

Honors 3025

American Constitutionalism: Historical & Cultural Roots

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The ideas that animate our national Constitution have their roots in, *inter alia*: classical ideas regarding the purposes and structure of government; medieval ideas of sovereignty and liberty; common law ideas of the rule of law and the respective roles of parliament and king; enlightenment ideas regarding natural law and natural rights; and the particular concerns and experiences of the North American colonists, both before and during the Revolution. Many of those basic ideas remain controversial today.

The purpose of this course is to explore the intellectual, historical and cultural contexts from which the ideas embodied in the U.S. Constitution arose. The approach will be as inter-disciplinary as I can make it. My hope is that by pooling the knowledge of students with backgrounds in different areas – political science, economics, hard sciences, art, history, classics, literature, philosophy, etc. – we can gain insight into how and why those basic ideas developed as they did.

The course will be taught in seminar format. The first two thirds or so will require the students to participate in class discussion of assigned readings. Students will also be required write, present and defend a substantial paper which will allow them to bring whatever background expertise they may have from their other studies to bear on some issue of constitutional law or history.