

## TEACHING TEACHERS THE CONSTITUTION: A BICENTENNIAL INSTITUTE

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In June of 1988, the political science department of Southwest Texas State University hosted a three-week institute on the U.S. Constitution. Twenty-six social science teachers from central Texas attended the institute that was funded by a grant from the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. A variety of teaching strategies were used to teach the history and political development of the American constitutional system. Although some strategies proved more effective than others, the overall result of the institute was a renewed interest and enthusiasm for teaching our constitutional system by university faculty and teachers alike. Our motives for hosting the institute combined the need for teachers in Texas to enhance their educational and professional training, our own desire to join the movement toward excellence in education, and a sense of responsibility for giving young citizens in our state a better understanding of the U.S. Constitution.

In 1984, the Texas Legislature mandated a series of sweeping educational reforms. One of the most important of these reforms was a qualified "merit" system for teachers, that is, the establishment of a teacher career ladder. In order to advance on this "ladder," teachers must enhance their professional training through state approved programs or through credit from graduate-level courses. Southwest Texas State saw the opportunity to meet this need and enhance its capacity and reputation as an institution that has close ties with the state public educational system. Southwest Texas graduates more teachers than any other institution in Texas. Solid preparation of public school teachers demands that there be interaction between teachers and university faculty. Teachers often complain that professors are not aware of the realities of the public school classroom. This gulf can only be narrowed by consistent and systematic communication between professors and teachers. We endorse the argument by others that there be greater involvement by university faculty in pre-college education.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in the spirit of the national bicentennial celebration of our Constitution, we felt a responsibility to stimulate knowledge of and interest in our constitutional system. In a state as culturally heterogeneous as Texas, it is especially important that students receive top-flight instruction on the history and political development of our Constitution. This instruction helps to enhance cultural, economic, and political integration. It seemed particularly important to our grantor agency that the institute have an impact on those who teach children born of Hispanic immigrants. Because we were to help prepare these new Americans for citizenship, our project assumed national significance.

This paper describes major activities and teaching strategies that were included in our institute, provides both quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the effectiveness of these activities, and offers suggestions for future institutes. The hope is that these suggestions will ease the way for those who sponsor similar institutes for public school teachers.

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<sup>1</sup>See Gerald M. Pomper, "A Summer Institute in American Politics," *The Political Science Teacher* 1 (Winter 1988), 20.

### INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES

Our goals for the institute embraced both content and methods, that is, helping teachers to learn more about the Constitution and giving them ideas for teaching it. Content was our primary emphasis. Our first priority was to enhance teachers' understanding and enthusiasm for the Constitution, and a major portion of the institute activities was devoted to this purpose. (See Appendix 1 for a schedule of institute activities.) Although the institute aimed to enrich participants' knowledge of the history, philosophy, and development of the U.S. Constitution in general, the immediate objective was to emphasize the Bicentennial Commission's theme for 1988: *the creation and development of the Legislative Branch and the debates and writings of the ratification period.*

Seminars that emphasized different aspects of the Commission's theme constituted the heart of the institute; they allowed faculty and participants to consider both the theoretical basis of constitutional principles and their practical application. Seminar #1 examined the structural dimensions of our Constitutional system, that is, the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the sophisticated architecture of our federal system. It gave particular emphasis to the changing role of Congress. Seminar #2 focused on "the Great Debate" over ratification of the Constitution. Participants examined *The Federalist Papers*, the convention of 1787, and the leading anti-federalist literature. Seminar #3 explored the history and development of a national identity, the Revolutionary War, and antecedents to the Constitutional Convention such as the Annapolis Convention and Shays' Rebellion. Participants attended two or three seminars Monday through Thursday, while Fridays were left free for other activities.

In addition to regularly scheduled seminars, participants heard lectures from visiting scholars. These scholars were selected because of their reputation for expertise in particular areas of constitutional history and law, and they added special insights to seminar themes. For example, one lecturer spoke of the historical application of judicial review to acts of Congress, while another described interesting examples of executive-legislative conflict. Lectures were approximately one hour, followed by 30 minutes of questions and discussion. Presentations of the visiting scholars were intended to add variety to the institute schedule, as well as expose participants to different teaching styles.

Institute participants also participated in formal debates that were scheduled twice a week. The debate topics reflected issues that were seriously discussed at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, as well as questions that still surround our political structure today. The topics were designed to encourage use of readings assigned and suggested in the seminars. For example, teams were asked to debate the adoption of Paterson's New Jersey plan or Madison's Virginia plan. Another team considered the resolution, "That the Constitution be amended to give the President more formal (constitutional) power over the Congress." The debates were formally timed and judged by institute faculty, and copies of the judges' comments were given to the members of both teams after a decision was made.

Although the primary emphasis of the institute was on content, some time was devoted to *methods* of teaching. Specifically we wanted to assist teachers in developing curriculum materials that would help them teach the Constitution. Prior

to the beginning of the institute we arranged for the library to order audio-visual materials with the understanding that we would preview the materials and buy those we thought to be suitable. A list of materials that were to be previewed, as well as materials already available in our library, was compiled. Participants were divided into six audio visual "teams." Each team was assigned tapes or filmstrips from the list to critique, and copies of these written critiques were compiled for distribution to their school districts. We were able to buy some of the cheaper audio-visual materials for participants' schools, while we purchased some of the more expensive materials for their area service centers.

In another approach to teaching methods, participants were instructed to bring with them lesson plans, textbooks, and curriculum materials they presently use to teach the Constitution. Since the teachers reflected a variety of social science subjects and grade levels, we divided them into groups that represented their direct teaching needs. Junior high American history teachers showed other junior high American history teachers their lesson plans and teaching materials. At the end of the institute, each group turned in revised lesson plans that incorporated new ideas and materials.

#### EFFECTS OF THE INSTITUTE

To measure the effects of the institute, we had both empirical and subjective feedback. A pre- and post-test was administered to the group. A reliability check of this instrument showed reliability to be .70 and .72 respectively, satisfactory for a small sample size of 26. The average score increased from 61 to 79 percent. A paired one-tailed t-test performed on the differences in the means of the two sets of scores shows a t value of 6.414 which is significant at the .0001 level.<sup>2</sup>

#### Seminars

Graduate-level seminars were the central activity of the institute. Professors teaching the seminars were knowledgeable and well-prepared, and participants enjoyed the seminar sessions. "Intellectually stimulating," "helpful," and "informative" were among the adjectives participants used to describe the seminars in their final evaluations. However, many of the participants considered the reading assignments--approximately 150 to 200 pages per night--too extensive for a three-week period. Several participants described the reading assignments as "excessive," and some complained that the assignments created undue pressure or "stress." One participant confessed that his failure to keep up with the required reading made him "feel like a failure in the seminars."

Complaints about excessive reading were taken very seriously. On the whole, the teachers who attended our institute were extremely conscientious; most possessed a sincere desire to do the work that was required of them. Yet institute faculty were hesitant to reduce what they thought to be appropriate reading for

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<sup>2</sup>Those interested in obtaining a copy of the post-test may write the author at the Dept. of Political Science, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas 78666.

graduate-level seminars. To alleviate this problem and encourage more thoughtful participation in seminars, it is critical that reading lists and materials be sent to participants two to three weeks prior to the beginning of the institute. Advance notice of seminar readings and assignments informs participants of the expectations of the institute faculty, and, therefore, reduces the tension that is created when expectations of participants and faculty are substantially different.

#### Lectures from Visiting Scholars

Visiting scholars included professors on the SWT faculty in addition to the University of Texas, Baylor University, and the University of Texas Law School. They presented lectures on topics that fell into their primary areas of expertise. All of the visiting scholars were well-organized and well-prepared. Lectures were informative and discussions were generally lively. Evaluations from participants showed that the visiting scholars were among their favorite activities. As we expected, the inclusion of visiting lecturers into the institute program provided the intellectual variety that is necessary to any successful institute.

#### Formal Debates

The least popular activity was the debates; comments from the participants caused us to question their utility. While debate is an excellent teaching device, there were problems in trying to have participants prepare adequately for their debates in such a short period.<sup>3</sup> One participant echoed many of the comments when she complained "too much pressure was put on preparation for the debates. The time could have been used more effectively elsewhere." Some criticism was even sharper. One teacher noted that the debates caused a "great deal of anxiety," while another thought that those who lost the debate suffered from "hurt feelings."

Although steady improvement in the quality of the debates and superb performances by some of the participants tempted us to retain them, we ultimately decided that scheduling debates as a separate formal activity was not appropriate. Given required reading in their seminars and other institute assignments, preparation for debates in such a short period is unreasonable. If the debates really do cause the losers "hurt feelings," then their use may threaten the atmosphere of collegiality among participants (and among participants and faculty) that one hopes to achieve in a summer institute.

If, in fact, debates are to be included, it is suggested that debate topics be included as questions to be discussed in seminars. The list of topics could be sent to participants along with the reading assignments that are sent prior to the institute. Participants, therefore, would be exposed to debate questions as they read their assigned material.

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<sup>3</sup>See Donald R. Cooper's informative article "Using Debates in Public Policy Courses," *The Political Science Teacher* 1 (Winter 1988), 11, 14.

## Audio - Visual Critiques

Written critiques submitted by participants who were organized into audio-visual "teams" proved useful to participants. While each team evaluated only three or four films or tapes, all the critiques were compiled and distributed to participants. From this complete "guide" and from their colleagues, participants were able to decide what materials were appropriate for their classes. (Appendix 2 includes a list of audio-visual materials that were rated among the best by institute participants.) However, the value of the audio-visual critiques was limited for some participants who noted that, due to budget constraints or other factors, they had very little control over the purchase of these materials. Thus we used grant funds to buy some of these materials for their schools and regional service centers.

## Revision of Lesson Plans and Curriculum Materials

Use of the institute to revise lesson plans and curriculum materials sounds like a good idea, but to succeed in practice, this activity needs to be highly structured and well-organized. It also should be supervised by experienced teachers or university faculty who are knowledgeable about application of curriculum materials in public school classrooms. Since we met neither of these criteria, our attempt to assist teachers in the development of new instructional materials fell short of our goals. While participants did acquire new and useful ideas from their colleagues, more time should have been devoted to developing and demonstrating these materials. Master teachers or professors from the Department of Education should have been called upon for assistance and direction.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE INSTITUTES

Like most teaching experiences, our first try has led us to make changes for the future. The success of seminars and visiting scholars means that they are likely to remain in our institute program. However, to enhance the performance of participants in the seminars, we will mail reading lists and required texts to them prior to the beginning of the institute. This will inform them of our expectations and ease the amount of reading required in the three-week period they are on campus.

Although formal debates are an effective teaching technique for a longer period, when combined with other demanding assignments they require an unreasonable amount of preparation for a three-week period. We plan to drop the use of debates in future institutes and incorporate debate topics into seminar discussions.

Development of curriculum materials will remain part of our institute program, but we will make changes in the organization of these activities. More extensive use will be made of the wealth of curriculum materials that have been produced by projects funded by the Bicentennial Commission. (See Appendix 2 for a list of these materials.) Rather than have participants meeting informally with each other, we will ask experienced classroom teachers to introduce and demonstrate the use of curriculum materials. We have already invited one of the teachers who

attended our first institute to direct two of these workshops should we receive funding for our second institute.

### CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important effect of the institute was a sense of collegiality that developed among the teachers themselves and between the university faculty and the teachers. Several teachers revealed to me that their most fruitful sessions were spent brainstorming with other teachers at night in the dorms. They seemed pleased and impressed by the ideas and materials of their colleagues. Among university faculty a sense of awareness and respect developed for these teachers whose jobs are often difficult and unappreciated.

In general, our project was fruitful for both teachers and university faculty. Both developed an intellectual excitement for the original and ongoing issues that characterize our constitutional framework of government. Both gained new insight and appreciation for the arguments of the federalists and anti-federalists. Both listened to and participated in debates about our political system that continue to generate intense controversy. Despite some shortcomings that we hope to correct in the future, it was rewarding to have jumped wholeheartedly into the spirit of the bicentennial celebration.

### Appendix 1

#### Institute Schedule

##### Week 1

- June 13: Morning: Seminars/Orientation session with Dr. Opheim, Institute Director  
Afternoon: Seminars/Audio-Visual Team Assignments and Library Orientation
- June 14: Morning: Seminars/Groups sessions discuss curriculum materials and lesson plans  
Afternoon: Seminars/Dr. Randall Bland, Professor of Political Science, Southwest Texas State University, Lecture title: "The Supreme Court and the Federal Judiciary"
- June 15: Morning: Seminars/Review of Audio-Visual Materials  
Afternoon: Seminars/Mr. Robert Norvell, Instructor of Political Science, Southwest Texas State University, Lecture title: "The Constitutional Mandate for Civilian Control of the Military"
- June 16: Morning: Seminars/Dr. Willard Stouffer, Professor of Political Science, Southwest Texas State University, Lecture title: "Defining the American Nation"  
Afternoon: Seminars/Dr. David Prindle, Associate Professor of Government, University of Texas, Lecture title: "Congress and the Public Interest"
- June 17: Morning: 1st Debate/Review of Audio-Visual Materials  
Afternoon: 2nd Debate

##### Week 2

- June 20: Morning: Seminars/Preliminary Evaluation of Institute by participants (so that Institute faculty can detect problems that might be corrected at this point)  
Afternoon: Seminars/Review of Audio-Visual Materials
- June 21: Morning: Seminars/Dr. Dale Hardin, Associate Professor of Political Science and former Interstate Commerce Commissioner, Southwest Texas State University, Lecture title: "Administrative Agencies: Congressional Delegation of Discretionary Power"  
Afternoon: Seminars/3rd Debate
- June 22: Morning: Seminars/Reading, Study  
Afternoon: Seminars/Ms. Joyce Dorrycott, Instructor of Political Science, Southwest Texas State University, Lecture title: "A Comparison of the Texas and U.S. Constitutions"

- June 23: Morning: Seminars/4th Debate  
 Afternoon: Seminars/Dr. Paul Armitstead, Professor of History, Baylor University, Lecture title: "The Changing Role of the Vice-President"
- June 24: Field trip to State Capital - Participants hear presentations by State Representative Ann Cooper and Lieutenant Governor William P. Hobby, tour the Legislative Reference Library and the State Archives

**Week 3**

- June 27: Morning: Seminars/5th Debate  
 Afternoon: Seminars/Review of Audio-Visual Materials
- June 28: Morning: Seminars/Dr. Philip Bobbit, Professor of Law, University of Texas School of Law, Lecture title: "Congress in Our Constitutional System"  
 Afternoon: Seminars/6th Debate
- June 29: Morning: Seminars/7th Debate  
 Afternoon: Seminars/Group sessions discuss curriculum materials and lesson plans
- June 30: Morning: Seminars/Reading, Study, Preparation of final reports and assignments  
 Afternoon: Seminars/Dr. Paul Kens, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Southwest Texas State University, Lecture topic: "Judicial Review of Acts of Congress"  
 Evening: Dinner/banquet/Presentation of certificates to participants
- July 1: Morning: Dr. Charles Pasco, Professor of Theatre Arts, Southwest Texas State University, Workshop title: "Using Creative Drama to Teach Social Science Concepts"/Discussion (all participants) of Audio-Visual Critiques and Curriculum Materials  
 Afternoon: Post-test/Comprehensive Evaluations of the Institute by participants

**Appendix 2****Institute Resources on the Constitution****I. Supplements for Middle School and High School Teachers:**

Bicentennial Resource Guide (Austin, Texas: State Bar of Texas, 1987).

Patrick, John J. and Clair W. Keller, Lessons on the Federalist Papers: Supplements to High School Courses in American History, Government, and Civics. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Social Studies Development Center (SSDC), 1987.

Patrick, John J. and Richard C. Remy, Lessons on the Constitution: Supplements to High School Courses in American History, Government, and Civics. Boulder, Colorado: Social Sciences Education Consortium, Inc. and Project 87, a joint effort of the American Historical Association and American Political Science Association, 1986.

We the People...do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. Casablanca, California: Center for Civic Education, 1987.

**II. Important Books on the Constitution**

Allen, W.B., and Gordon Lloyd, eds. *The Essential Anti-Federalist*. Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1985.

Baldwin, Henry. *A General View of the Origin and Nature of the Constitution and Government of the United States*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1873.

Barbash, Fred. *The Foundling*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Beard, Charles. *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*. New York: McMillan, 1925.

- Bennett, Walter, ed. *Letters from the Federal Farmer to the Republican*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1978.
- Berger, Raoul. *Congress v. The Supreme Court*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Bowen, Catherine D. *Miracle at Philadelphia*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1966.
- Corwin, Edwin S. and Jack W. Peltason. *The Constitution and What It Means Today*, 14th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- Cronin, Thomas. *State of the Presidency*. 2nd ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980.
- Edel, Wilbur. *A Constitution Convention, Threat or Challenge?* New York: Praeger, 1981.
- Elliot, Jonathon. *The Great Rehearsal: The Story of the Making and Ratifying of the Constitution of the United States*. New York: Viking, 1948. Reprint. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Epstein, Daniel F. *The Political Theory of the Federalist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Fairfield, Roy P., ed. *The Federalist Papers*, 2nd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.
- Farrand, Max., ed. *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 (Vol. 1-4)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.
- Fisher, Louis. *Constitutional Conflicts Between Congress and the Presidency*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Goldwin, Robert A., and William Schambra, eds. *How Democratic Is the Constitution?* Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981.
- Grimes, Alan P. *Democracy and Amendments to the Constitution*. Indianapolis: Lexington Books, 1978.
- Mace, George. *Locke, Hobbes and the Federalist Papers*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979.
- The Papers of James Madison, (Vol. 1-15)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Price, Don. *America's Unwritten Constitution*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.
- Storing, Herbert J., ed. *The Anti-Federalist: Writings by the Opponents of the Constitution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

### III. Audio-Visual Materials

"A More Perfect Union" (VHS Series), \$598.00, Level: High School and College  
Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation  
425 N. Michigan Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60611

"The Constitution at 200: Why Does it Still Work?" (VHS), \$179.00, Level: Middle and High School  
Random House Educational Enrichment Materials  
400 Kahn Road  
Westminster, MD 21157

"The Constitution: Foundation of Our Government" (VHS), \$159.00, Level: High School  
Opportunities For Learning, Inc.  
20417 Nordhoff St., Dept. VR  
Chatsworth, CA 91311



"The United States Constitution: A Document for Democracy" (VHS), \$59.00, Level: Middle School  
SVE

1342 W. Diversey Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60613

"Supreme Court Decisions that Changed the Nation: The Dred Scott Decision" (VHS), Level: High school

Guidance Associates  
Communications Park  
P.O. Box 3000  
Mount Kisco, NY 10549-9989

"Supreme Court Decisions that Changed the Nation: Gideon v. Wainright / Miranda v. Arizona" (VHS), \$277.00 - cost of this and preceding videocassette, Level: High School

Guidance Associates

"Background of the Constitution: Where Historians Disagree" (Filmstrip), \$60.00, Level: High School

Social Studies School Services  
10200 Jefferson Blvd.  
P.O. Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232-0802

"The Constitution: A Framework to Govern the Nation" (VHS), \$75.00, Level: Middle School

Social Studies School Services

"Our Constitutional Rights: Landmark Supreme Court Cases" (Filmstrip), Level: High School

Social Studies School Services

"The Constitution: Weathering 200 Years" (Filmstrip), \$28.00, Level: Middle and High School

Social Studies School Services

"The U.S. Constitution: Nationalism and Federalism" (Computer Software), \$99.00, Level: Middle and High School

Social Studies School Services

#### IV. Games and Simulations

"1787: A Simulation Game of the Constitutional Convention," \$69.00, Level: High School and College

Social Studies School Services  
10200 Jefferson Blvd.  
P.O. Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232-0802

"Freedom of the Press: A Simulation of Legal Issues of Journalism," \$37.50, Level: High School and College

Social Studies School Services