American Political Tradition: Constitution Day

Event Guide:
How to Run a Successful Constitution Day Event

Thank you for your interest in hosting a Constitution Day Event! This guide is designed to help college and university faculty plan a program that engages students, faculty, and the broader community in discussions about the U.S. Constitution. You can always reach out to the APT team with questions at *academics@gojmc.org*.

The Big Picture

American Political Tradition Project's Constitution Day Initiative has two key goals:

1. **To Promote Constitutional Literacy**
   Constitution Day events should provide attendees with a deeper understanding of the principles, structure, and history of the U.S. Constitution. The lecture or activities should encourage critical engagement with constitutional ideas and issues related to governance, rights, and civic responsibility, and the principles of a free society. Students should leave the event with a greater understanding and appreciation for the American structure of government.

2. **To Engage Students with Primary Sources**
   Whenever possible, the event should interest students in the primary sources of the American Political Tradition. The event, lecture, or activity should encourage students to draw connections between the writings of the past and the way the American government itself is structured.

Event Fundamentals: Timeline, Budget, & Theme

For a successful Constitution Day Event(s), here is an approximate timeline:

- **April:** Define event goals, create a budget, consider dates and locations (internal or external to campus), decide on a theme, reach out to key speakers or panelists.

- **May-June:** Secure a venue, finalize the program/event agenda and speakers, create a registration form and/or event webpage.

- **July-August:** Begin outreach to students and community members, determine how stipends will be paid and how relevant information will be collected, arrange any catering or technology needs.

- **September:** Continue recruitment, execute final promotions, confirm details with speakers, and prepare printed materials.

- **Constitution Day (September 17th):** Host the event and facilitate meaningful discussions and activities.

> *The APT team is a resource you can utilize throughout this process. We can advise on event topics and speakers and offer guidance on event logistics and communications.*

Budget Considerations:

Honoraria for Speakers	If bringing in guest lecturers, budget for their travel and speaking fees.
Event Materials	Printed copies of the Constitution, educational pamphlets, discussion guides, and promotional materials
Catering	Consider providing refreshments, especially for longer events or those taking place during meal hours.
Facility Costs	Reserve an appropriate venue and include A/V capabilities
Student Engagement Incentives	Consider offering certificates of participation, extra credit opportunities, or giveaways such as pocket Constitutions
Film, Photo, or Audio	Include an item for recording or otherwise documenting the event

It is the policy of the Jack Miller Center <u>not to pay institutional overhead or other indirect costs</u>.
Documentation for this policy can be provided upon request.

Choosing a Theme:

Your event should have a coherent theme that ties together discussions and activities. Some examples include:
- "[Can the Constitution Unify Americans](#)?"
- "[James Madison as the Founder of Founding](#)"
- "[Who's Responsible for Constitutional Rights](#)?"
- "[Adam Smith and Founding Economics: The Political Economy of the U.S. Constitution](#)"
- "[Freedom from Religion or Freedom for Religion: Natural Rights & the American Constitution](#)"
- "[What Can George Washington Teach Us About the Constitution](#)?"
- "[Constitution Extravagance ft. Jack Rakove](#)"

Pre-Program Logistics: Registration, Materials, & Communication

Essential Planning Steps to consider:

- Confirm date(s), location, participating faculty, and program title & summary (a few sentences)
- Develop a clear agenda
  - Session topic(s), speakers & moderators if any, Q & A portion
  - If planning a quiz bowl, re-enactment or other competition, schedule each segment

- Prepare a resource packet that includes primary sources and prompts for discussion
- Landing page on your university site and/or on JMC's website
  - If possible, create a page on your university or academic center website to host information about the program.
  - JMC will also post your event, if it is open to the public, on our website. Please send the APT team your event information!
- Setting up an online registration form to track attendance
  - Collect name, year, email, major, etc. (any information you may want to use in future planning)
  - This information is also useful in reporting back on your event

Promotional Strategies:

- Create a webpage or digital flyer with event details.
- Use university email lists, social media, and newsletters to invite participants.
- Engage student organizations, political science and law or pre-law departments, and civic groups to co-sponsor or promote the event.
- Reach out to local media outlets, campus newspapers, and radio stations for coverage.
- Distribute posters and flyers in high-traffic areas such as student unions, libraries, and resident halls.
- Ask your colleagues to promote the event in their classes and encourage attendance.

At the Program: Execution & Engagement

Key Considerations for a Successful Program:

- **Facilitating Discussion**: Encourage participation rather than passive listening. Panel discussions, Q&A sessions, and small group activities work well.
- **Incorporating Primary Sources**: Use historical documents such as the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and Supreme Court decisions.
- **Show the Evolution of an Idea Over Time**: How do current debates relate to an issue found in, for example, the dispute between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists?

Additional Engagement Activities:

- **Mock Constitutional Debates**: Have students take opposing sides on constitutional issues and present arguments.
- **Live Readings of the Constitution**: Encourage faculty, students, and staff to participate in a public reading.
- **Trivia Competitions**: Organize a quiz-style competition with prizes for students who demonstrate strong constitutional knowledge.

- **Student Essay Contest**: Have students submit essays on subjects related to the Constitution and the event.
- **Social Media Engagement**: Create a hashtag and encourage students to share reflections after the event.

Post Event Follow-Up

- Send thank-you notes to speakers, volunteers, and attendees.
- Collect feedback through surveys to improve future events.
- Share event highlights through social media, university newsletters, and local media outlets.
- Provide attendees with follow-up resources, such as recommended readings.
- Encourage continued discussion by organizing follow-up events such as book clubs, discussion groups, or speaker series related to constitutional topics.

Thank you for your time and effort in planning and executing an APT Constitution Day Event.

The Jack Miller Center appreciates your commitment to our mission to ensure students across the country receive excellent education in America's founding principles and history.