The Stanford Constitutional Law Center grows out of the long and distinguished tradition of constitutional law scholarship at Stanford Law School. It carries on this tradition through a program of conferences, lectures, informal “Constitutional Conversations,” and fellowships. The Center has no politics and takes no sides on controversial cases—but it is committed to the rule of law and the idea that the Constitution can be studied and interpreted objectively in light of its text, history, and purposes. It advances this mission through events and activities that foster scholarship, generate public discussion, and provide opportunities for students and scholars to engage in analysis of the Constitution across the ideological spectrum.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Stanford Constitutional Law Center was founded in 2006. Since its inception, it has focused particularly on the separation and scope of legislative, executive, and judicial powers; the structure of constitutional democracy; the freedoms of speech, press, and religion; and the right of privacy, including the privacy of personal data in a digital world. In 2009 Michael W. McConnell, Richard and Frances Mallery Professor of Law, became faculty director of the Center.
Michael W. McConnell
Richard and Frances Mallery Professor of Law and Faculty Director, Constitutional Law Center

In 2009, Stanford Law School announced the appointment of Michael W. McConnell, a federal judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and well-known constitutional law scholar, as the Richard Frances Mallery Professor of Law and Director of the Constitutional Law Center. Widely regarded as a judge, appellate litigator, and constitutional law scholar, Professor McConnell has written broadly on many aspects of the Constitution and is perhaps best known for his work on freedom of religion. Professor McConnell was appointed to the Denver-based Tenth Circuit in 2002 by President George W. Bush. Before his appointment to the bench, he taught law at the University of Chicago and University of Utah. He was assistant general counsel at the Office of Management and Budget, Assistant to the Solicitor General in the Department of Justice under President Ronald Reagan, and a member of the President’s Intelligence Oversight Board from 1988-1990. He served as law clerk to Justice William J. Brennan Jr. of the U.S. Supreme Court and Chief Judge J. Skelly Wright of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. He has argued 13 cases in the United States Supreme Court.

Constitutional Law Center Events

The Center advances its educational mission by sponsoring three types of events:

Conferences

The Center sponsors three annual conferences, each drawing many speakers and attendees from beyond the law school. The Center’s signature conference, usually held in the winter quarter, is open to the public and addresses a significant issue in constitutional law. Past conference subjects have included the constitutional rights of corporations, campus civil liberties, the Constitution in times of financial crisis, the Constitution and the world, and the legacy of the Supreme Court’s abortion jurisprudence. The Center also co-sponsors with the Supreme Court Litigation Clinic an annual conference to bring together prominent Supreme Court counsel and journalists for an “off the record” discussion of the Supreme Court’s current term. Lastly, the Center co-sponsors with the Institute for Constitutional History a one-week summer workshop for young scholars to discuss and develop their own scholarship in a particular field of constitutional law.

Conversations

Each month the Center holds one or more “Constitutional Conversations.” The format of these events is informal—usually a short presentation by a prominent figure in constitutional law, followed by discussion and audience questions. These events are well-attended by Stanford Law School students and other members of the community and typically highlight current issues of constitutional law. The Center also hosts roundtable discussions featuring prominent scholars and practitioners. Recent roundtable panels have discussed religious freedom, federalism and the treaty power, and how to interpret the Privileges or Immunities Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Past talks have addressed some of the most pressing issues of constitutional law, including the President’s recess-appointment authority, the religious-freedom challenges to the Affordable Care Act, the constitutionality of the National Security Agency’s surveillance programs, and issues of inequality and taxation.

Lectures

The Center also serves as Stanford University’s designated host of the annual Constitution Day lecture on September 17 each year. Past lecturers include Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Professor Jack Goldsmith (“The Eternal War on Terror”), Judge Janice Rogers Brown of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit (“Honor and the Constitution”), Professor Stanley Fish (“Academic Freedom”), Judge Carlos Bea (“Religion in the Public Square: What Tests to Apply Now”) and Jack Rakove (“The Electoral College and the Crisis of Presidential Legitimacy: Some Dark Concerns”).

https://law.stanford.edu/stanford-constitutional-law-center/
CONSTITUTIONAL LAW SCHOLARS

In addition to hosting public events, the Center supports the next generation of constitutional law scholars.

POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

Post-graduate scholars pursue their own academic projects; their scholarship appears regularly in premier law journals, including the Stanford Law Review, Yale Law Journal, and Columbia Law Review. And they have had outstanding success on the academic teaching market. In the past few years, the Center’s post-graduate scholars have secured jobs at the University of Chicago Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, Hastings College of the Law, UCLA School of Law, and the University of Georgia School of Law.

In addition to working on their own projects, the Center’s Academic Fellows and Executive Director offer valuable contributions to the law school community. They speak at student events; serve on moot-court panels; help mentor students; and teach law classes, including past seminars on remedies law, federalism, and constitutional interpretation. Weekly academic workshops also offer the Center’s fellows a chance to present their papers and exchange ideas with other fellows at the law school.

STUDENT FELLOWSHIPS

The Center supports a number of Stanford Law School students who are interested in pursuing their own constitutional law scholarship. Summer and academic-term fellowships are designed to encourage and assist these students, who also participate in the Center’s other activities.

Mark Storslee became the Executive Director of the Constitutional Law Center in 2016. His research focuses on the First Amendment freedoms of speech, association, and religion, along with related questions at the intersection of ethics and law.

Mark earned a law degree from Stanford Law School, where he was an editor of the Stanford Law Review and a recipient of the Stephen M. Block Award for outstanding student scholarship in civil rights. He is also a Ph.D. Candidate in Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. He is co-editor of Comparative Religious Ethics: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies (Routledge, 2014), and has also published in Political Theology and other journals. After law school, he clerked for the Honorable Diarmuid O'Scanlaim of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

In addition to his law degree, Mark holds masters degrees from Duke University and from the University of Edinburgh, where he was a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. He also holds a B.A. from Furman University.

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CURRENT ACADEMIC FELLOWS

LANCE SORENSON received his J.D. from Pepperdine University and is a doctoral candidate in Legal History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His dissertation traces the development of American Federalism in the context of westward expansion and imperialism, and he is particularly interested in Native American Tribal Sovereignty and Territorial issues.

GEOFF SIGALET is a PhD candidate in Public Law and Political Theory at Princeton University. Geoff’s doctoral dissertation is titled “Dialogue and Domination: A Theory of Judicial Review.” In addition to research concerning constitutionalism, Geoff maintains a keen research interest in the history of political thought. Geoff earned his M.A. from McGill University and his B.A. in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of Alberta.

SLS Constitution Day 2016 featuring Pulitzer Prize winning author Jack Rakove

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