



# POLS 4710E: Constitutional Law: Rights & Liberties

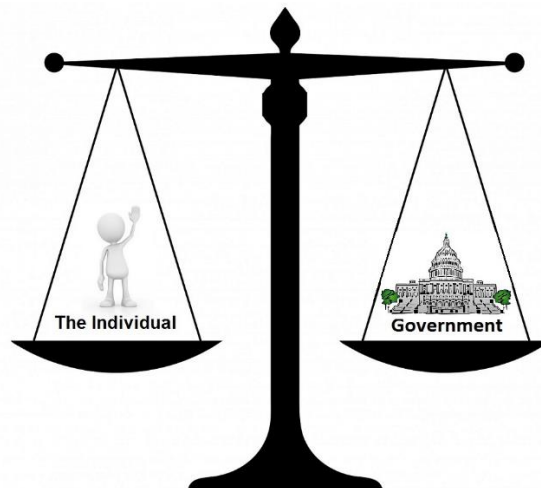
University of Georgia, Summer 2026

Instructor: Barry C. Edwards, J.D., Ph.D.

## Course Description

This course focuses on the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights. To better understand the scope of liberties protected by the U.S. Constitution, we will study the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court decisions that illustrate the application of constitutional principles to real world problems.

As a general matter, one can view the Bill of Rights as an accommodation between individual liberties and the collective interests of society. We want to be free to pursue happiness in our homes without the government telling us how to raise our children, worship, or express ourselves, but we also want our neighborhoods to be safe. We value both individual and collective interests, but sometimes these values come into conflict. Accordingly, in this class, we'll look at how the U.S. Constitution strikes a balance between individual and government interests.



While it is not always easy to discern the scope of rights and liberties protected by the U.S. Constitution, it is important to remember that the balance between individual liberties and collective interests has, in manner significant respects, already been

debated, decided, and documented in the U.S. Constitution. Our personal, political opinions, which change from one year to the next, are largely irrelevant. Indeed, our country has made certain principles part of its Constitution, which is very difficult to amend, to prevent us from changing the terms of our social contract as often as we change our mind about political leadership. This idea was eloquently expressed by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (U.S. 1942) (holding mandatory flag salute unconstitutional):

The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials and the establish them as legal principles to be applied by the courts. One's right to life, liberty, and property, to free speech, a free press, freedom of worship and assembly, and other fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no elections.

So, if you're asked on the final exam whether a high school student has the constitutional right to write an article advocating drug use in the school newspaper, the answer doesn't depend on whether you like what the student wrote or would recommend doing something like that. The extent of a student's free speech rights is a constitutional question not a matter of personal opinion. We can look for an answer in the Bill of Rights and Supreme Court decisions that help balance individual rights against government interests.

## **Prerequisite**

POLS 1101 or POLS 1101E or POLS 1101H or POLS 1101S

## **Course Objectives**

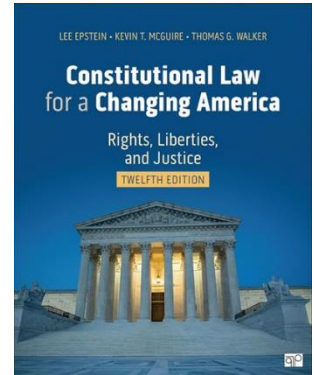
The objective of this course is to introduce you to the important role that the United States Constitution has in orienting American politics and governance. With this end in mind, we will explore the Constitution, its various interpretations, and the role of the judiciary in constitutional application, examples of the influence it has had on the function of government, and the case law that has emanated from its interpretation. The objectives of this class include the following:

- Understand key constitution terms and concepts
- Understand historically significant Supreme Court decisions
- Analyze historical trends in Supreme Court composition and decision making
- Evaluate and apply constitutional precedents

- Apply legal reasoning to complex hypothetical problems
- Engage in discussion and deliberation of constitutional issues
- Improve writing and critical thinking skills
- Build collaboration skills and practice professional work habits

## Required Textbook

Lee Epstein, Kevin McGuire and Thomas G. Walker. *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice, Twelfth Edition*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, an Imprint of Sage Publications, Inc. 2019). ISBN-13: 978-1071901663, ISBN-10: 1071901664.



Make sure you buy the right textbook (see cover image) not similarly titled textbooks for other classes by the same authors or prior editions of this textbook.

### Waiting on Textbook?

You can [read the first chapter as preview on Amazon](#).

## Course Outline and Assignment Schedule

There are 15 numbered course modules. We will cover two modules per week during Summer 2026. The course content is primarily asynchronous. You can read course material and watch streaming videos on demand; however, course modules open on certain dates and there are assignment due dates.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Module	Dates (open - quiz due)	Textbook Reading (pages)
Orientation Modules	June 4-7	
1. Introduction to U.S. Constitution and U.S. Supreme Court	June 4 - 10	3-10, 11-46, 639-650
2. Judicial Review and the Incorporation Doctrine	June 11 - 1	45-68, 69-90

3. Free Exercise of Religion	June 11 - 17	91-96, 97-123
4. The Establishment Clause	June 18 - 21	124-166
5. Freedom of Expression: Development of Standards	June 18 - 24	167-188, 214-223
6. Freedom of Expression: Content and Contexts	June 25 - 28	189-214, 223-262
7. The Boundaries of Free Expression	June 25 - July 1	275-312
8. Freedom of the Press and New Media Regulations	July 2 - 5	247-274
9. The Right to Keep and Bear Arms	July 2 - 8	313-326
10. The Right to Privacy	July 9 - 12	327-370
11. Rights of the Accused: Investigations and Evidence	July 9 - 15	371-378, 379-436
12. Rights of the Accused: Attorneys, Trials, and Punishments	July 16 - 19	437-486
13. Race Discrimination & Foundations of Equal Protection	July 16 - 22	487-496, 497-526
14. Development of Equal Protection Standards	July 23 - 26	527-565
15: Contemporary Equal Protection Issues	July 23 - 29	566-582
Final Exam Module	July 30 - Aug. 2	Cumulative

Course assignments are outlined in more detail on the eLC course site. Be sure to check modules for supplemental course material, like streaming videos, assigned in addition to textbook readings.

## Varied Assignments

This course uses a variety of types of content to help you learn the material. In addition to the textbook, you'll have the opportunity to discuss constitutional law with classmates and take practice quizzes. You'll watch videos and explore some different web sites. I enjoy learning about the real people involved in the cases we read so I've included a number of videos profiling litigants and attorneys.

## Grading

Your grade for this course will be determined by your scores on weekly module quizzes (45% of overall grade), weekly small group discussions (25% of overall grade), and the final exam (30% of overall grade).

There are no extra credit assignments in this class. Note this now so that you are properly motivated to achieve your grade goal.

You can use your textbook and notes during module quizzes and the final exam. Even though they are open book, given that they are time limited (and they will remain so – only those students with accommodations may seek extended time), you need to be prepared and knowledgeable or you will not be able to complete the test in the time allowed.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>From %</b>	<b>To %</b>
F	0	59.4
D	59.5	69.4
C-	69.5	72.4
C	72.5	77.4
C+	77.5	79.4
B-	79.5	82.4
B	82.5	87.4
B+	87.5	89.4
A-	89.5	92.4
A	92.5	100

## Late Work Policy

Late work will be penalized 10% of the assignment value per day late. For example, if you receive a score of 9 out of 10 on a quiz two days after it was due (i.e. you took a quiz due Sunday on Tuesday instead), your score will be reduced by 2 points (20% of 10

points), so you will receive a 7 out of 10 on that quiz. You will receive no credit for work complete ten or more days after its due date.

I will waive lateness deductions if you submit an assignment late due to one of the following reasons:

- The eLC is not available (major server outages)
- Unforeseeable medical (e.g. COVID), personal, or family emergency
- Active duty military responsibilities
- Travel for University events (like UGA sports and tournaments)
- Religious observances

I may ask for documentation. I know things don't always go as planned and try to be reasonable and fair to all students.

Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next semester. Your instructor is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete.

### **If You Can't Access/Open a Module**

If you think you should be able to access a module based on the time/date, but it's still not letting you into the module, there may be a glitch in the system that requires tech support. UGA has a tech support system in place for just this sort of problem.

In past semesters, we've found that learning systems have some unexpected downtime. If this happens, wait a couple hours and try again. I can't restart UGA servers or fix any problem; I have to wait it out the same way you do. If server downtime makes it impossible to submit work on time, I won't deduct for lateness caused by technical problems outside of our control.

### **Technical Requirements of the Course**

If you are able to access the Internet on a regular basis, you meet the technical requirements for the course. It is important that you have reliable Internet service, particularly as the tests are time sensitive. You also need a reliable laptop or desktop computer. I would not suggest taking tests or quizzes on your phone.

### **Online Learning Environment:**

This course is hosted on UGA eLC. If you have any issues at any point, make sure to contact:

- EITS Help Desk: helpdesk@uga.edu or 706.542.3106. Business hours are 8am - 10pm (Mon-Thurs), 8am-6pm (Fri), and 1pm-7pm (Sat-Sun)
- Go the [University System of Georgia Desire2Learn Online Help Center](#). From this site, you can search the Knowledge Base, browse popular articles, or click the link for live support (24x7x365) in the scrolling news area.
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## Academic Honesty and Student Conduct

This course follows all policies related to [Academic Honesty](#) and [Student Code of Conduct](#) as outlined by the University of Georgia. All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at [honesty.uga.edu](http://honesty.uga.edu).

I encourage you to study course material with other students and learn together. Your discussion posts, module quizzes, and final exam must, however, be your own work. Telling other students answers to quiz or exam questions is cheating. Copying someone else's writing and posting it as if you wrote it is academic dishonesty. If you're not sure if what you're doing is learning or cheating, please ask for clarification.

## Generative AI Policy

As many of us have explored new AI tools like ChatGPT, we can think of them as valuable aids, similar to calculators in math classes. These tools excel at idea generation, synthesis, rephrasing, summarizing, and gathering information on various topics. However, it's crucial that you use these technologies appropriately to enhance, rather than degrade, your human intelligence.

- You may use generative AI like a personal tutor. For example, you may use generative AI to explain concepts, summarize documents, and generate practice questions. You may also use generative AI to analyze discussion prompts and hypotheticals. You may also use generative AI to analyze and evaluate other students' discussion posts. It may help you generate ideas, explore counterfactuals, evaluate different perspectives, and identify key issues.
- **You may not use AI to generate your posts and replies in small group discussions.** You can use it to proofread your own writing but may not use AI to fake genuine communication with classmates like an online scammer.

- **Do not use any AI to generate answers for Module Quizzes 1 - 15 or the Final Exam.** Using AI to answer graded quiz/test/exam questions is prohibited. Relying on AI for answers harms your learning.

## Disability Statement

The University of Georgia is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must notify the professor at the beginning of the semester regarding needed accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with University student support services.

## UGA Well-Being Resources

UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community.

Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit [sco.uga.edu](https://sco.uga.edu). Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the [Embark@UGA](https://embark.uga.edu) program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity.

UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: [well-being.uga.edu](https://well-being.uga.edu)
- Student Care and Outreach: [sco.uga.edu](https://sco.uga.edu)
- University Health Center: [healthcenter.uga.edu](https://healthcenter.uga.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: [caps.uga.edu](https://caps.uga.edu) or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: [healthpromotion.uga.edu](https://healthpromotion.uga.edu)
- Accessibility and Testing: [accessibility.uga.edu](https://accessibility.uga.edu)

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting <https://well-being.uga.edu>.

## **Professionalism Policy**

Follow university policy and basic rules of etiquette in all your course interactions. When you participate in small group discussions, please refrain from using offensive language or making personal attacks. You are encouraged to make constructive criticisms and present opposing viewpoints in a respectful and professional manner.

## **Third-Party Software and FERPA**

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

## **Copyright**

This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate, download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only.

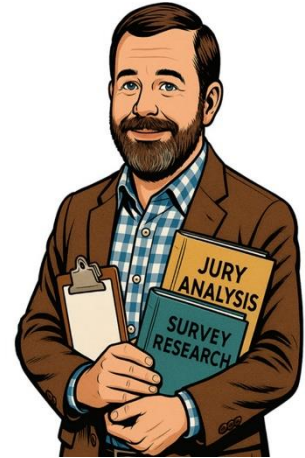
## **Agreement**

By taking the course online, you also enjoy the opportunity to fit this course into your own schedule and adapt the course to your learning style. However, the freedom of an online class requires more personal responsibility on your part.

By enrolling in this course, you agree to adhere to these policies linked above and to do your best to be a good, productive, and honest student. You also agree to work with Dr. Edwards to make sure that you have a positive learning experience and a rewarding course outcome and that you will not neglect to stay on top of your work. Nor will you interact with your peers to collaborate on any exams, essays or projects unless they are clearly designated as group projects or work.

## About Me

My name is Barry Edwards and I am a part-time Instructor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Georgia. I earned my Bachelor's degree from Stanford University (political science and economics), a J.D. from New York University School of Law, and a Ph.D. from UGA. One of graduate school professors asked me to help the department teach American constitutional law online and I'm happy to assist my graduate school. I'm teaching this class remotely as I work full-time in Orlando.



My teaching and research interests include American politics, law and the courts, and research methodology.

I hope taking this class not only improves your understanding of American constitutional law, but also motivates you to ask critical questions and conduct your own research.

## My Teaching Philosophy

I'd like to see students learn as much as possible in my class and improve their critical thinking skills. To that end, I employ a variety of strategies to reach students with different learning styles. One of the great things about online education is that it allows you to learn different ways; for example, some of you may prefer to stream lectures, while others may prefer navigating web pages, while others learn more from reading the textbook.

While it is important for you to understand the terminology and concepts in this course, I challenge students to apply terms and concepts to new situations. I want you to develop informed views on American constitutional law and develop problem solving abilities. To succeed in this class, you will need to demonstrate both a solid understanding of terms and concepts as well as the ability to apply the material in a creative and insightful manner.

Here are some of my teaching philosophies and values:

- **Critical Thinking to Solve Problems.** I believe that true learning requires students to actively apply course material. Even though we're not meeting in a regular classroom, you can still engage the material, your instructor, and other students in this class. You will not merely read the assignment material and regurgitate facts, you will be asked to apply what you learn to analyze problems.
- **Online Classes and Face-to-Face Classes are Different.** I design my online classes to take advantage of the benefits of learning/teaching online and don't try to simulate face-to-face class experience. The biggest advantage of

learning/teaching online is convenience. I think online classes should be asynchronous so we can learn/teach at times that are convenient for us. I don't use live Zoom lectures in online classes; I think they take away the main advantages of learning/teaching online (flexibility and convenience) and don't really replicate a face-to-face class experience. Be sure to read [Should I Take This Class?](#)

- **Clear Expectations.** Students should know what they're expected to do from day-to-day and week-to-week. I organize class content into sequential weekly modules so you should know what we're working on and what you should do next at all times.
- **Fair Grading.** You can expect your assignments to be graded fairly based on clear, objective criteria.
- **Encourage Lifetime Learning.** I'm sure you've heard the saying "Give someone a fish, they'll eat for a day. Teach someone to fish, they'll eat for a lifetime." It's kind of corny, but it's true and it can be a problem for students who expect their teacher to tell them how to answer a question or what they need to know for a test. I try to create a good learning environment and design activities that make you think. I want students to become less and less dependent on having others tell them what to think and what to do. If a teacher is really good, you'll learn how to teach yourself.

## Contact Me

I want everyone in this to class to understand what's expected of them and enjoy a great learning experience. If you have a question, I want to answer your question efficiently. To help you get your questions answered, please follow these suggestions which help me efficiently answer questions for many students in multiple classes.

**General Questions.** If you have a straightforward question that applies for everyone in the class, please [Post General Questions about Class Here](#). Post general questions to the class discussion board so I can answer them for everyone.

**Questions Specific to You.** If you have a straightforward question that's specific to you and not everyone in the class, please feel free to email me: [bce@uga.edu](mailto:bce@uga.edu). You can expect a reply email from me within one or two business days. If you email me on a Friday, you may not receive a reply until Monday.

**Virtual Office Hours:** Thursdays, 1-3pm via Zoom. If you want to discuss something, like constitutional law, your academic plans, interest in law, simply drop in to the weekly Zoom meeting, no appointment necessary. I enjoy meeting my students and would be happy to chat with you!