I. CONTENT & OBJECTIVES

This course is an examination of the United States Constitution, as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court. It will focus on the authority of, and relationships between, the three branches of the federal government. We will examine the scope and limits to the legal and policymaking power of the Court, the Congress, and the Executive branch. In covering these topics, we also will consider various theories of Constitutional interpretation, the influence of “extralegal” factors on judicial decision-making, and the role of the Supreme Court in the democratic process.

This course will be taught primarily using the “case method,” which uses specific cases to extract legal rules and larger legal principles. In this way, the course will be similar to what one might experience in law school, but with the workload and intimidation factor greatly reduced. As this is an undergraduate political science course, we also will explore the political context surrounding Court decisions as well as the role that ideological positions of the justices might (or might not) play in shaping their votes and opinions.

At the conclusion of this course, students will:

1) Demonstrate knowledge of several basic doctrines of American Constitutional law.

2) Understand the relationships among the various branches of government, both as articulated in the Constitution and as defined by the Supreme Court.

3) Gain proficiency in legal reasoning and be able to apply extant legal doctrines to hypothetical cases.

4) Evaluate the operation of the U.S. Supreme Court and its role in shaping the balance of power among governmental institutions.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS

Each student must purchase/borrow:

Please note that if you choose to use an earlier version of the text, the pages will not match those listed in the syllabus and there may be material that is not included in the older book. I strongly recommend you use the 10th edition.

Additional readings may be assigned and will be posted on OAKS. It is the student’s responsibility to check email and OAKS regularly for information about any changes in course material, schedules, or exams.

**III. EVALUATION**

Grades will be based upon the following elements: three examinations, one final project, case briefs, reading quizzes, and class participation.* The contribution of each to your final grade is as follows:

- Exam #1: 10%
- Exam #2: 20%
- Exam #3: 20%
- Final Project: 30%
- Class Participation: 15%
- Case Briefs/Presentation: 5%

*Examinations*

The first exam will be take-home and completed via OAKS. The second and third exams will be closed-book and taken in class(*). They will be comprised of a mix of question types, including objective, short answer, and short essay. Similar to what one might confront in law school, the short essay question(s) will be hypothetical cases to which students must apply the substantive law they have learned in the course. There will be many opportunities to practice this during class sessions, but please be aware that this is a skill that takes effort and practice on your part. The weight given to the exams reflects the likelihood of a learning curve. Further details will be discussed in class.

Exams must be taken or turned in at the scheduled time, unless arrangements have been made with me at least 48 hours prior to the exam. Make-up exams will only be offered once and will be more difficult than the regular test.

*Final Project*

In lieu of a final exam, you will be required to complete a final project in which you will act as either a Supreme Court justice or an attorney arguing before the Court. The project will include participation in a simulated oral argument (held during the last three class
sessions*) and completion of a final paper (either a legal brief or judicial opinion). Further details will be forthcoming.

Class Participation

The class participation element may be satisfied by in or out of class questions, or through other arrangements with the instructor. As discussion is central to the course, I expect all students to come to every class having already read and carefully considered the material, ready to participate. Please note the significant amount of weight given to this aspect of your grade.

To ensure that all students have an equal opportunity for participation, I will be employing a modified version of the “Socratic method,” in which the student and I will engage in an in-class dialogue (potentially lasting several minutes) about a particular case or set of cases. I use the term “modified” because students will know, in advance, when they are likely to be called upon. More specifically, beginning the second full week of the semester, I will be calling upon students in alphabetical order, by last name. When called upon, the student will be expected to answer my questions about the case facts and Court opinions as well as the implications of the case for legal doctrine and the political system more broadly. Good preparation will be essential for this element of the grade, as students will be assessed on effort as well as the quality of the response. The grading scale for this will be a 0-4. Students who have an unexcused absence the day they are called upon will be assigned a zero.

Please note that you may still be called upon in class even if it is not your “assigned” day, so you must come prepared for every session. I also reserve to right to give random pop quizzes if it appears that students are not reading the material and coming to class well-prepared. If instituted, these quizzes will be factored into your class participation grade.

Case Briefs/Presentation

You will also be required, with one other student, to present one case to the class. This presentation, which should last no longer than 10 minutes, will be an oral form of a “case brief” in which you explain various elements of a case. It will occur either in-person (for case briefs due after 9/14/2020 or during Zoom sessions.* In addition, you must post a copy of your case brief on the discussion board on OAKS at least 24 hours prior to your presentation date and time. The other students in the class are expected to read this brief and come prepared with any questions or concerns about the brief, which the presenters will answer in class. Specific instructions for how to write a case brief have been posted on OAKS. Case and group assignments will be posted as soon as the class list is finalized.
Grading Scale

The grading system is based upon the following scale: 93-100% A; 90-92 A-; 87-89% B+; 83-85% B; 80-82% B-; 77-79% C+; 73-76% C; 70-72% C-; 67-69% D+; 63-67% D; 60-62% D-; 0-59% F. Extra credit is not permitted.

IV. ATTENDANCE AND CLASS BEHAVIOR

Attendance is required for all classes, either during synchronous Zoom sessions or in-person classes. Attendance will be taken during every in-person class. Only documented illness (subject to exception for Covid-related absences), family emergency, or institutional permission constitute excused absences. Please let me know of any such absences in advance whenever possible; if you will be missing class for a school-related reason (activity, athletics etc.), you must let me know twenty-four hours before your absence.

Any student with a Covid-related absence should inform me as soon as possible. The student and I will make reasonable accommodations/arrangements as needed. My classes are built on mutual respect and trust, and I expect that you will be honest and truthful about the cause of your absence(s).

As tardiness disrupts the classroom environment, any student who is late more than two times will have their participation grade dropped by 10%.

If classes are suspended due to inclement weather, pandemic or substantial interruption of instruction, I will announce a plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

The rules of the student code of conduct apply in this class. Appropriate behavior is required at all times. Students may not speak while other students or the instructor is speaking. Classroom debate is highly encouraged, but students are expected to conduct themselves with decorum and respect.

Laptops are not allowed during in-person class sessions. Use of cell phones during class is strictly prohibited. Turn phones off before entering the classroom/Zoom session.

V. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each incident will be examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

Incidents where the instructor determines the student’s actions are related more to a misunderstanding will handled by the instructor. A written intervention designed to help
prevent the student from repeating the error will be given to the student. The intervention, submitted by form and signed both by the instructor and the student, will be forwarded to the Dean of Students and placed in the student’s file.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly by the instructor and/or others having knowledge of the incident to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible by the Honor Board for academic dishonesty will receive an XXF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student’s transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the XX to be expunged. The F is permanent. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration--working together without permission-- is a form of cheating. Unless the instructor specifies that students can work together on an assignment, quiz and/or test, no collaboration during the completion of the assignment is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (which could include accessing information via a cell phone or computer), copying from others’ exams, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance. Research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the instructor.

Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the Student Handbook at http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.

VI. DISABLED STUDENTS

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply for services at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. Students approved for accommodations are responsible for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed

VII. ASSIGNMENTS AND LECTURE TOPICS

Please note that I reserve the right to alter these assignments as necessary. Notice of such changes will be provided in advance and students are expected to alter their reading as necessary. Indeed, given current circumstances, change is so likely that this syllabus includes only the material to be covered during the first three weeks of class. An updated syllabus will be distributed when it is determined whether in-person classes will resume as scheduled.

*DUE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, THE FIRST THREE WEEKS OF CLASS WILL INCLUDE SYNCHRONOUS ZOOM SESSIONS ONLY. DURING THESE SESSIONS, HELD AT THE CLASS TIME LISTED ABOVE, WE WILL DISCUSS
THE MATERIAL COVERED IN THE TEXT, THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS POSTED ON OAKS, AND THE PRE-RECORDED LECTURE POSTED ON OAKS. The Zoom sessions will NOT be re-teaching of material covered in the text or lecture but will build upon that material. Therefore, YOU MUST READ THE ASSIGNED PAGES IN THE TEXT, READ AND CONSIDER THE KEY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, AND LISTEN TO THE LECTURE PRIOR TO CLASS. The lecture and discussion questions will be posted on OAKS 24 hours before class.

SECTION ONE: THE SUPREME COURT - “LEAST DANGEROUS” BRANCH?

A. Session 1: Tuesday, August 25th

Topic: Introduction to the Course & Each Other

Modality: Zoom – 9:25 AM, EST (I will send invitation via email)

Reading: Syllabus; How to Read and Brief a Case

Additional Assignments: None

B. Session 2: Thursday, August 27th


Modality: Zoom – 9:25 AM, EST (I will send invitation via email)

Reading: pp. 22-33; 716-721 (Articles I, II, III); Concurrences of Justice Roberts, Citizens United v. FEC & June Medical Services v. Russo (selections); Concurrence of Justice Thomas, Gamble v. United States (selections)

Additional Assignments: Listen to lecture; read/consider discussion questions

C. Session 3: Tuesday, September 1st:


Modality: Zoom – 9:25 AM, EST (I will send invitation via email)

Reading: NONE (review reading from prior session)

Additional Assignments: Listen to lecture; read/consider discussion questions
D. Session 4: September 3rd

**Topic:** Introduction to Judicial Decision-Making: The Role of “Politics”

**Modality:** Zoom – 9:25 AM, EST (I will send invitation via email)

**Reading:** pp. 33-37; Lawrence Friedman, “Supreme Court Justices Should Not Be Called Liberal or Conservative”

**Additional Assignments:** Listen to lecture; read/consider discussion questions

E. Session 5: September 8th

**Topic:** Introduction to Judicial Decision-Making: Just Play the Game

**Modality:** Zoom – 9:25 AM, EST (I will send invitation via email)

**Reading:** pp. 37-42; Ilya Somin, “Is John Roberts a Judicial Minimalist, a Coward, or a Strategic Maximizer?”

**Additional Assignments:** Listen to lecture; read/consider discussion questions

F. Session 6: September 10th

**Topic:** The Breadth of Judicial Power: Beyond the Confines of the Constitution, Part 1

**Modality:** Zoom – 9:25 AM, EST (I will send invitation via email)

**Reading:** pp. 54-69; 720-721 (Article III; review)

**Case Brief:** Marbury v. Madison, 5 U.S. 137 (1803) (completed by Group 1 ONLY – post Case Brief by 9 am on September 9th)

**Additional Assignments:** Listen to lecture; read/consider discussion questions; read case brief