 86%
C+	77% - 79%
C	73% - 76%
C-	70% - 72%
D+	67% - 69%
D	63% - 66%
D-	60% - 62%
F	Below 60%

Policies:

Laptop computers – I am increasingly convinced that the use of laptops during lecture is detrimental for student learning. I reserve the right to prohibit the use of laptops during lecture at any point during the semester, except for students who need laptops due to a documented disability.

Academic dishonesty – I have no tolerance for academic dishonesty. I will not hesitate to report and pursue action against anyone who plagiarizes the work of others, cheats on an exam, or otherwise engages in dishonest academic practices. Please consult the UC Merced Academic Honesty Policy.

Late assignments – Please hand your assignments in on time. Assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day they are late (weekends count as one day), regardless of the reason for why they are late.

Accommodations for students with disabilities – UC Merced is committed to ensuring equal academic opportunities and inclusion for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made at the beginning of the semester, except for unusual circumstances. Students need to register with Disability Services Center to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Class Schedule

1/28 Introduction to the class

**2/4 Substantive topic - The U.S. Constitution
Research skill - Approaches to research**

U.S. Constitution (<https://www.usconstitution.net/const.pdf>)

**2/11 Substantive topic - Public knowledge of the Constitution
Research skill - Survey research**

“Americans are Poorly Informed about Basic Constitutional Provisions.” 2017.
Annenberg Public Policy Center Press Release.

**2/25 Substantive topic - Does public knowledge of the Constitution matter?
Research skill - Experiments**

Green, Donald P., Peter M. Aronow, Daniel E. Bergan, Pamela Greene, Celia Paris, Beth I. Weinberger. 2010. “Does Knowledge of Constitutional Principles Increase Support for Civil Liberties? Results from a Randomized Field Experiment.” *Journal of Politics*.

**3/4 Substantive topic - Conceptions of the Constitution and how it should be interpreted
Research skill – Locating existing research and data**

Greene, Jamal, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Nathaniel Persily. 2011. “Profiling Originalism.” *Columbia Law Review*.

Marshall, Thurgood. 1987. “Reflections on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.” (<http://thurgoodmarshall.com/the-bicentennial-speech/>)

3/11 *Presentations of research proposals*

Research proposals are due in class

3/18 Substantive topic - How do we view constitutional rights and liberties?

Research skill - Interviews

Chong, Dennis. 1993. "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties." *American Journal of Political Science*.

4/1 Substantive topic - Presidential power

Research skill - Analyzing data

Research designs are due in class

Braman, Eileen. 2016. "Exploring Citizen Assessments of Unilateral Executive Authority." *Law and Society Review*.

4/8 Substantive topic - Freedom of speech

Research skill - TBA

Nelson, Thomas E. and Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review*.

Canelo, Kayla, Thomas G. Hansford, and Stephen P. Nicholson. 2018. "The Paradoxical Effect of Speech Suppressing Appeals to the First Amendment." *Journal of Politics*.

4/15 TBA

4/22 Substantive topic - The Supreme Court and public opinion on the Constitution

Research skill - Effective presentations

4/29 *Presentations of research reports*

5/6 *Presentations of research reports*

TBA *Research reports due*

General Learning Outcome Information

General Education Program Learning Outcomes:

1. Life at the Research University: Asking Questions
2. Reasoning: Thinking Critically
3. Communication: Explaining and Persuading
4. Cultural and Global Awareness: Engaging with Differences
5. Citizenship: Contributing to the Public Good

General Spark Learning Outcomes:

Students take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world that reflects engagement with the mission and values of our research university. They achieve this by being able to do the following:

1. You will generate questions, identify problems, and formulate answers by applying appropriate theoretical, evidentiary, analytical and ethical frameworks from multiple intellectual perspectives.
 2. You will demonstrate intellectual curiosity and an understanding of the nature of knowledge, discovery, and ambiguity and of themselves as learners, identifying their own values and talents.
- Students become equipped with multiple tools of analysis to support accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. They achieve this by being able to do the following:*
3. You will identify and use analytical tools from scientific, social scientific, or humanistic disciplines.
 4. You will be able to identify and evaluate sources of information.

Students communicate in a variety of ways to diverse audiences. They achieve this by being able to do the following:

5. You will use written, visual, oral and/or numerical modes of communication to explore and convey ideas, adjusting their communications depending on occasion, purpose and audience.
6. You will work both independently and collaboratively.