**SOC 303: Exploring U.S. Government: The Constitution**

**The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Humanities**

**Spring 2024, MWF 9:00, 10:00, Burris 119**

Dr. Sean A. Scott [seanscott@bsu.edu](mailto:seanscott@bsu.edu)

Wagoner 149, hours: MWF 11:00-12:50, T 1:00-2:50, or by appt.

**Course Description:** The course explores U.S. government by focusing on the history and role of the Constitution. The course will provide students with both a historical background and a modern working knowledge of the Constitution and the American political system. The course will examine important legal cases with special attention to issues of current relevance.

**Attendance, Unexcused Absence Policy, and Classroom Etiquette**: The Indiana Academy regards any absence from class as unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, or extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from class, the instructor reports the absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The instructor does not have discretion in this matter. Four or more unexcused absences will lead to academic and residential consequences beyond the scope of this class determined by the Office of Academic Affairs (i.e., residential groundings, parent-principal conferences, or detentions).

Any homework assignment missed because of an unexcused absence will not be made up for credit and will be given a zero. Any unexcused absence on the day of an exam or project will result in a 30% deduction for that assignment.

Come to class engaged and prepared to learn. I record attendance in powerschool a few minutes before class. If you are late, please see me afterwards to remind me to change your absence to tardy. Any student arriving fifteen minutes after the start of class will be counted absent for that period. There’s no reason to have your phone out during class or be wearing earbuds.

**Academic Integrity**: Academic integrity is foundational to achievement at the Academy and throughout your college life. Cheating on tests, plagiarism on papers, and all forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please understand that severe penalties will arise for violating academic integrity and review the relevant policies outlined in the Academy Handbook.

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. This holds true whether the material is copied from a source in print, taken from internet content, or generated by AI. For my courses, AI should not be used for writing papers. Period. Because the discipline of history emphasizes the importance of careful reading, independent research, and original writing, AI is an inappropriate shortcut. If you have any questions about this policy, please speak to me during office hours.

**Disability**: Students with documented disabilities should notify me by the end of the first week of class, and I will make reasonable accommodation for you.

**Excused Absences**: In the event of a serious illness or family tragedy, please notify me as soon as possible. Appropriate documentation will be necessary to make up an exam.

**Make-up Policy**: Missed tests with an excused absence should be made up as quickly as possible after returning to class in order to keep from falling too far behind. Ideally, this will be done within 2 days of returning to class. Late homework will be accepted if a student has been sick and is excused from class, but no late submissions will be accepted under normal circumstances.

**Student Success**: I want you to succeed in this course. Please see me during office hours to discuss any concerns or questions you have about the course or assignments. I am always happy to talk about specific readings, the study of history, or life in general. If I become concerned about your performance in this course, engagement in class, or overall well-being, I will speak with you first and then may refer you to the appropriate counselor within the Academy.

**BSU Statement on Diversity**: “Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>.”

**Texts:** Readings will be posted to Canvas.

**Assignments**

1. Reacting to the Past roleplaying game over the Constitutional Convention—Each student will be assigned a member of the Constitutional Convention and will approach four key issues debated at the convention from the viewpoint of his or her character. Details on particular assignments and how students earn points will be explained during the game setup.
2. 1787 essay—Each student will write an essay for the 1787 Prize, a national essay competition. The essay must be between 1,000-2,500 words, be footnoted, and incorporate both primary and secondary sources. Below is this year’s prompt.

The United States government has progressed from a treaty among the colonies (the Articles of Confederation), to a national constitution that shared governing power with a federation of states, to a strongly centralized national power. Over two centuries have elapsed since our nation’s founding, the pressures of a Revolutionary War have waned, and slavery has ended. While our understanding of democracy has matured, how might you re-envision the following two aspects of the Constitution?

* The division of rights and responsibilities among the Federation
* The division of power within the Federal government, including the role of the Senate and the Electoral College

Per contest rules, I am allowed to submit one essay from the IASMH. The winner of the national competition will receive $2,500.

1. Test—there will be one comprehensive test over the Constitution, including amendments.
2. Simulations—Students will participate in presidential, congressional, and judicial simulations throughout the semester.

**Grading**

Constitutional Convention game 33%

1787 essay 20%

Test 17%

Simulations 30%

Students must complete all major projects to pass the class. Grades will be figured according to the plus-minus scale copied below:

94-100% = A “A” grades reflect the “wow” factor. This shows exceptional, extra-

90-93% = A- ordinary effort and rewards work of the highest excellence.

88-89% = B+

83-87% = B “B” grades reflect the “very good” factor. This shows effort exceeding

80-82% = B- average and work that is high quality, but short of excellence.

78-79% = C+

73-77% = C “C” grades reflect average work and satisfactory results.

70-72% = C-

0-69% = D\* “D\*” reflects unsatisfactory work.

**Course Schedule:**

Week 1: Jan. 5

F: Course intro and historical background—the Articles of Confederation

Week 2: Jan. 8-12

M: Historical background continued—state constitutions

W: Discussion of Locke and Montesquieu

F: Discussion of Paine, Jefferson, and Adams (read the first two)

Week 3: Jan. 15-19

M: MLK Day—no class

W: Discussion of Madison and Brutus

F: Reacting to the past game setup and explanation

Week 4: Jan. 22-26

M: Game day 1: House of Representatives—nature of representation

W: Game day 2: House of Representatives—size of the chamber

F: Game day 3: Senate—mode of election

Week 5: Jan. 29-Feb. 2

M: Game day 4: Senate—state suffrage

W: Game day 5: Presidency—term of office

F: Game day 6: Presidency—re-eligibility

Week 6: Feb. 5-9

M: Extended weekend—no class

W: Game day 7: Presidency—mode of election

F: Game day 8: Slavery—importation

Week 7: Feb. 12-16

M: Game day 9: Slavery—representation and taxation

W: Game day 10: Final voting

F: Game day 11: Debriefing

Week 8: Feb. 19-23

M: Article I

W: Article I continued

F: Article II

Week 9: Feb. 26-Mar. 1

M: Article III

W: Articles IV-VII

F: Discuss 1787 essay

Week 10: March 4-8—Spring break

Week 11: March 11-15—No class—work on 1787 essay

Week 12: March 18-22

M: **Essay rough drafts due**—peer feedback in class

W: Amendments 1-4

F: Amendments 5-10

Week 13: March 25-29

M: Amendments 13-15

W: Amendments 16-19

**Essay final drafts due**

F: Amendments 20-26

Week 14: Apr. 1-5

M: Extended weekend—no class

W: Review for exam

F: **Exam**

Week 15: Apr. 8-12

M: Congressional simulation—bill writing

W: Congressional simulation—committee work

F: Congressional simulation—floor votes

Week 16: Apr. 15-19

M: Congressional simulation—floor votes continued

W: Cabinet simulation—introduction

F: Cabinet simulation—research

Week 17: Apr. 22-26

M: Cabinet meeting

W: Free speech in schools

F: Extended weekend—no class

Week 18 M: Supreme Court simulation—discuss case

W: Supreme Court simulation—write briefs

F: Supreme Court simulation—arguments and votes