

FIRST TAKE-HOME WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Questions (select and write on *one* of the following questions):

1. Your boss or supervisor puts this assignment to you: “I’ve heard that the origins of the U.S. Constitution lie in two rival ‘plans’ from Virginia and New Jersey that were put before the Constitutional convention. *On what major points did the two plans differ and, on these points, which plan (if either) is reflected in the final Constitution?* I’m not interested in relatively minor things (like age qualifications for office or the exact length of terms of office) but only in the basic things like the powers of the central and state governments, the relationship between the central government and the people, and so forth.”
2. Your boss or supervisor puts this assignment to you: “I understand that about a third of the way through Federalist 39, Madison noted that adversaries of the proposed Constitution said that the Constitution should have ‘preserved the FEDERAL form, which regards the Union as a CONFEDERACY of sovereign states: instead of which they have framed a NATIONAL government, which regards the Union as a CONSOLIDATION of the States.’ That sounds like a serious charge. *Explain to me how Madison responded to this charge.*”
3. Your boss or supervisor puts this assignment to you: “I’ve heard that, in his Supreme Court opinion in *Marbury v. Madison*, Chief Justice Marshall started with the question of whether the Court should grant Marbury’s request for a *writ of mandamus* against Secretary of State Madison and ended up by concluding that the Supreme Court has the power to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional. That seems like quite a stretch. *How did Marshall reason from that starting point to that conclusion?*”

Note 1. The Virginia and New Jersey Plans were discussed in class in considerable detail, *Marbury v. Madison* was discussed in class in somewhat less detail, while Federalist 39 was not discussed in class at all. Grading with respect to Criterion (D) will take account of these differing circumstances.

Note 2. Please bear in mind that this assignment will be graded preponderantly (60%) on the basis of presentation, organization and English composition and only 40% on the basis of its political science substance. In the long run, the development of effective writing skills will be far more important to you than accurate recollection of the arguments of James Madison or of a Supreme Court opinion. If you have reason to believe that you will have difficulties with the mechanics of the English composition, you are invited to seek help from the Learning Resources Center Writing Center in completing this assignment. The Writing Center is located in the vicinity of Main Entrance area of the Library and is open on a walk-in basis during these hours: 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. on Mondays through Wednesdays, from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. on Thursdays, and from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. on Fridays. Take your copy of these instructions with you if you seek help.