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Constitution Day: An Opportunity for Honors Colleges to Promote Civic Engagement

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Abstract: The United States Constitution is the bedrock upon which government and society rest, yet its precepts remain generally unfamiliar to contemporary college students. Considering the extent of its impact and the misinformation regarding its purpose, content, efficacy, and limits, the authors provide suggestions for civic learning based on this seminal document. While all American educational institutions receiving federal funding must celebrate the U.S. Constitution each year on or near September 17th, research suggests that comprehensive and integrative instruction is scarce. Citing a lack of formal Constitution Day programming among honors colleges, the authors present a multi-modal framework for honors students to conduct research, stimulate critical thinking, showcase their findings, and engage in civic dialogues. Historical underpinnings of Constitution Day legislation are provided, and curricular guidelines are included.

Keywords: civics education; Constitution Day & Citizenship Day (U.S.); civic literacy; Western Illinois University (IL)–Centennial Honors College; Central State University (OH)–Honors College

Citation: *Honors in Practice*, 2022, Vol. 18: 45–63

INTRODUCTION

“the Fate of Empires depends on the Education of Youth.”

—Aristotle (qtd. in Peter, 1977)

Diversity is a dominant theme of American popular culture and educational life today. American society is a rich mixture of diverse individuals who come from different nations and ethnic backgrounds and who embrace myriad lifestyles, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and philosophical, political, and ideological viewpoints. The blood of every nation flows through our collective body politic. While we embrace and celebrate this diversity, we need also to recognize what Americans share in common.

One paramount commonality is the United States Constitution, which is the oldest continuously functioning nation-state constitution in the world. Contrary to popular belief, the document is surprisingly parsimonious. It contains a Preamble, a succinct statement of our nation’s founding principles; seven Articles separated by powers and restraints; and just 27 Amendments, the first ten of which are called the Bill of Rights, added in 1791. The entire document, excluding the signatories, is only 7,591 words long, or roughly the length of *USA Today*’s daily sports section. Despite its age and succinctness, the Constitution remains an abiding, workable framework upon which our nation is built and functions despite historical and contemporary debates about whether its institutional design inhibits democracy. These ongoing debates reinforce the Constitution’s centrality to American politics and governance.

Unfortunately, studies have long revealed that many Americans, even honors students, have scant knowledge of or are badly misinformed about the purpose, history, content, efficacy, and limits of this classic document (cf. Naseem; Bailey; Rosen; “Poll”; Fouse; Stauss). Consider just a few examples. A recent annual survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) found that just 26 percent of Americans could accurately name the three branches of government (legislative, executive and judicial) set forth in the U.S. Constitution (“Americans are Poorly Informed”). The same survey found that 37 percent could not name a single right protected in the First Amendment (freedom of religion, speech, press, and assembly), and 53 percent erroneously believe immigrants have no protection under the U.S. Constitution. In a survey of 500 students attending 55 elite colleges (e.g., Brown, Northwestern, Yale, Bowdoin), 73 percent failed to pass a basic civics test (“Students Flunk”). This survey of college seniors also found that only 23 percent could

correctly identify James Madison as the “Father of the Constitution,” compared to 98 percent who correctly identified Snoop Dogg as a rap artist. Further, a 2019 national survey by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation reported that a mere 27 percent of Americans under the age of 45 could pass the Citizenship Test administered by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (Riccards).

CONSTITUTION DAY CELEBRATION

The widespread lack of basic civic knowledge led Louise E. Leigh, a senior citizen from Pomona, California, to forge a national campaign to celebrate the U.S. Constitution. Leigh was a lifelong learner and a tireless civic leader. Among other endeavors, she served on the National Selective Service Board, the California Respiratory Care Board, and the Los Angeles County Consumers Affairs Board, and she volunteered countless hours teaching English to new immigrants and tutoring at-risk school children through the New Revolution Baptist Church in Pasadena, California. In her early 80s, Leigh enrolled in a course on the U.S. Constitution offered by the National Center for Constitutional Studies, a nonprofit organization founded in 1971 by W. Cleon Skousen, a lawyer and professor at Brigham Young University. The course awakened Leigh to the quintessential history and workings of the Constitution, inspiring her to further promote the Constitution. In 1997, at the age of 83, she founded the National Constitution Day, Incorporated, a nonprofit organization dedicated to setting aside one day a year to study and honor our nation’s foundational document.

Leigh lobbied Congress relentlessly and eventually convinced Robert Byrd, a seasoned and revered U.S. Senator from West Virginia, to include an eleventh hour “Constitution Day” amendment to the 2004 Omnibus Spending Bill. The bill subsequently became law and took effect in 2005. Under the law, every educational institution receiving federal funding must celebrate the U.S. Constitution each year on or near September 17. September 17, 1787, was the date the delegates to the U.S. Constitution approved the document and sent it to the states for ratification. While all educational institutions across the nation must observe Constitution Day or face the prospect of losing federal funding, each institution decides the method and scope of the observance.

Implementation of this law varies considerably. A 2013 study, conducted by the American Democracy Project (ADP), examined how colleges and universities across the country commemorated Constitution Day. The ADP

is an initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), whose constituency is largely composed of state-supported regional universities that offer limited or no doctoral degrees. As such, its membership consists of institutions that are peers of and similar to Western Illinois University. Some examples of the Constitution Day activities cited in the study are highlighted below:

- Missouri State University sponsored a speaker from the Federal Defender's Office of Western Missouri to discuss the Supreme Court Case *Gideon v. Wainwright* and posted facts about the Constitution on Facebook and the university's website.
- Metropolitan State University of Denver hosted a panel on religious liberty that included faculty, a representative from the American Civil Liberties Union, and a state legislator.
- St. Cloud State University sponsored a survey of students' knowledge of the Constitution in the student union.
- Ferris State University conducted a panel discussion on the First Amendment's Freedom of Speech guarantees.
- Middle Tennessee State University held a mock Supreme Court event featuring three pivotal cases, with relevant classes participating in the simulation.
- Weber State University baked a "birthday cake for the Constitution" and provided students with copies of the document.
- The University of Missouri at St. Louis sponsored a student discussion of how emerging technologies, including social media, have affected First Amendment rights. (American Democracy Project)

Of course, the preceding activities represent select examples, and actual practices range widely from ambitious multi-day events that include speakers and specific programming to more passive document displays.

Higher education has long served as a foundation for nurturing a democratic society (Barnhardt, Sheets, and Pasquesi). Preparing students to be active citizens is a core value of colleges and universities in the United States (Colby et al.; Flanagan and Levine; American Association of State College and Universities). Honors colleges are particularly well-positioned to exercise this role given the academically motivated and engaged students they serve. Honors colleges are the academic heart and soul of today's universities, the

centers of intersecting academic units; they draw the brightest and best faculty and students from every undergraduate major and program they serve. Honors college leadership in this realm also helps prepare students for their post-baccalaureate future. According to a survey conducted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, close to 82% of employers believed that students should take courses that ensure the “vitality of democracy.” The annual Constitution Day Celebration thus presents a singular opportunity for honors colleges to lead the way in promoting democracy and constitutional literacy on their respective campuses. It provides a vehicle for interdisciplinary faculty collaboration, student research presentations, and interactive learning and civic engagement activities while promoting civic education and satisfying the federal mandate. In addition, it offers a venue to critically assess the Constitution’s continuing role in politics and government. While honors colleges can lead the way, participation should not be limited exclusively to honors students. Therefore, the model presented below is open to all faculty and students on campus and to the broader community as well.

THE CENTENNIAL HONORS COLLEGE MODEL

At Western Illinois University, the responsibility for organizing and implementing annual Constitution Day events rests with the Centennial Honors College, working in conjunction with the Departments of Political Science and History. Western Illinois University is a regional comprehensive state university with an overall enrollment of 7,000 students. The Centennial Honors College has approximately 700 students. In addition to its normal responsibility of identifying, recruiting, and educating honor students, the Centennial Honors College also sponsors myriad honors societies (e.g., Phi Eta Sigma, Phi Kappa Phi, Golden Key, Tau Sigma) and honors clubs (e.g., Student Honors Association, Honors Student Think-Tank, Honors Ambassadors), successfully nominates students for prestigious scholarships (e.g., Rhodes, Goldwater, Truman, Boren, Udall, Lagrant, Fulbright), and organizes annual pre-law and pre-med symposia, undergraduate research days, honors convocations, and the quadrennial campus-wide mock presidential election.

Planning for Constitution Day begins a year in advance. The theme and format of the event are determined by a committee co-chaired by the dean of the Centennial Honors College and the chair of the Political Science Department. Themes vary from year to year, and previous themes include:

- The Constitution and Freedom of the Press,
- Search and Seizure under the Fourth Amendment,
- Separation of Powers *with* Checks and Balances,
- Presidential Powers and Constraint,
- The Constitution and Religious Freedom,
- Federalism and the Constitution,
- The Constitution and Women's Rights,
- Civil Rights and the Constitution,
- Privacy Rights under the Constitution,
- The Meaning of the Fifth Amendment,
- Article V and Amending the Constitution, and
- Citizenship and Immigration under the Constitution.

We found it prudent to center themes on current events, drawing interest and making the university-wide event more meaningful and relevant.

After determining the theme of Constitution Day, the committee next selects a venue and time slot for the event. Ideally, the event should be centrally located on campus and offer ample space for public displays, poster presentations, panel discussions, and intermingling of participants and the general public. At Western Illinois University, we found the main branch library to be the ideal location to hold the events. The building is located at the center of campus and has sufficient space to display up to 200 research posters plus ample seating for the formal presentations. See Figure 1 for examples of promotional posters from past celebrations.

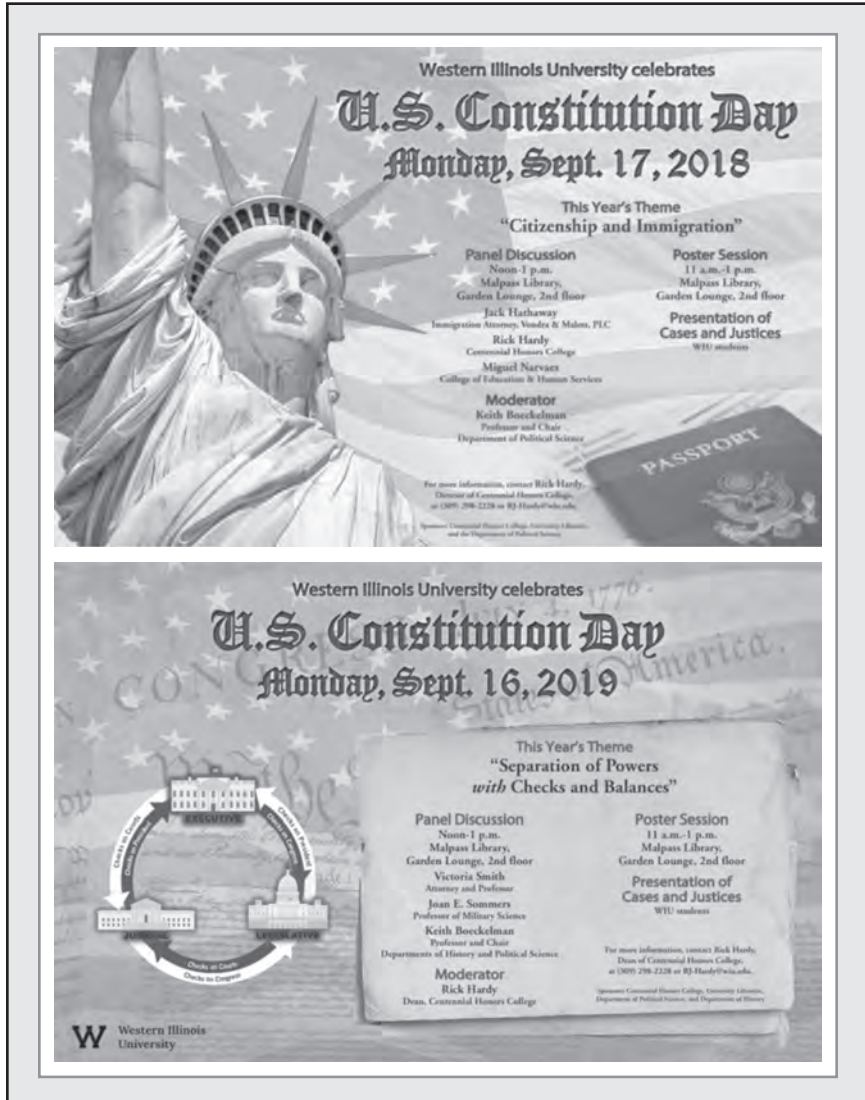
There are four major components to our Constitution Day observances: 1) Student Research Posters, 2) Panel Discussions and Public Commentary, 3) Historical Research and Documents posted on the Honors College website, and 4) Video Recordings and Broadcasting of the Panel Discussions on UTV, Western Illinois University's public broadcast television station.

Student Research Posters

Foremost among the major components are the research posters created and presented by our students. Research papers employ an educational method long used at research conferences sponsored by the National

Collegiate Honors Council and affiliated regional and state honors associations. At the very beginning of the fall semester, we promulgate a promotional poster and invite all undergraduate students to participate. We also contact professors teaching classes relating to the Constitution and invite them to give in-course or extra credit for student participation. Not surprisingly, we tend to draw disproportionately from honors history and political science classes, but we also have many students participate from the Departments of Military

FIGURE 1. EXAMPLES OF PAST PROMOTIONAL POSTERS



Science, Women’s Studies, and African American Studies. The Constitution Day committee then emails each student with a list of possible research topics pertinent to the theme for the year. Students, for example, may choose to research a relevant Supreme Court decision, an important provision of the Constitution, a famous Supreme Court justice, or a current constitutional

FIGURE 2. SAMPLE POSTER OF FAMOUS SUPREME COURT DECISION

<u>Background of the Case,</u> historical setting and dates [Picture of people or place]	<u>Your Name</u> and participating class <u>Name of the Case</u> and citation	<u>Majority Opinion</u> [Picture or background of the justice]
<u>Facts of the Case</u> (Who sued whom and why?)	<u>Question(s) of Law</u> raised in the case	<u>Dissenting or</u> <u>Concurring Opinions</u>
<u>Litigants’ Background</u> [Pictures of litigants]	<u>Decision of the Court Splits</u> (e.g., 9–0, 5–4)	<u>Significance of the Decision</u> <u>Sources Used</u>

FIGURE 3. SAMPLE POSTER OF FAMOUS SUPREME COURT JUSTICE OR CONSTITUTIONAL FIGURES

<u>Biographical Information</u> (Date, Birthplace, Family)	<u>Your Name</u> and participating class <u>Name of Justice or</u> <u>Historical Figure</u>	<u>Important Decisions,</u> <u>Accomplishments</u>
<u>Education, Early Experience,</u> <u>Work History</u>	<u>Pictures of the Subject</u>	<u>Famous Quotations</u>
<u>Appointments, Years on the</u> <u>Supreme Court</u>	<u>Judicial or Political</u> <u>Philosophy</u> (e.g., Judicial Restraint or Activism)	<u>Sources or Suggested</u> <u>Readings</u>

issue. This focus reinforces the idea that the Constitution evolves through interpretation as different generations grapple with its meaning and its relevance to contemporary challenges.

Students are then provided guidelines for conducting research and instructions for setting up a research poster using PowerPoint. The honors college furnishes the research posters and covers the cost of color copying and producing them. Throughout the process, students work closely with their professors or staff at the honors college to ensure that their research is accurate, grammatically correct, properly cited, and professionally presented. Students are also strongly encouraged to work collaboratively with fellow classmates and with the staff at the university library.

Students are provided with the template in Figure 2 as a suggestion for showcasing PowerPoint slides on 4' X 3' display boards. Each board holds between 9 and 12 PowerPoint slides. Students are encouraged to be creative with colors, photos, and descriptions of the cases at hand. We also provide them with copies of posters from previous years to give them ideas for how to construct theirs. While there is no one way to display research posters, Figures 2 and 3 offer some suggestions for organizing a poster.

A full understanding of the content of the U.S. Constitution requires knowledge of Supreme Court decisions and the justices who wrote them. As Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes once quipped, “The Constitution is what a majority of justices say it is.” Students are therefore asked to select one Supreme Court decision or Supreme Court jurist to research and present. The list of cases and key figures to research is substantial.

Following is a list of notable Supreme Court decisions relating to the topic of “Separation of Powers *with* Checks and Balances.” These cases expand or restrict congressional powers, presidential powers, or both. Included are cases dealing with vetoes, pocket vetoes, legislative vetoes, line-item vetoes, judicial review, appointment powers, removal powers, taxing power, congressional privilege, executive privilege, executive orders, reapportionment, treaty powers, executive agreements, war powers, pardons, amnesty, reprieves, commerce, and spending, to name but a few.

Marbury v. Madison (1803)

McCulloch v. Maryland (1819)

Luther v. Borden (1849)

Colgrove v. Green (1946)

Baker v. Carr (1962)

J. W. Hampton, Jr., & Co. v. U.S (1928)

Gibbons v. Ogden (1824)

U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton (1995)

Worcester v. Georgia (1832)

In Re Neagle (1890)

In Re Debs (1895)

Schechter Poultry Corp. v. U.S. (1935)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <i>Panama Refining Co. v. Ryan</i> (1935) | <i>United States v. Smith</i> (1932) |
| <i>Mistretta v. United States</i> (1989) | <i>Myers v. United States</i> (1926) |
| <i>U.S. v. E.C. Knight Co.</i> (1895) | <i>Humphrey's Executor v. U.S.</i> (1935) |
| <i>Champion v. Ames</i> (1903) | <i>Bowsher v. Synar</i> (1986) |
| <i>Hammer v. Dagenhart</i> (1918) | <i>Morrison v. Olson</i> (1988) |
| <i>Helvering v. Davis</i> (1937) | <i>Wright v. United States</i> (1938) |
| <i>NLRB v. Jones Laughlin Steel</i> (1937) | <i>Kennedy v. Sampson</i> (1974) |
| <i>U.S. v. Darby Lumber</i> (1941) | <i>INS v. Chadha</i> (1983) |
| <i>Wickard v. Filburn</i> (1942) | <i>Clinton v. City of New York</i> (1998) |
| <i>Heart of Atlanta Motel v. U.S.</i> (1964) | <i>Citizens United v. FEC</i> (2012) |
| <i>Katzenbach v. McClung</i> (1964) | <i>Ex Parte Garland</i> (1867) |
| <i>NFIB v. Sebelius</i> (2012) | <i>Ex Parte Grossman</i> (1925) |
| <i>McGrain v. Daugherty</i> (1927) | <i>Schick v. Reed</i> (1974) |
| <i>Watkins v. United States</i> (1957) | <i>Mississippi v. Johnson</i> (1867) |
| <i>Barenblatt v. United States</i> (1959) | <i>United States v. Nixon</i> (1974) |
| <i>Senate Select Com. v. Packwood</i> (1994) | <i>Nixon v. Fitzgerald</i> (1982) |
| <i>Powell v. McCormack</i> (1969) | <i>Clinton v. Jones</i> (1997) |
| <i>Gravel v. U.S.</i> (1972) | <i>Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009</i> |
| <i>Hutchinson v. Proxmire</i> (1979) | <i>Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire Co.</i> (2007) |
| <i>U.S. v. Lopez</i> (1995) | <i>Gundy v. United States</i> (2019) |
| <i>Schechter Poultry Corp. v. U.S.</i> (1935) | |

Following is a list of leading cases dealing with the theme “Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment.” Included are major Supreme Court decisions pertaining to prayers in public places, government aid to religious schools, freedom of worship, government regulation of religious activities, taxing churches and church properties, conscientious objector status, religious rights of parents, public vouchers to attend sectarian schools, religious displays on public places, freedom to engage in religious practices, compulsory flag salute laws, and religious activities in public schools and the workplace.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Gibbons v. D.C.</i> (1886) | <i>Bowen v. Kendrick</i> (1988) |
| <i>Bradfield v. Roberts</i> (1899) | <i>Tilton v. Richardson</i> (1971) |
| <i>Cummings v. Missouri</i> (1866) | <i>Zorach v. Clauson</i> (1952) |
| <i>Scopes v. State</i> (1927) | <i>Curtis v. Falmouth</i> (1996) |
| <i>Torcaso v. Watkins</i> (1961) | <i>Cantwell v. Connecticut</i> (1940) |
| <i>McGowan v. Maryland</i> (1961) | <i>Jones v. Opelika</i> (1942) |
| <i>Everson v. Board of Education</i> (1947) | <i>Murdock v. Pennsylvania</i> (1943) |
| <i>Walz v. Tax Commission</i> (1970) | <i>Thomas v. Review Board</i> (1981) |

Swaggart Ministries v. Bd. of Equal. (1990)
Engel v. Vitale (1962)
Abington School District v. Schempp (1963)
Marsh v. Chambers (1983)
Wallace v. Jaffree (1985)
Lee v. Weisman (1992)
Town of Greece v. Galloway (2014)
Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971)
Mitchell v. Helms (1999)
Zelman v. Simmons-Harris (2002)
Lutheran v. Comer (2017)
Wooley v. Maynard (1977)
Reynolds v. United States (1879)
Jacobson v. Massachusetts (1905)
Minnesota v. Hershberger (1990)
People v. Woody (1969)
Flast v. Cohen (1968)
McCollum v. Board of Education (1948)
Stone v. Graham (1980)
Wallace v. Jaffree (1985)
Board of Education v. Allen (1968)
Goldman v. Weinberger (1986)
Lynch v. Donnelly (1984)
Allegheny County v. ACLU (1989)
Capitol Square Advisory Bd. v. Pinette (1995)
McCreary County v. ACLU (2005)
Van Orden v. Perry (2005)
Minersville School District v. Gobitis (1940)
West Virginia v. Barnette (1940)
Rosenberger v. UVA (1995)
Bunn v. North Carolina (1949)
Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972)
Wooley v. Maynard (1977)
Goldman v. Weinberger (1986)
Boerne v. Flores (1997)
Sherbert v. Verner (1963)
Employment Division v. Smith (1925)
Widmar v. Vincent (1981)
Westside S.D. v. Mergens (1990)
Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Com. (2018)

Relevant to current events, below is a partial list of famous [and infamous] Supreme Court cases and leaders related to “Civil Rights and Equal Protection of the Law.”

The Antelope (1825)
The Amistad (1839)
Prigg v. Pennsylvania (1842)
Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)
Minor v. Happersett (1879)
The Civil Rights Cases (1883)
Pace v. Alabama (1883)
Plessy v. Ferguson (1996)
Guinn v. United States (1915)
Smith v. Allwright (1944)
South Carolina v. Katzenbach (1966)
Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections (1966)
Oregon v. Mitchell (1970)
Kramer v. Union Free School District (1969)
Adarand Constructors v. Pena (1995)
Muller v. Oregon (1908)
Buck v. Bell (1927)
Griswold v. Connecticut (1965)
Roe v. Wade (1973)
Webster v. Reproductive Services (1989)
Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992)
Women of Minnesota v. Gomez (1995)
Gonzales v. Carhart (2007)
Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstadt (2016)
In re Quinlan (1976)
Cruzan v. Missouri Dept. of Health (1990)
Washington v. Glucksberg (1997)
Vacco v. Quill (1997)

Rice v. Hawaii (1999)
Crawford v. Marion Co. Election Board (2008)
Shelby County v. Holder (2013)
Baker v. Carr (1962)
Reynolds v. Sims (1964)
Gomillion v. Lightfoot (1960)
Davis v. Bandemer (1986)
Shaw v. Reno (1993)
Vieth v. Jubelirer (2004)
Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada (1938)
Sweatt v. Painter (1950)
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)
Bolling v. Sharp (1954)
Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg S. D. (1971)
U.S. v. Fordice (1992)
Missouri v. Jenkins (1995)
Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)
Gratz v. Bollinger (2003)
Fisher v. University of Texas (2016)
Reed v. Reed (1971)
Frontiero v. Richardson (1973)
Rostker v. Goldberg (1981)
Grove City College v. Bell (1984)
United States v. Virginia (1996)
Altitude Express, Inc. v. Zarda (2020)
Shelly v. Kraemer (1948)
Jones v. Mayer (1968)
Loving v. Virginia (1967)
Seif v. Chester Residents (1998)
Griggs v. Duke Power Company (1971)
City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co. (1989)
Bowers v. Hardwick (1986)
Lawrence v. Texas (2003)
Obergefell v. Hodges (2015)
Rosa Parks
Willa Brown
Sojourner Truth
Frederick Douglass
W.E.B. Dubois
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
John Lewis
Ella Baker
Roy Wilkins
Malcolm X
C.T. Vivian
Betty Friedan
Whitney Young
Elie Wiesel
Cesar Chavez
Dick Gregory
Harvey Milk
Sylvia Rivera
Gloria Steinem
Barbara Jordan
Matsue Endo
Judy Shepard
Gordon Hirabayashi
Fred Korematsu
Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Lloyd Gaines
Thurgood Marshall
Henry Espy
Charles H. Houston
Linda Brown

Students may also find this list of “Notable Supreme Court Justices and Legal Scholars” intriguing subjects for research and presentation.

Amy Coney Barrett
Brett Kavanaugh
Neil Gorsuch
Robert Jackson
Wiley Rutledge
William O. Douglas

Elena Kagan
 Sonia Sotomayor
 Samuel Alito
 Stephen Breyer
 John G. Roberts
 Ruth Bader Ginsburg
 Clarence Thomas
 David Souter
 Anthony Kennedy
 Antonin Scalia
 Sandra Day O'Connor
 John Paul Stevens
 William H. Rehnquist
 Lewis F. Powell
 Harry Blackmun
 Thurgood Marshall
 Abe Fortas
 Arthur Goldberg
 Byron R. White
 Potter Stewart
 Charles Whittaker
 William J. Brennan
 John Marshall Harlan
 Tom Clark
 Harold Burton
 Frank Murphy

Stanley Reed
 Felix Frankfurter
 Hugh Black
 Harlan Fiske Stone
 Willis Van Devanter
 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.
 Henry Brown
 Rufus Peckham
 Stephen Field
 William Strong
 John Jay
 John Rutledge
 Oliver Ellsworth
 John Marshall
 Robert B. Taney
 Salmon Chase
 Morrison Waite
 Melville Fuller
 Edward White
 Fred Vinson
 Earl Warren
 Warren Burger
 William Blackstone
 Edward Coke
 Learned Hand

Students could also research the Founders and the people and events leading up to the Convention in Philadelphia.

James Langdon
 Nicholas Gilman
 Nathaniel Gorham
 Rufus King
 William Samuel Johnson
 Roger Sherman
 Alexander Hamilton
 William Livingston
 David Brearley
 Jonathan Day

Charles Pinckney
 Pierce Butler
 William Few
 Abraham Baldwin
 William Jackson
 George Washington
 Declaration of Independence
 Second Continental Congress
 Shay's Rebellion
 Articles of Confederation

Benjamin Franklin
Thomas Mifflin
Robert Morris
George Clymer
Jared Ingersoll
James Wilson
Gouverneur Morris
George Reed
Gunning Bedford
John Dickinson
Richard Bassett
Jacob Broom
James McHenry
Daniel Carrol
John Blair
James Madison
William Blount
Richard Dobbs Spaight
Hugh Williamson
John Rutledge

Virginia Declaration of Rights
John Locke
Jean Jacque Rousseau
Thomas Hobbes
Virginia Plan
New Jersey Plan
Connecticut Compromise
Three-Fifths Compromise
Slave Trade Compromise
Fugitive Slave Clause
Federalist Papers
Anti-Federalist Papers
John Hancock
Richard Henry Lee
Samuel Adams
Elbridge Gerry
George Mason
Catherine Drinker Bowen
Charles A. Beard
Max Farrand

Honors professors and students are further free to research and present relevant terms, concepts, or significant laws that have been enacted under the auspices of the Constitution.

Full Faith & Credit
Interstate Rendition
Privileges & Immunities
Due Process
Equal Protection
Supremacy Clause
Entrenched Clause
Free Exercise Clause
Eminent Domain
Establishment Clause
Grand Jury
Self-Incrimination
Double Jeopardy
Selective Incorporation
Rational Basis Test

Exclusionary Rule
Right to Counsel
Speedy Trial
Public Trial
Defense of Counsel
Bill of Attainder
Ex post Facto Law
Original Jurisdiction
Appellate Jurisdiction
Letter of Marque & Reprisal
Constitutional Courts
Legislative Courts
Judicial Review
Writ of Mandamus
Writ of Certiorari

Fundamental Rights Test	Treason
Suspect Classification Test	Impeachment
Ordinary Scrutiny	Immigration
Heightened Scrutiny	Naturalization
Strict Scrutiny	Social Security Act of 1935
Cruel and Unusual Punishment	Fair Labor Standards Act of 1937
Excessive Bail or Fines	Civil Rights Act of 1964
Enumerated Powers	Voting Rights Act of 1965
Implied Powers	Housing Rights Act of 1968
Denied Powers	Title IX of Education Amendments Act of 1972
Reserve Powers	Violence Against Women Act of 1993
Inherent Powers	Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993
Probable Cause	
Search Warrant	

Panel Discussion and Public Commentary

The second component of our Constitution Day consists of a panel discussion on the topics at hand. Panelists consist of professors, attorneys, administrators, community leaders, and governmental practitioners from all levels of government. We are also mindful to make the panel a blend of women and men from diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and constituency groups. This diversity of discussants ensures that students will encounter a variety of perspectives on the Constitution, including those that are critical. We normally reserve the panel discussion for the lunch hour to attract as many students, faculty, staff, and members of the public as possible. We also have found it best to hold the panel discussion in close proximity to the poster presentations as a way of dovetailing with and reinforcing the students' research posters. Each panelist is asked to address questions relating to the year's theme.

Ideally, each panelist should confine his or her remarks to ten minutes to allow for questions and comments from the audience. Finally, to draw attention to the event, we issue press releases, invite classes that are scheduled at the same time to attend, and encourage professors to give in-course or extra points for attending or participating in the event. The honors college staff assists with the logistics and maintains records of participation and attendance for participating classes.

Historical Research and Documents posted on the Honors College Webpage

To help educate students about the history and backdrop of the U.S. Constitution, the Centennial Honors College posts a series of documents created by Richard J. Hardy on its website. The following are examples of such documents:

1. a timetable and explanation of “Important Dates in U.S. Constitutional History,”
2. a list of intriguing, little known “Constitutional Facts,”
3. a list of “Famous Quotations” about the U.S. Constitution,
4. many questions that “Test Your Knowledge of Constitutional History,”
5. a discussion of “Constitutional Change Through Amendments,” “Constitutional Change Through Custom and Usage,” and “Constitutional Change Through Supreme Court Rulings,”
6. a comprehensive list of annotated Supreme Court rulings that have had a major impact on the constitutional development and civil rights and liberties, and
7. a bibliography of great books on the history and analyses of the U.S. Constitution.

These documents can be found on the Centennial Honors College’s website at http://www.wiu.edu/centennial_honors_college/constitution.

Video Recordings and Public Broadcasts

Finally, with the assistance of Western Illinois University’s public television station, WIUTV, the Centennial Honors College televises and records the panel discussions, enabling students, faculty, and members of the public who cannot attend the event to view it at their convenience since the event is rebroadcast throughout the year. The broadcasts are also made available to middle schools and high schools throughout the state and region to help those institutions comply with the federal mandate to celebrate Constitution Day. This exposure and the educational materials provide a way to showcase our university and promote the Centennial Honors College.

SUMMARY

In an age of increasing political, ideological, racial, ethnic, and cultural polarization, Americans need to remember what we have in common. One major common tie is the United States Constitution, the oldest continuing nation-state constitution in the world. This document provides the undergirding for our legal and governing systems. Unfortunately, many Americans are largely ignorant or misinformed about the history, function, and provision of the Constitution even though today all educational institutions receiving federal funding are required by federal law to celebrate the U.S. Constitution on or near September 17 annually. The law, however, allows institutions considerable latitude in satisfying the mandate. Some institutions take the directive seriously while others appear to offer symbolic compliance.

We believe the study of the U.S. Constitution is worthy of developing a systematic approach to encouraging careful consideration, thoughtful examination, and meaningful activities. We also believe that honors colleges and honors programs throughout the United States can lead the way in implementing strategies to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of this seminal document. We hope to have provided a springboard for other honors colleges and program to develop their own Constitution Day observances. We have found that student research posters, coupled with panel discussions and provision of basic information relevant to current events, provide efficacious methods to promote learning about the Constitution. More specifically, Constitution Day posters are an effective way for students to explore our legal history, learn how to present their findings, articulate their ideas, build confidence, inspire further research, and work collaboratively with their faculty and peers.

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