Georgetown Center for the Constitution

GEORGETOWN LAW
Georgetown Center for the Constitution

“Under the strong leadership of Professor Randy Barnett, the Georgetown Center for the Constitution, although only recently established, is already making profound contributions to the field of constitutional law. In addition to providing informative events featuring renowned constitutional law scholars and offering an important forum for discussions ranging from the impact of recent Supreme Court decisions to general theories of constitutional interpretation, the Center is leading a thoughtful examination of the best practices for originalist jurisprudence, and it is focusing scholars on the modern significance of nineteenth century anti-slavery jurisprudence. Already deeply influential, the Center’s contributions to constitutional law will only grow more significant in the years ahead, and I am deeply proud of its important work.”

William Treanor, Dean

The Georgetown Center for the Constitution, founded in 2012, offers a variety of programs on constitutional law and theory at Georgetown Law, placing special emphasis on how best to remain faithful to the Constitution’s text. Led by Professor Randy Barnett, the Center sponsors lectures, faculty colloquia, conferences, visiting scholars, post-graduate fellowships, and student fellows. All of its activities are designed to engage scholars, students, and even Supreme Court justices in conversations about how to interpret and apply the document that sits under glass less than ten blocks away from Georgetown Law.
Annual Salmon P. Chase Lecture and Colloquium on the Constitution

Each year, the Georgetown Center for the Constitution sponsors The Salmon P. Chase Lecture and Colloquium on the Constitution to bring scholars together to discuss some aspect of our constitutional history.

In 2014, the inaugural Chase Lecture and Colloquium celebrated the 150th anniversary of the appointment of Salmon P. Chase as Chief Justice of the United States. Co-sponsored by the Supreme Court Historical Society and hosted by Chief Justice Roberts in the courtroom of the Supreme Court, the inaugural lecture by historian James Oakes focused on Chase’s development of antislavery constitutionalism. The following day, twenty-six scholars gathered at Georgetown Law for a day-long colloquium discussing Chase’s antislavery activities as a lawyer, political organizer, public official, and finally, as Chief Justice. Following the riveting discussion of Chase’s accomplishments, the annual conference was renamed to honor the former Chief Justice.

Recent Chase lectures and colloquia have commemorated the anniversaries of the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment and ratification of the Bill of Rights. The Center has continued its relationship with the Supreme Court Historical Society and looks forward to hosting many more successful lectures at the Supreme Court.

“Each event features professors and practitioners with varying perspectives on the Constitution and how it is, should be, and could be interpreted. As a Student Fellow, I have the opportunity to interact with the speakers and join in the discussion, which is vital for students who are looking for opportunities to explore constitutional law outside of the traditional classroom curriculum.”

Meghan Breen, L ’17
The Student Fellows Programs

The Student Fellows Program is an integral part of the Center’s mission to diversify the educational experience of Georgetown Law students through interaction with leading scholars, judges, and practitioners on the subject of constitutional interpretation and implementation. Membership in the Student Fellows Program provides special access to activities such as daytime programs and evening receptions with the nation’s leading experts on constitutional law, as well as internship and post-graduate job opportunities. Since its inception, the Center has exposed hundreds of students to conversations on such topics as recent Supreme Court jurisprudence, judicial review, and modes of constitutional interpretation. Student Fellows are also invited to attend the annual Chase Lecture, which customarily occurs at the Supreme Court.

Visiting Scholars Program

The Visiting Scholars Program provides junior faculty members from other law schools with the opportunity to spend a semester at Georgetown Law. The Program is designed to assist tenure-track and recently-tenured professors in expanding their body of scholarship by providing them with the time and resources to complete a major project, often a book, while in residence at Georgetown. The Visiting Scholar works closely with the Center’s scholars, attends faculty workshops, and participates in advanced constitutional law seminars. The Center hosts scholars focused on the constitutional aspects of a diverse areas of study—criminal law, intellectual property, and international law, for instance.

Originalism Boot Camp

Each summer, the Center hosts a week-long seminar for thirty of the nation’s most accomplished law students and recent graduates. The Originalism Boot Camp is a dynamic course that exposes students to the theory and practice of originalist interpretation, as well as the relationship between law and history. Georgetown Law professors Randy Barnett and Lawrence Solum co-teach the seminar with guest lecturers by such distinguished scholars as Sai Prakash (Virginia), Will Baude (Chicago), Jack Balkin (Yale), Joyce Malcolm (George Mason) and Michael Rappaport (San Diego). The first Originalism Boot Camp featured private meetings with Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, conversations with Senators Rand Paul and Mike Lee, and lunches with former Attorney General Ed Meese and Judge Diane Sykes. Future speakers will include Judge Janice Rogers Brown and Utah Justice Thomas Lee.

“My time as a visiting scholar at the Georgetown Center for the Constitution was among the most valuable experiences of my professional career. It gave me an entire semester to research, write, attend workshops, and participate in the life of a world-class law school. Even more importantly, it gave me the chance to discuss ideas with leading constitutional scholars over numerous lunches, dinners, and cups of coffee. Those interactions have helped shape who I am as a scholar, and will continue to do so for years to come.”

John Stinneford
From top left: Senator Mike Lee discusses his book, *Our Lost Constitution: The Willful Subversion of America’s Founding Document*, with students and faculty. Professor Randy Barnett moderates the third annual Salmon P. Chase Colloquium. Constitutional litigators speak as a panel during the 2016 Originalism Boot Camp. Colleen Sheehan, the third Chase Lecturer, discusses her research on James Madison. More than 20 historians, political scientists and legal scholars consider the origins and iconization of the Bill of Rights.
“In just one week, the Center’s originalism seminar instilled in me a better understanding of the Constitution and provided me with a way to interpret and apply the Constitution’s text in a manner that stays true to its original meaning. I highly recommend this course for anyone who wants to establish a strong and compelling understanding of Constitutional principles.”

James Danford, L’17

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The Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy

In 2015, the Center began a partnership with the Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy, assisting the Journal in switching to an all-symposia format. Instead of soliciting papers from authors through the traditional journal processes, the Journal instead relies on the Center’s conferences for the content of its biannual publications. To date, the Journal has worked on publications for the first three Salmon P. Chase Lectures and faculty colloquia, a conference on the Second Amendment co-sponsored by the Heritage Foundation, and a symposium on the constitutionality of the rational basis test co-sponsored by the Institute for Justice. These conferences have produced papers from diverse scholars such as Pamela Brandwein, Erwin Chemerinsky, Richard Epstein, and Eric Foner, with more exceptional scholarship to follow.

Co-sponsoring Other Programs

In addition to these recurring programs, the Center co-sponsors special events with other organizations. For example, in September of 2013, it hosted the first annual Robert H. Bork Memorial Lecture and Debate Series, co-sponsored with the Federalist Society of Law and Public Policy, with the inaugural lecture delivered by Justice Antonin Scalia. In recent years, the Center has collaborated with the Heritage Foundation, The Institute for Justice, the Ayn Rand Institute, The James Wilson Institute, and Georgetown’s own Supreme Court Institute.
From top: Each semester, the Center engages students in meaningful discussions about constitutional law and its impact on everyday life. The Institute for Justice’s Clark Neily debated Ed Whelan of the Ethics and Public Policy Center about judicial engagement versus judicial restraint; Constitution Accountability Center President Elizabeth Wydra speaks to the 2016 Originalism Boot Camp; Professor Louis Michael Seidman offered critical commentary on Professor Barnett’s presentation on “Our Republican Constitution”; and Professors Marty Lederman and Lawrence Solum presented competing views on constitutional interpretation.
Randy Barnett  
Director  
Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Legal Theory

Lawrence B. Solum  
Senior Scholar  
Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Law

Laura K. Donohue  
Senior Scholar  
Professor of Law

John Mikhail  
Senior Scholar  
Professor of Law

Nicholas Quinn Rosenkranz  
Senior Scholar  
Professor of Law

Yvonne Tew  
Faculty Scholar  
Associate Professor of Law

John Baker  
Director, Summer Program on the U.S. Constitution and the American Economy  
Visiting Professor of Law

Françoise Djoukeng  
Program Manager

Georgetown Center for the Constitution  
600 New Jersey Ave., NW  
Washington D.C., 20001

Email: lawconstitution@georgetown.edu  
Phone: 202.662.9861

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