

PUBP 3000: US Constitutional Issues Syllabus

3.0 credit hours, Fall 2026

Sections 89244, 87860, 87888

Friday, 11:00 am - 1:45 pm, Skiles Classroom Building, Room 308

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jared Bruff

jbruff3@gatech.edu

Office Hours: By appointment only. Please e-mail me with at least three times you are available to meet.

General Information

Description

This course will examine the American social and political system through the prism of Constitutional issues decided by the US Supreme Court. The class will use other primary sources to highlight Constitutional issues and will cover the Georgia Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

While there are no required pre- or co-requisites for this course, a basic understanding of the structure of the American judicial system, such as that you likely gained in a high school or college introductory American government class, will be helpful to your understanding of the material covered. We will also cover the basics of the judicial system early in this course.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Articulate the significance of various landmark Supreme Court cases studied.
- Appreciate and outline the societal context of landmark Supreme Court cases studied, as well as the development of Supreme Court jurisprudence in certain arenas over time.
- Appreciate the individuals involved in Supreme Court cases studied.
- Have a better understanding of the US Constitution and its role in American society.
- More comfortably and skillfully read a judicial opinion and understand and articulate the issues, holdings, and reasoning of legal opinions.

Course Requirements & Grading

Grades for this course will be based on a cumulative point system. You will have the opportunity to earn 1000 total points for exams, case briefs, and class attendance and participation. The total points you've earned at the conclusion of the course will determine your final grade according to the grading scale below.

Grading Scale

Your total points earned will be divided by 1000 to determine a percentage grade, and your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

Letter Grade	Grade Range	Point Range
A	90-100%	900-1000
B	80-89.9%	800-899
C	70-79.9%	700-799
D	60-69.9%	600-699
F	Below 60%	Below 600

Extra Credit Opportunities

Extra credit may or may not be provided during the course of the semester at the sole discretion of the instructor. Any extra credit opportunities will be made available to the entire class.

Exams

Midterm Exam - 250 Points

Final Exam - 250 points

There will be two exams in this course, each worth 250 points. Exams will be open notes and open book, and they will consist of essay questions. The midterm exam will cover material from the beginning of the course until the exam. The final exam will cover mostly material from after the midterm exam, though it will partially cover material from the first half of the course, as well. Exams are due via Canvas at the appointed times, with the exception that the final exam might be in-person. You may not collaborate with classmates on your exams or use materials aside from your textbook and class notes, including artificial intelligence. Any evidence that you have done so will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Case Briefs

10 Case Briefs x 25 points each = 250 points

You will be required to prepare case briefs for ten of the cases we read during the course of the semester. The cases requiring briefs will be assigned the week prior to the due date. Case briefs should be submitted as PDF documents to the professor in Canvas by the beginning of class on the day they are due. In general, a case brief should be no more than 1-2 pages, and bullet points are acceptable and even encouraged. You will receive further instruction in class on what is to be included in a successful brief, however the case brief template, available on Canvas, should be used for each brief. Your lowest case brief grade will be dropped and replaced with an average of your other briefs. One or two case briefs will be created as a video case brief. More instructions on that will follow.

You may find having a copy of your brief handy during class is useful so you can reference your brief during class discussions about the case.

Class Participation/Attendance/Conferences

10 regular class meetings X 25 points each = 250 points

Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course as our class meetings will consist largely of class discussion. You are required to attend each class meeting and participate meaningfully in our class discussions and conferences. We have 10 regular class meetings scheduled for this semester (1 class meeting is being replaced with online submissions of the midterm exam, 2 class dates are canceled, and 1 class date is our final review class before the final). For these 10 regular class meetings, you have the opportunity to earn 25 class participation points each, for a total of 250 class participation points. **If you miss a class meeting, you will receive zero class participation points for that class meeting. Absences from class meetings will be excused at the discretion of the instructor (see Attendance section below). Please let me know if you must be absent, and should your absence be excused, you will receive full participation credit for that day.**

To earn full class participation points for a class meeting you must attend the full class session and willingly and meaningfully participate in class discussions. Your class participation should show evidence of preparation, reading, and thought. Partial participation points will be assigned if you attend class but it appears you are not actively engaged in the discussion, unprepared for class, or you do not participate in the entire class meeting. Class participation points are not meant to be punitive if you don't yet understand a concept or aren't comfortable speaking up in a particular situation. Asking good questions is as important as making insightful comments. If you attend class, are clearly prepared, and show a willingness to engage in class discussions, you will earn full participation points.

Course Materials

Course Text

Constitutional Law for a Changing America: A Short Course, 9th Ed., Lee Epstein, Kevin T. McGuire, and Thomas G. Walker, Sage CQ Press, 2024; ISBN 978-1071879016

This textbook is required and is available through multiple online retailers. Either the electronic or hard copy version is sufficient. I am trying to have it available through the Georgia Tech Bookstore. Please do not attempt to download court opinions and read them on your own. They often include material not relevant to our class discussions and can lead to confusion.

Additional Materials/Resources

Additional required readings and course materials will be posted to Canvas.

If you are interested, I highly recommend you read SCOTUSblog regularly while taking this course, accessible at: <https://www.scotusblog.com/>. While it is not required reading, it will help you learn more about what is currently going on at the US Supreme Court, and we may occasionally discuss relevant postings in class.

Course Website

There will be a course website on Canvas. Canvas will be used for announcements, assignment submission, exams, grades, and for posting of other documents relevant to the course.

Course Expectations & Guidelines

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic

Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment or exam will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Attendance

Given the small size, once a week class meeting schedule, and interactive nature of this class, **attendance is taken each class period and is required.** Any requests for an absence to be excused must be made via e-mail to the professor either before or immediately after class. Excused absences are at the professor's sole discretion, and documentation may be required. Excused absences will only be granted in narrow circumstances that include, but are not limited to, Institute sanctioned absences, illness, jury duty, requirement for military service, religious observances, and death of a family member. It is the student's responsibility to request that an absence be excused either before or immediately after the absence from class.

All absences not excused by the professor are unexcused absences. Note that job interviews, career fair attendance, conflicts with other on-campus commitments (tour guide, students orgs, etc.), trips, etc. are all considered unexcused absences. You are allowed **ONE** unexcused absence per semester with no penalty. This is to account for the fact that you may have an intractable conflict of the nature described in this paragraph come up during the course of the semester. For the second and subsequent unexcused absence, your final grade in the course will be lowered by one letter grade for each unexcused absence. (i.e. if you have two unexcused absences, the highest possible letter grade you can earn is a B, three a C, four a D, and five an F). Please note this is independent of the fact that your participation grade will also suffer from excessive unexcused absences as outlined in the class participation section above.

Georgia Tech's official attendance policy can be found at <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>. In addition to the GT rules, it states "All students are responsible for obtaining an understanding of each instructor's policy regarding absences." Information about how to notify instructors when you need to miss class and what kind of documentation you should provide is at: <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/student-absence-regulations/>.

Course Communications

I will communicate with you using only your Georgia Tech e-mail address, and you should communicate with me using my Georgia Tech e-mail address (above). All enrolled students have an e-mail account provided by Georgia Tech. This account is a student's official point of contact with the Institute, and you are expected to check it each school day. <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/3/>

I routinely send important class communications using Canvas announcements. Please make sure you have your Canvas settings adjusted so that announcements are delivered to your e-mail inbox when they are sent.

Collaboration & Group Work

Part of the fun of studying law is talking with your classmates about cases and the issues they raise outside of class. It's practically the favorite past-time of law students and law professors, too, and I encourage you to do so. Just make sure that when it's time to complete your case briefs and exams that your work is entirely your own, and that you are not sharing resources or work with your classmates or anyone else. The case briefs are to improve your own understanding, and the exams gives me a chance to assess and give you feedback on your analytical skills that are being developed through the course, so your work must be entirely your own.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at 404.894.2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Case briefs must be turned in by the beginning of the class period in which they are due, and Canvas' due date/time will reflect that. Late case briefs will not be accepted and a score of zero will be assigned if your brief is not received by the beginning of the class during which it is due. Extensions will not be granted. If you must be absent from class for any reason on the due date of a case brief, in general, you should e-mail the brief to the instructor before class. If you feel there are extenuating circumstances in a particular situation making this impossible, please discuss with the instructor to see if there are any accommodations that can be made.

Exams will be made available as Canvas quizzes for at least a 24-hour period of time that will end at 11:59pm Eastern time on the date the Exam is listed on our syllabus. The exam is due in Canvas by 11:59pm on the date listed. Exams may only be made up in the case of documented, excused absences. If you feel you have extenuating circumstances, please speak with the professor as soon as possible, PRIOR to the exam.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Additional Resources for Students

I want to see you succeed not just in this course, but at Georgia Tech and during this time of your life in general. If you need assistance in the course, or in other areas, please don't hesitate to reach out for help. Resources to keep in mind if you're facing challenges while at Tech include the Dean of Students (<https://studentlife.gatech.edu>), the Counseling Center (<https://counseling.gatech.edu>), the GT Police (<https://police.gatech.edu>), Stamps Health Services (<https://health.gatech.edu>), and Belonging & Student Support (<https://belonging.gatech.edu/student-support>)

If you are having issues with housing, food insecurity, clothing, or other financial issues, please be aware of possible assistance available to you through the STAR Program (Students' Temporary Assistance and Resources). More details on the STAR Program are available at:

<https://studentlife.gatech.edu/content/star-services>

Inclusion

The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts supports the Georgia Institute of Technology's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in the broader society.

Course Schedule

The course schedule provided below will guide us through the semester. It may be necessary to tweak dates and readings, though any such change will be communicated to you prior to those classes/dates.

Dates for the midterm and final exams will not be changed.

No Legal Advice/No Attorney-Client Relationship

While your professor is an attorney, nothing expressed during this class, office hours, or any other interaction you may have with the professor in or out of class constitutes legal advice of any kind, and no attorney-client relationship exists between the professor and any student.

August 28 - Class 1

Introductions

Review Syllabus

Coverage of the material below

READ (before or after class¹):

Appendix 1: Constitution of the United States (pp. 711-721)

An Introduction to the U.S. Constitution (pp. 3-10)

Ch. 1: The Living Constitution

Federalist No. 78 - Read the 1-paragraph summary here for background

(<https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/alexander-hamilton-federalist-no-78-1788>) and then read Federalist No. 78 itself (<https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-71-80#s-lg-box-wrapper-25493470>).

September 4 - Class 2

READ (before class):

Ch. 2: Understanding the US Supreme Court

Structuring the Federal System (pp. 56-60)

Ch. 3: The Judiciary (pp. 61-84)

Includes cases:

Marbury v. Madison

Ex parte McCordle

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 1 - *Marbury v. Madison*

¹ For the first week, you can complete the reading before or after class. For Class 2 and going forward, please complete the readings **before** class so we can discuss the material in class.

September 11 - No In-Person Class

Georgia Constitution & Bill of Rights (https://sos.ga.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/state_constitution.pdf)

- Read the Bill of Rights (numbered pages 1-5)
- Skim the rest of the Constitution

Review the case synopsis posted to Canvas

Watch the assigned oral argument (tbd)

DUE (beginning of the normal class time):

Brief 2 - Assigned case and additional questions (tbd)

September 18 - Class 3

Ch. 7: The Commerce Power (pp. 216-258)

Includes Cases:

Heart of Atlanta Motel, Inc. v. United States

Gonzales v. Raich

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 3 - *Gonzales v. Raich*

September 25 - Class 4

READ:

Approaching Civil Liberties (pp. 360-362)

Ch. 12: Religion: Exercise and Establishment (pp. 362-378)

Includes Cases:

Sherbert v. Verner

Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon v. Smith

Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye Inc. v. City of Hialeah

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 4 - *Oregon v. Smith*

October 2 - Class 5

READ:

Ch. 12: Religion: Exercise and Establishment (pp. 379-412)

Includes cases:

Van Orden v. Perry

American Legion v. American Humanist Association; *Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission v. American Humanist Association*

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 5 - *Van Orden v. Perry*

October 9 - Class 6

READ:

Ch. 13: Freedom of Speech, Assembly, and Association (read *Morse v. Frederick* available at: <https://edge.sagepub.com/epsteinshort9e/student-resources/chapter-13-foundations-of-freedom-of-expression/morse-v-frederick>, then pp. 412-417, 426-429)

Ch 14: Modern-Day Approaches to Free Expression (pp. 440-444)

Includes cases:

Morse v. Frederick

Brandenburg v. Ohio

Boy Scouts of America v. Dale

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 6 - *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*

October 16 - Midterm Due (No Class)

You will have all week to complete the Midterm online.

October 23 - Class 7

READ:

Ch. 16: The Right to Privacy (pp. 501-508)

Includes case:

District of Columbia v. Heller

Gettysburg Address

https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/abraham-lincoln-the-gettysburg-address-1863?gad_source=1

Emancipation Proclamation

<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 7 - *Heller* (Video brief; instructions to follow)

October 30 - Class 8

READ:

Ch. 16: The Right to Privacy (pp. 513-534)

Includes cases:

Griswold v. Connecticut

Roe v. Wade

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 8 - *Dobbs*

November 6 - No In-person Class

Assignment tbd.

November 13 - Class 9

READ:

Ch. 16: The Right to Privacy (pp. 534-546)

Includes cases:

Lawrence v. Texas

Obergefell v. Hodges

Additionally, we will discuss *Bostock v. Clayton County* - decided in June 2020. Please access the opinion here: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf

Read pp. 5-37 of this PDF document (not the page numbers printed on the pages, but of the PDF). This is Justice Gorsuch's majority opinion. I also encourage you to skim Justice Alito and Justice Kavanaugh's dissents.

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 9 - *Obergefell v. Hodges*

November 20 - Class 10

READ:

Civil Rights and the Constitution (pp. 618-622)

Ch. 20: Discrimination (pp. 627-642)

Includes cases:

Plessy v. Ferguson

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

Loving v. Virginia

Letter from Birmingham Jail - http://make.berkeley.edu/readings/1963_MLK_Letter_Abridged.pdf

DUE (beginning of class):

Brief 10 - *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*

December 10-17 - Final Exam - Format and date(s) tbd