

American Constitutional Law Syllabus

POS 3603/AFA 3930, Section 15539

Fall 2025 | 3 credits

General Information

Meeting days and times: Period 1, M, W, F

Class location: Leigh Hall Room 0207

Instructor:

Professor Samuel P. Stafford

Phone: (352) 273-2372 (office)

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday (5:30 pm - 8:30 pm) via Zoom **and** by pre-set appointment through the link on the Course Homepage

Teaching Assistant

Ms. Montahina Akther

Email: ta.conlaw25@gmail.com

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday (8:30 - 9:30 am)

Office Location: Library West lobby or Study Room via Zoom per **prior** request

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

This survey course is designed to study and understand American Constitutional Law. It is not a course solely concerning “law” or the “U.S. Constitution,” but rather this course seeks to expose students to broad legal reasoning and historical analysis that will explain the rationale embraced by the United States Supreme Court, as well as State and Local Governments, as they all seek to preserve or expand their respective governmental powers by limiting those of others, within the parameters of the U.S. Constitution.

Together we will learn the history, structure, terminology, and basic operating rules of the American judicial and constitutional law systems. Furthermore, each student will also

embrace this unique method of legal analysis and reasoning by preparing select “case briefs,” and by actively participating in a teaching approach known as the modified Socratic Method, so that the Constitution is seen and confirmed as being adaptable, and hence more viable.

As stated by my colleague and predecessor in this course, “Because the student is developing case analysis and legal reasoning skills, the student must be able to think to be successful in this course.” A multifaceted examination of relevant substantive and procedural segments of the U.S. Constitution, relevant current events, as well as interpretation of the same by the United States Supreme Court will comprise a major focus of this course. Given our collective learning approach, there will be an underlying emphasis on each student’s evolving ability to hone and continually sharpen their reasoning/analytical skills, as we approach the study of American Constitutional law through our readings, cases, guest speakers, videos, research paper(s), Group and/or any individual projects.

Major course content and attention will focus on:

1. The political-social impact of the U.S. Constitution on everyday aspects of life;
2. The role and responsibilities of courts in the management and/or resolution of U.S. Constitutional policy application and conflict;
3. The nature, limitations, and evolving capacity of the United States Supreme Court to shape and address the most challenging U.S. Constitutional problems and solution;
4. The divergent and sometimes interconnecting roles of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of the federal government, vis-a-vis the U.S. Constitution; and
5. The unique historical tension between the state and federal government as defined and determined by the U.S. Constitution.

Note: This Syllabus is a general outline of the course and is subject to change. The Professor or the TA will let you know when modifications are made; therefore, class attendance is important.

GENERAL EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND OBJECTIVES

The course fulfills the General Education requirements for the Gordon Rule requirement. This means that the major writing assignments will amount to a total of 6000+ words and that students will receive feedback so they can improve their writing skills.

Upon completing this course, students will:

1. Learn about the historical, political-social justice impact of constitutional issues;
2. Be able to describe/appreciate the roles and responsibilities of all levels of courts in the management and/or resolution of constitutional policy conflict and implementation challenges;
3. Be able to analyze the nature, limitations, power, and capacity of the United States Supreme Court and other state and local branches of government to shape, define, and address evolving constitutional concerns; and
4. Be able to appreciate/examine the interconnecting and/or sometimes conflicting roles of various components of the justice system, media, interest groups, and society, as they each seek to guide, influence, and impact the evolution of the U.S. Constitution in this country.

REQUIRED READINGS AND MATERIALS

- William Peden, Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, 1955 (Chapel Hill).
- Lee Epstein and Thomas G. Walker, Institutional Powers and Constraints (CQ Press) [most current edition acceptable].

Additional articles will be assigned throughout the semester as well. Students will be expected to access those readings either online, by using the UF library catalog, via Canvas, or through a hard copy.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Each student will complete all required reading assignments and brief all assigned cases prior to each class meeting AND be prepared to fully and cogently discuss the cases/readings at the next class.
2. Each student will be expected to read and thoroughly digest the Articles and the Amendments to the United States Constitution and have an expressed working knowledge of the Constitution as we progress through the course this semester.
3. There will be two (2) major Examinations: a cumulative Midterm and a cumulative Final Exam. These Exams will only be given during the semester, no exceptions. These Exams and all quizzes of whatsoever nature must be completed and turned in on time, OR there will be a corresponding Full Letter Grade reduction for the Exam or quiz, or any test instrument, for Each Calendar Day the assignment is late, OR they may NOT be accepted at all.
4. There will be several announced and unannounced quizzes during the semester. These focus quizzes cannot be made up or retaken. These quizzes must be completed and turned in on time, OR there will be a corresponding Full Letter Grade reduction for the Exam, quiz or any test instrument for Each Calendar Day the assignment is late; OR they may NOT be accepted at all
5. There may be one class project during the semester. Each student will be required to participate in and/or submit the project on time. The same penalty found in items 3, 4, & 6 will apply.
6. A Moderate (16 pages) and a Long (27 pages) research paper will be assigned during the semester. Each research paper must be turned in on time, OR there will be a corresponding Full Letter Grade reduction for the Exam or quiz, or any test instrument for Each Calendar Day the assignment is late; OR it/ may NOT be accepted at all.

7. Due to the nature of the course, class attendance and participation are mandatory and will count toward your final grade. There will be a heavy emphasis on student-professor interchange, as well as class discussions where we will learn from one another. Hence, you must be present to participate and learn.
8. Class participation/attendance, assigned research paper(s), (class project[s]), quizzes, etc., will reflect 40% of the student's final grade; the Midterm will count for 25%; while the cumulative Final Examination will comprise 35% of the total grade in this course.

(See <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/> for current University of Florida grading policies).

9. Each student has the individual responsibility to read, comprehend, and fully comply with all procedural requirements of the course as listed in the Course Syllabus, AND any subsequent adjustments, during the semester.
10. Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students have the responsibility to research and locate when the evaluation period opens. Each student must complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals.

GRADE PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN

Percentage of Final Grade	Description
15%	Participation/Attendance
13%	Research Paper(s)
7%	Class Project(s)
5%	In-Class Quizzes/Assignments

25%	Cumulative Midterm Exam
35%	Cumulative Final Exam

WRITING REQUIREMENT

All assignments should:

- Be written in standard English and demonstrate competence in capitalization, grammar, sentence structure, and paragraph structure
- Be typed with Times New Roman, 12 pt. Font 1" margins
- Include information with your name, date, and course on the first page only or on a cover page.
- Properly document all sources and work. Students may use APA, MLA, Turabian, etc.

I will provide feedback on written assignments; these comments are intended to strengthen your writing skills. I will evaluate organization, clarity, content, structure, and sources.

Gordon Rule: "The Writing Requirement (Gordon Rule) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning." This is a Gordon Rule course with a 6000+ word writing requirement. Your writing will be evaluated, and you will receive feedback on assignments that are intended to fulfill this writing requirement. You will be evaluated based on grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, organization, and sources.

To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive at least a grade of C or higher, as well as satisfactory completion of all writing components of the course.

EXAM DATES (TENTATIVE) [subject to change/adjustment]

Major Quiz #1	September 24th from 7:25 am to 8:15 am/TBA
Midterm Exam	October 27th from 7:25 am to 8:15 am/TBA
Final Exam	December (TBA)

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE) [subject to change/adjustment]

Assignment #1	<u>U.S. Constitution</u> : Articles I-VII, Amendments I-XX <u>TJ</u> : Introduction (<i>xi-xxv</i>), Queries I-IV, VIII-IX, XI
Assignment #2	<u>U.S. Constitution</u> : Amendments XXI-XXVII
	<u>TJ</u> : Queries XIII-XV <u>E/W</u> : Part II - Chapters 2 and 3
Assignment #3	<u>TJ</u> : Queries XVII-XX, Appendices II and III <u>E/W</u> : Part II - Chapters 4 and 5
Assignment #4	First batch of case briefs <u>E/W</u> : Part III - Chapters 6 and 7
Assignment #5	<u>E/W</u> : Part III - Chapters 8 and 9
Assignment #6	Second batch of case briefs <u>E/W</u> : Part III - Chapters 10 and 11
Assignment #7	Third batch of case briefs Group project assignment
Assignment #8	Fourth batch of case briefs

GRADING SCALE {UF}

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-92.5
A-	92.4-89.5
B+	89.4-86.5
B	86.4-82.5
B-	82.4-79.5
C+	79.4-76.5
C	76.4-72.5
C-	72.4-69.5
D+	69.4-66.5
D	66.4-62.5
D-	62.4-59.5
E	59.4-0

See the UF Catalog's "[*Grades and Grading Policies*](#)" for information on how UF assigns grade points.

ATTENDANCE POLICY AND CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Attendance may not be taken every day, but there will be regular Assignments that cannot be made up.

Moreover, quizzes, the Midterm and the Final Examination will cover both lectures and readings, as well as anything related to the course subject matter, whether gleaned in-or-outside of class, and it is common for material in lectures and class interchanges not to come solely from readings. Hence each student must approach the material from a holistic position. If you miss class regularly, your grade will reflect this/these absences. Excused absences must be consistent with University policies.

During class, students are expected both to silence phones and to refrain from using them. Additionally, students must refrain from bringing open drinks/bottles and any food per the University policies.

Laptops may be used for taking notes or other activities directly related to class.

ZOOM PRIVACY CONSENT STATEMENT (If & When Applicable)

Our class sessions MAY HAVE to be audio/visually recorded at the request or requirement of the University if a pandemic need arises, and to accommodate student accessibility requirements. Students who participate with their cameras engaged or utilize a profile image agree to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who unmute during class and participate orally agree to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the “chat” feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all University courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded material are strictly prohibited.

CLASS RECORDINGS

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, upon instructor approval; (2) in connection with a complaint to the university; or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are Prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor- or teaching assistant-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is Prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center.](#) It is important for students to

share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

AI/SUPPLEMENTS: *EXPRESSLY FORBIDDEN*

Any use, reference, inclusion, or reliance upon ChatGPT, Google BARD, Chatsonic, Microsoft Bing Chat, Github Copilot, Fusion Chat, YouChat, Law ChatGPT, Clearbrief, Case Text, Studocu, any known OR subsequently developed artificial intelligence (AI) supplements, as well as any similar type of **unauthorized** AI writing OR research assistance/supplements, not mentioned here OR that may be developed during the semester, are **EXPRESSLY** prohibited and forbidden for use in this course.

Any use, inclusion, indication, or infusion of any material from any-or-all of these or similar sources will be viewed and considered by the professor as a class violation, and the offending student shall be immediately assessed for disciplinary action.

BE AWARE: Any use of AI will be subjected to detection through third-party software upon submission of any ungraded OR graded assignments (via Canvas or e-mail, etc.).

Finally, the ability to remain in this course during the semester will be determined by the professor and the University.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

University policy requires that we remind you of the commonsense values embodied in the University Honor Code. We assume that you are all familiar with the policy on academic honesty. If you are not, it is included below:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies several behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the University, instructor or TA in this class.

A student cannot use unauthorized materials or resources in any academic activity for academic advantage or benefit. Cheating includes but is not limited to:

1. Using any materials or resources prepared by another student without the other student's express consent or without proper attribution to the other student.
2. Using any materials or resources, through any medium, which the faculty has not given express permission to use and that may confer an academic benefit to the student.
3. Using additional time, or failing to stop working when instructed, on any time-bound academic activity.
4. Failing to follow the directions of a proctor of any academic activity, when such conduct could lead to an academic advantage or benefit.
5. Collaborating with another person, through any medium, on any academic activity when the faculty has expressly prohibited collaboration.

Plagiarizing the previous or current work of others, online documents, or any online platform without the proper citation will not be tolerated, and will be treated as a matter of grave concern.

V. UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis Services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the [Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: Visit [UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the [UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

[Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

[Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

[Teaching Center](#): Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

[Writing Studio](#): 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the [Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage](#) for more information.