

# Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Political Science 485 / Summer 2023

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## Course Description

This is a survey course for students who are interested in understanding how the Constitution works to guarantee specific rights to U.S. citizens. The rights addressed will include both protections granted to people as members of groups (commonly referred to as civil rights) and protections granted to them as individuals (civil liberties). We will be studying constitutional provisions, relevant history, with a strong focus on Supreme Court jurisprudence on one hand, and the work of social movements on the other. Three key questions will guide our study of rights and liberties:

- *What are civil rights and liberties?* There are many contested concepts that fit within this discussion. Some are enshrined in law; social norms; and many are entangled in ongoing debates about being added or even removed (i.e. issues / ideas around education, gender, sexuality, race, etc). Let's figure out what these are and understand the arguments for and against their inclusion.
- *Where do civil rights and liberties come from?* We will aim to historicize our contemporary discourse and jurisprudence concerning civil rights and liberties within western political thought, which will inform how we interpret foundational texts like the US Constitution, among others. We will survey US history, from colonial periods, up through the "long civil rights" period, and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.
- *How does the US political system promote or prevent civil liberties, domestically and internationally?* Often the scholarly discourse and talking head punditry concerning civil rights and liberties is contained to a domestic political arena, *for citizens* of the United States. We will explore civil rights and liberties in a way that challenges us to think critically and imaginatively about our world that is more interconnected than at any time in history—yet also more restrictively defined by borders, fences, and (paper)walls than at any time in history—how we grapple with this tension will shape what it could mean for the future of the United States, neighboring nations, and our "*pale blue dot, suspended in a sunbeam.*"

## **Course Organization and Policies**

First and foremost, this is an online and asynchronous course. In the absence of defined class periods, this course offers content entirely via the Canvas platform. As a summer course running approximately four weeks, this class is organized into four key modules. Each module is organized with a broad question or theme in mind.

Module One explores the theoretical and conceptual workings of civil rights and civil liberties. On one hand, this means revisiting a bit of historical context in which liberalism emerges and why the ideas of rights and liberty are so central and radical in comparison to the traditional organization of social, political, and economic life. We begin in this more conceptual realm to make sure our understanding of basic terms and concepts used frequently in political science are familiar, as we cannot proceed into actual content without first having some language to comprehend and analyze the development of rights and liberties in the US.

Module Two dives into US history, tracking the development of the colonies and later the United States in terms of civil rights and liberties, up through the 1960s. Concepts of modern education have us believe that rights and liberties are somehow obvious and timeless, but it is the complete opposite. As we will see, the struggle to advance rights and liberties across many different fronts is almost always going to be violent and destructive before any resolution or progress is attained.

Module Three concerns the post “Civil Rights” era of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, or more precisely, the new civil rights period, which is characterized on one hand by the expansion of rights and liberties for some, like LGBTQ, but on the other ushered in the mass expansion of carceral spaces, bordering, and rollbacks on reproductive care, precarious struggles over drugs, guns, education, and even the science and language we use to describe humans and humanity.

Module four serves as a sort of synthesis of the prior three modules and then pushes the envelope further by considering our contemporary struggles and the future of civil rights and liberties. We will discuss Artificial Intelligence, the Rights of Nature, the frontiers of reproduction, transhumanism, immigration, and ultimately, what the limits of liberal capitalism in regimes oriented toward democracy, and what alternatives may be on the horizon.

## **Assignments**

This course requires one assignment per week that allows students to process, reflect on, and express analytical discussion of selected materials and ideas. This is an opportunity for students to work on persuasive writing, precise vocabulary, and logically organized ideas using evidence from a variety of sources. Rather than individual and isolated papers that only the instructor would see, this course takes a more democratic and transparent approach, structuring assignments into discussions that encourage collaboration, iteration, and constructive feedback. A simple final quiz concludes the course that is more of a basic vocabulary and concept quiz, it is open notes and has no time limit. The assignments are as follows:

<b>Assignment Name</b>	<b>% of Total Grade</b>
Introductory post	5%
What Are Civil Rights & Liberties?	20%
Crip Camp Movie Analysis & Discussion	20%
News, Civil Rights, and You	20%
New Horizons of Civil Rights and Liberties?	20%
Final Quiz	15%
<b>Total Points Possible</b>	<b>100</b>

There is no grading curve, so the score break points to letter grade is as follows. If you're not satisfied with your grade please contact me to discuss. For those striving for an A+, extra credit is possible usually in the form of additional content analyses.

A+ > 100 > A > 94 > A- > 90 > B+ > 87 > B > 84 > B- > 80 > C+ > 77 > C > 74 > C- > 70 > F

## **Course Materials**

Given the summer course format, I have organized the class such that there are no required purchases in terms of books or materials. All content will be provided via Canvas in the form of videos and articles accessible on the web or UO library system.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

### **Office Hours and Communications**

Since this is an online course, you should just email me at [dellis@uoregon.edu](mailto:dellis@uoregon.edu) and we can arrange a meeting, or stop by the live stream and talk there! [Twitch.tv/dustinlikesyou](https://www.twitch.tv/dustinlikesyou)

**Guidelines for Class Discussions:** Below are some useful guidelines for discussions to keep in mind this term for both general discussions and in-class debates:

*Discussing to Learn:* Contribute ideas and views in the spirit of inquiring and learning together, rather than trying to debate or win arguments (unless the activity is designed as a debate or to assess best arguments).

*Mindful Listening:* Listen actively with attention and respect for what others are saying, without interrupting or tuning out to focus on preparing one's own contribution.

*Stepping Up/Stepping Back:* Pay attention to the voices in the room and be mindful of one's contributions. Are there patterns regarding which voices are being heard and which are not? How do I fit in these patterns? Is there need to step back and let others have opportunity to contribute?

Is there need to step up and contribute more? Do we feel empowered to hold ourselves accountable for our class participation dynamics?

*Listening Lenience:* Remember that we are learning together and may not necessarily get something right the first or even second try. Practice being lenient with oneself and with others. Restating what someone just said can provide them an opportunity to clarify or revise their statement. Similarly, it is good practice to state when you say something not quite right and then try to state it again or ask for help in saying it.

*Ideas not Individuals:* Focus on engaging others' ideas not judging or criticizing individuals. Asking for clarification can be helpful, and using language such as "The idea I hear you saying is..." (rather than "you said") or "I don't agree with that idea..." (rather than "I don't agree with you").

*Support Our Statements:* Offer supporting evidence of some kind to back up your contributions, such as data, clear reasoning or reference to a text, and be aware that your own experience or an anecdotal story may not fit a larger pattern. Remember that being an exception does not discredit a rule.

*A Part is Not the Whole:* Remember that your view or experience is your view or experience, a partial opening onto the whole, and not necessarily a general view or experience of everyone; nor are the views or experiences of others necessarily going to match your own. And, just as you cannot represent an entire group of people, nor can anyone else represent a group of people. It is quite okay for everyone to speak their truth and their experience, but working from individual views and experiences to more general ideas or conclusions often requires considerable work.

*Mutual Respect:* A key goal is to respect diverse experiences, viewpoints, approaches, and identities. Even when we disagree, please do not undermine, demean, or marginalize others.

**Academic Integrity:** The University Student Conduct Code defines academic misconduct, which includes unauthorized help on assignments and examinations and the use of sources without acknowledgment. Dishonest behavior includes both "giving" and "taking" of improper assistance on exams, papers, or any other form of attempting to take credit for work that is not your own. If you are uncertain what plagiarism entails, please see the following site: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>.

### **Accessible Education**

If you have a condition that inhibits learning or evaluation under customary circumstances, please let me know. In addition, please request a letter from the Accessible Education Center (346-1155, 164 Oregon Hall) that verifies your disability and states the accommodations that I can make. I will make any reasonable adjustments necessary to improve your learning

environment.

### **Notice of duty to report**

We support Title IX and have a duty to report relevant information. The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. Any UO employee who becomes aware that such behavior is occurring has a duty to report that information to their supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. The University Health Center and University Counseling and Testing Center can provide assistance and have a greater ability to work confidentially with students.

### **University Health and Counseling Services**

University Health Services help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates. Find out more at [health.uoregon.edu/ducknest](http://health.uoregon.edu/ducknest).

University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more at [atcounseling.uoregon.edu](http://atcounseling.uoregon.edu) or by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).