

LAW / CHARTER

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The first-year **Political Institutions** course at the Sciences Po Undergraduate College has the twofold objective of introducing students to a set of objects and familiarising them with a set of methods. This choice is based on the principle that Sciences Po students should have a good grounding in a particularly broad panorama of legal and political phenomena and forms and techniques of government.

To explore the way in which contemporary political power is organised, particularly through constitutions, the course aims first to present a series of legal and political topics—past and present, French and foreign, national and international. Second, it intends to offer a diverse range of key concepts and approaches that will enable students to navigate the facts, information and source materials independently in view of understanding the part of the world we live in. Consequently, as well as providing students with a certain amount of information, the course will introduce them to intellectual and practical skills that will bolster their critical thinking, capacity for logical argument and intellectual creativity.

The themes selected for the semester are organised to: first, clarify a number of core concepts for the analysis of constitutional law and political institutions; second, to examine several examples of foreign political institutions in order; third, to allow students to gain a thorough understanding of the background, situation and characteristics of present-day French institutions. Using case studies and applied examples, each session gives students the opportunity to enrich their methodological apparatus. By rejecting any idea of orthodoxy in the analysis of political and constitutional institutions, students must gradually learn to select their intellectual tools pragmatically to suit their argument and to develop imaginative analyses.

TEACHING AND LEARNING FORMAT

- **24 hours of lectures + 12 hours of extra sessions**
- **24 hours of seminars**

The Political Institutions course is delivered in two complementary styles.

First, 36 hours of **lectures**: 24 hours that tie in with the seminars and 12 hours of topic-based sessions that vary according to the lecturer and the campus's geographical focus.

Second, **seminars** on methodology for the study of political institutions. While respecting the chronology of the themes for the twelve weeks, lecturers have plenty of leeway in how they bring students to explore the subject. This variety means that each week, for the same set of elements—a concept, a state, an institution, etc.—students are confronted with two approaches, two tendencies, two methods, two angles of attack, etc. By being exposed to a wide range of intellectual approaches and tools, students should then be able to make their own choices between them on the strength of these diverse experiences.

COURSE CONTENT

Syllabus for the 24 hours of Political Institution lectures (the states used as examples can vary depending on the campus's academic directors)

- Lecture 1: Democracy, definitions and status quo
- Lecture 2: Common heritage: separation of powers and fundamental rights
- Lecture 3: The structure of political units
- Lecture 4: Presidential regimes: the United States and Brazil
- Lecture 5: Prime-ministerial regimes: the United Kingdom and India
- Lecture 6: Constitutional parliamentary democracy: Germany and Spain
- Lecture 7: Consociational democracies: Switzerland and Israel
- Lecture 8: Between dictatorship and democracy: Russia and China
- Lecture 9: Constitutional history: building democracy and forming a constitutional culture
- Lecture 10: An original system that breaks with the French constitutional tradition: democratic presidentialism
- Lecture 11: The interaction between regime and political life in France
- Lecture 12: The European Union: an original institutional system reflecting the emergence of global constitutionalism

Sessions proposed for the additional 12 hours

- A more in-depth analysis of the **institutions of the Fifth Republic** is offered to all students (at least 4 of the 12 hours).
- For the remaining hours, lecturers may choose to develop one or more of the following themes:
 - **Islamic constitutionalism, between secularism and theocracy.** Key points of such a session would include: political Islam; secularism; theocracy; Sharia; the Arab Spring.
 - **African constitutionalism,** between maintaining the legalism of the colonial power (constitutions copied and pasted from those of the former coloniser, with an exercise of power far removed from constitutional law) and founding a new model (South Africa). Key points of such a session would include: transplanting institutions; colonialism; transformist constitutionalism; authoritarianism.
 - **Latin American constitutionalism:** a closer look at the current state of neo-constitutionalism and the “new constitutionalism”, in this continent specifically (new constitutional objects and goods, collective rights and nonhuman rights, appeal for protection of fundamental rights, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, constitutional interpretation). Key points of such a session would include: presidentialism; individual and collective fundamental rights (human and nonhuman); methods of constitutional interpretation; new constitutionalism.
 - **One session may be devoted to an open discussion with students.** This will be a chance to clarify or explore in more depth certain notions or examples addressed in the course (at the students' request), and to take stock of current events related to the subject (especially any developments since the beginning of the semester in the states studied).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Through the students' indispensable participation, the work in the seminars is a means to complement and gain greater insight into the themes of the lecture syllabus. Each lecturer is free to decide which exercises he or she wants to set the students (tests, presentations, formal debates, document reviews, group reading of a political institutions "classic", reading reports, current affairs reports, essays, dissertations, press reviews, literature reviews, mock parliamentary debates, interviews or political programmes, etc.). The many and varied assignments allow students to try out different types of exercise and gradually develop the way of thinking required to analyse and understand political institutions.

The overall goal is to ensure that students gain knowledge and a precise understanding of the key topics, while experimenting with as wide a range of methods as possible and learning to apply them rigorously. To this end, students must develop their capacity for research and analysis of both primary source materials (e.g., constitutional texts, constitutional court decisions, political speeches, etc.) and secondary source materials (e.g., textbooks, journals, websites, etc.). These skills should enable students to present their thinking in an accurate, precise, organised and well-argued manner, using sophisticated language both in writing and orally. The academic and methodological skills developed on this course include:

- Literature-based research
- Critical reading and interpretation (internal and external critique)
- Analysing and summarising
- Writing and presenting a convincing argument
- Demonstrating enhanced written and oral communication skills
- Making connections between and prioritising information coherently in response to given issues
- Proposing an insightful analysis or argument, both in terms of the information used and mastery of intellectual tools
- Linking the knowledge acquired to current affairs

EVALUATION

Continuous assessment: 2/3 of the final mark

Lecturers are free to use the teaching methods they feel will be of most benefit to students in acquiring the intellectual and practical skills and knowledge outlined above. The continuous assessment in the seminar counts for 2/3 of the final mark. This mark is designed to measure students' skills and progress based on a qualitatively and quantitatively varied range of exercises.

Final exam: 1/3 of the final mark

- Final oral exam: Candidates draw one question from each of two lists (one on more theoretical or broader topics, the other on more concrete, specific topics). They answer the question of their choice. After 20 minutes of preparation, students have 10 minutes to present their analysis in a well-argued and organised manner. The next 10 minutes are devoted to a discussion with the examiners, which is intended chiefly to assess the students' overall understanding of the course. or

- Final written exam: assessment method to be set by the lecturer

RESOURCES

O. Duhamel, G. Tusseau, Droit constitutionnel et institutions politiques, 4th edition, Paris, Le Seuil, 2016.

F. Hamon, M. Troper, Droit constitutionnel, 38th edition, Paris, LGDJ, 2017.