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## PSCI 474.01: Civil Rights Seminar

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# **PSCI 474**

## **Spring, 2018**

### **Syllabus**

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Office Hours:  
MWF 12:00 – 2:00  
or by appointment

There are several objectives for this seminar. Students will be expected to

1. develop analytic skills in connection with sets of Supreme Court decisions relating to several civil right and liberties doctrines that have developed since 1789. These skills are:
  - a. Reading analytically to develop answers to the relevant questions about a case or a doctrine.
  - b. Presenting one's analysis orally and/or in writing in clear, rigorous, and systematic fashion.
2. develop oral presentation skills relating to the analysis of cases.
3. develop intensive and rigorous writing skills, in the course of preparing the seminar paper.

There is no textbook for this seminar. Instead, the seminar will be conducted by reading, analyzing, and discussing Court opinions. Students are expected to uncover and master supplemental materials as they choose to develop comprehensive understandings of the doctrines explored in the seminar.

A seminar is different than a lecture course. There will be some presentation of overviews by the instructor. However, the bulk of the seminar will focus on questions posed by the members of the seminar to each other as well as the presentations conducted by students, who have prepared the appropriate material. Each student, whether presenting or not, is expected to be engaged in (contribute to) the discussion of the cases each (and every) session of the seminar. That means class attendance is required. Students who expect to flourish in this seminar will be expected to contribute nearly every day to the discussion.

Perhaps the most important feature of a seminar is that students learn to ask the right questions. Those questions may not have answers and they certainly do not have “yes” or “no” answers. Yet, asking the right questions is the core to developing analytic skills. That is because working through some resolution of the question or the problem presented by the question is the heart of developing analytic skills.

This seminar will focus on several specific subjects related to Civil Rights and Liberties in the United States. The list of cases involved in each of the following categories will be presented during the semester. The first topic – Nationalization of the Bill of Rights – will be provided at the outset of the semester. Those subjects will be:

- The Nationalization of the Bill of Rights

- The Free Exercise of Religion
  - Affirmative Action (a segment of Equal Protection)
- (If time permits, one or more additional components of the Bill of Rights will be explored. That will be determined later in the semester, as the pace of the seminar “settles down.”)

The list of cases includes two sets of cases. Those in bold on the Case List page are required of all students in the Seminar. They will be the focus of class discussions on the topic. So, the bolded cases will be assigned to students for presentation and all students will prepare for discussion of these cases. The additional cases that constitute more than half of each list of cases are also deal with the same doctrine. All the cases on the list (bolded and non-bolded) are in chronological order, and are the cases to be used in the Seminar paper on the subject, if the students selected that topic for the paper.

The course will be conducted as a traditional seminar. That means students will be engaged in several activities throughout the semester. These activities will require each student to prepare for class each day by reviewing the prior discussions on the subject as well as reading and analyzing the cases discussed on each day, in class. In addition, student will need to remember the earlier discussions and points made by other students in those meetings. (Notes made during seminar meetings are likely to be a list of questions presented by seminar members. There may be few conclusions to draw from discussion.)

- The core of the seminar will involve pairs of students assigned to read, analyze, and then present (lead) discussion of each, individual case in class. These assignments will start after a variety of preliminary matters are outlined in the early seminar sessions. These presentations will be done on a daily, rotating basis. (Depending on the number of cases and students, students will be assigned more than one case per topic. However, each student will be assigned nearly the same number of cases to present throughout the semester.)
- At the end of each topic covered in the seminar, a broader discussion of the subject will involve all the members of the seminar discussing all the assigned cases. This discussion will put the individual cases together into some structure of the doctrine,
- At the end of the semester, each student will prepare and submit an analytic paper on one of the selected topics covered during the semester. This paper is due the last day of class for the semester – Friday, May 4, 2018. (Selecting one of the topics early in the semester may be difficult to do, since all the topics will not have been outlined early. However, given a student’s interest, selecting and starting to read a set of cases will be expected during the first several weeks of the course.)

**Grades:** There are two major components of the grade earned in this course. **First**, individual students will be assigned oral presentations and those will be graded. In addition, student contributions to the seminar discussions will also be evaluated. Being able to discuss and present analytic material orally is an important skill. It is a learned skill, not one that is inherent. So, this feature of the seminar will involve effort and sustained work by each student. It is not expected that students will begin the semester with these skills, but students will hone and polish those oral skills throughout the semester.

**Second**, the Seminar Paper, which will involve reading and analyzing a large set of cases on the subject than were presented and discussed in class will be due at the end of the semester. There is a separate document posted that outlines this part of the Seminar in more detail. However, it is expected that students will begin shortly after the start of the semester working through cases for this paper.

The distribution of these two grade components is straightforward and follows:

<b>Grade Component</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Class Participation	50%
Seminar Paper	50%
Total	100%

Political Science Majors need to complete the one credit writing course requirements for their major (**PSCI 400**). The Research Project for this seminar will certainly satisfy this requirement. Completing the registration for PSCI 400 requires several steps, but those can be completed quickly at the outset of the semester. If students want to discuss this possibility before they register for PSCI 400, that would be quite

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**Nota Bene.** Students are strongly encouraged to discuss seminar matters with the instructor anytime they have questions or ideas. A seminar is based on discussion and learning that comes from discussing ideas, problems, or other related topics. Those discussions can occur anywhere – in class, over coffee, in the office, or while walking down the hall. If the scheduled office hours do not work, please make an appointment or just stop by the office.

<p>The following items are important for you to know about and to understand. These are statements provided by the University or the instructor. They relate to matters of general concern. These might affect you as a student generally or in this class specifically during the term.</p>
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All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and students need to be aware of the Student Conduct Code. See

[http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php).

In connection with this course, the penalty for any student engaging in academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, will be a failing grade for the entire course.

Turn off all electronic devices that will disrupt class before coming into class. Ringing or signaling devices are a terrible distraction and will result in the immediate end of class session. If cell phone calls or texting are vital to your continued existence, then please do not attend class.

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me as long as the requested modification is documented by Disabled Student Services (DSS). The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications. Contact Disabled Student Services for further information and assistance. The DSS website is: (<http://www.umt.edu/dss/>) or call 406.243.2243. You should inform the instructor at the outset of the semester of any needs for accommodation.

I recognize that a time of bereavement is very difficult for an individual. As a result, students will be excused for funeral leave and given the opportunity to earn equivalent credit and to demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missed assignments or assessments in the event of the death of a member of the student's family. I am not amendable to multiple family emergencies during the semester, given prior abuses of this bereavement policy. However, the instructor will try to accommodate family bereavement events.

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control.

I am committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. To achieve academic excellence, I will insure that we all respect and value diverse perspectives and backgrounds in order to promote the exchange of ideas and enrich campus life.

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