

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

PSPS 3320: Civil Liberties

3 credit hours, face-to-face

Course: PSPS 3320
Semester: Spring 2026
Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday 3:30 – 4:45 PM

Instructor: Trevor G. Samaha, Ph.D.
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Course Catalog Description:

Case studies of key Supreme Court decisions affecting the rights and freedoms of the individual in American society.

Course Introduction:

This course will focus on the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. Supreme Court, and the role both have played in defining and protecting personal liberties. This course will not focus on the role of the Constitution in the distribution of governmental power; that's covered in PSPS 3310 – Constitutional Law.

Although helpful, PSPS 2300 is not an official prerequisite for this class. However, I will spend a minimal amount of time in this class reviewing helpful introductory concepts like judicial review or constitutionalism. Students who have not taken PSPS 2300 and who feel at a disadvantage during the first several weeks of the semester should contact me for help.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Develop a substantive understanding of historical and modern developments in the constitutional law of civil rights and civil liberties.
2. Understand how societal and political factors interact with the law. In particular, understand how these factors influence Supreme Court justices and their interpretation of the Constitution and decision making.
3. Develop the ability to read, understand, and interpret U.S. Supreme Court decisions, and summarize them effectively.
4. Apply your understanding gained from course readings and lectures to current and hypothetical legal issues to arrive at a well-reasoned decision that you can clearly articulate with sufficient legal justification.
5. Enhance your oral and written communication skills through classroom discussion and written assignments.

In addition to the course-specific learning outcomes, we will be reinforcing and practicing each of the following PSPS student learning outcomes:

1. Students are able to apply key concepts used to study governmental and non-state structures and actors in political systems.
2. Students are able to analyze political phenomena and critique arguments in a theoretically informed manner.
3. Students are able to apply their disciplinary knowledge to address contemporary, real-world problems.
4. Students are able to identify, evaluate, and accurately apply verifiable sources of evidence, including empirical research.

Notes on the Syllabus:

This syllabus is the first place you should turn to when you have questions about your responsibilities or the structure of the course. If you do not find the information that you are looking for in the syllabus, please feel free to contact me with questions.

Information contained in the syllabus, especially regarding scheduling, is subject to change during the semester at my discretion. Generally, such changes will move the due dates for some readings back or remove some readings from the schedule. I will announce any changes in class and by email. **The best way to ensure that you are aware of any changes is to attend class** and check your Mocs email regularly. I will also try to update the course reading schedule available on Canvas whenever changes are made, but such updates may not be made immediately. If there is an unintended contradiction between this syllabus and university policy, the university policy supersedes the syllabus.

Course Materials:

Required Book:

Epstein, Lee, Kevin T. McGuire, and Thomas G. Walker. 2025. *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. 12th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. ISBN: 9781071901663

The bulk of the readings for this course will come from the assigned textbook. If there are any additional readings, they can be found on the course Canvas page.

Grading Criteria:

Attendance	100 points
Pre- and Post-Test	100 points
Case Briefs	260 points
Quizzes	140 points
Written Assignments	200 points
Final Exam	200 points
TOTAL	1000 points

Determination of Grades:

1000 points	A+
930-999 points	A
900-929 points	A-
870-899 points	B+
830-869 points	B
800-829 points	B-
770-799 points	C+
730-769 points	C
700-729 points	C-
600-699 points	D
<600 points	F

I will round anything .5 or more to the next highest point. (For example, a 799.6 will be rounded to 800, but a 797.6 will be rounded to 798, *not* 800.)

Your beliefs and values about politics and society have **absolutely no impact on your grade**. Your grade is based on completing the requirements of the course. Do not assume that agreeing with my ideology will enhance your grade and do not assume that disagreeing with my ideology will hurt your grade. There is no relationship between your beliefs and values and your grade.

Attendance: Simply put, attendance is mandatory. Every absence beyond the second will cost you ten points from your attendance score. You start with 100 attendance points and can only go down from there. **Essentially, you get two free absences.** Since I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, students are strongly encouraged to save their free absences for sessions missed due to illness, emergencies, and schedule conflicts, such as participation on UTC athletic teams. If you

miss class, you will not be allowed to make up any in-class work from that day, including quizzes or exams.

Pre- and Post-Tests: At the beginning of the semester, you will be asked to complete a multiple-choice test that will ask you about your knowledge of civil rights and civil liberties, as well as your comfort levels with different topics and types of coursework. You will take the same test again at the end of the semester. These tests will establish your baseline knowledge of the course material and show how much you learned/retained by the end of the semester. These tests will be graded for completion and good-faith effort only, so you will get full credit as long as you complete the tests and it looks like you thought about the questions and your answers.

Quizzes: Quizzes will be held weekly throughout the semester and are based on the assigned readings. Their purpose is straightforward: to confirm that you've completed the reading and are ready to engage with the material. Quizzes will be on Canvas and will be due prior to the beginning of class on Tuesday. They are open book and open note. Each quiz is five questions long, and you will have 20 minutes to complete it once you have started. Late quizzes will receive a zero.

Case Briefs: During the semester, you will be completing 26 case briefs that outline important information about cases we will be studying. We will be using the "Facts, Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion" (FIRAC) briefing style where you will create one-page briefs outlining what happened in the case, how the Court ruled, what legal rules were applied, and why this case is important. I will provide more details about these briefs, including the grading rubric and an example, in a separate document that is posted on Canvas. The briefs must be brought to class both Tuesday and Thursday the week that they are due (listed on the schedule below). They will be turned in at the end of class on Thursday. You must print out and turn in hard copies of your briefs. They will be returned to you after they are graded.

Written Assignments: At two different points this semester, you will complete a writing assignment in which you apply course concepts to current or hypothetical legal issues. These assignments give you the opportunity to work on your analytical skills while also showing your comprehension of course topics. More information will be given on each assignment individually.

Final Exam: To evaluate all that you learned throughout the semester, there will be a final exam for this class. More information regarding the format and expectations for the exam will be given later in the semester.

Classroom Policies:

It is expected that all students adhere to the following at all times:

1. Respect the viewpoints, opinions, and backgrounds of others at all times. We will frequently encounter potentially difficult and controversial questions and topics. We must all make every effort to tolerate competing and contradictory views and create and sustain a space where everyone feels comfortable expressing opinions on law, politics, and society. All students have a right to a productive and safe learning environment. I endeavor to maintain a classroom environment that allows for lively, yet mature, debate: feel free to state your opinions on politics and society, but do so intelligently, without rancor or vitriol, and allow your classmates to do the same.
2. Silence your cell phone **before** class starts and stay off it during class. No texting/emailing/Tweeting/Snapchatting or any other form of electronic communication during class. It's distracting and disrespectful to the students around you and me. Keep your phone in your pocket or in your bag during class, not on your desk. If I see you on your phone,

I will ask you to put it away and you will lose attendance points for that class. This is especially important during exams/quizzes. If you use your phone for any reason during an exam or quiz, you will receive a zero on the exam/quiz.

3. No recording (audio or video) of the lectures by students is permitted.

Failure to follow these rules may result in being asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the meeting period.

Academic Integrity:

Students are required to adhere to the university's policies regarding academic dishonesty. The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. If you are found to have plagiarized on any assignment, you will receive a zero for that assignment. If you are found to have plagiarized on the written portion of an exam, or any writing assignment, in addition to receiving a zero on the paper or assignment, I reserve the right to give you a failing grade for the class based on the severity of the infraction.

For UTC's detailed policies regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Code of Conduct and Honor Code. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

The University's Honor Code Pledge states: "As a student of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, I pledge that I will not give or receive any unauthorized assistance with academic work or engage in any academic dishonesty in order to gain an academic advantage. I will exert every effort to insure that the Honor Code is upheld by myself and others, affirming my commitment to a campus-wide climate of honesty and integrity."

Artificial Intelligence (AI) use policy: Students may use AI tools (such as spell checkers and grammar checkers or language refinement tools) to assist with proofreading and stylistic improvement of their writing. However, the substance of all written work (ideas, arguments, structure, content, etc.) must originate entirely from the student. AI may not be used to generate, compose, or substantially rewrite any portion of an assignment. The use of AI to produce original content, even if later edited by the student, constitutes a violation of academic integrity and will be treated as plagiarism. Put simply, you may use AI to polish your prose, but not produce it.

Example:

Acceptable: You write a draft of an essay and use AI to suggest clearer phrasing or correct grammar.

Unacceptable: You ask AI to "write an essay about the functions of the federal Courts of Appeals" and submit the result, even if you make your own edits.

If you are unsure whether a particular use of AI is appropriate, ask me before submitting the assignment. When in doubt, err on the side of avoiding AI.

Institutional Policies:

Students are responsible for reviewing and being familiar with the university's policies, including the Campus Syllabus (<https://www.utc.edu/academic-affairs/campus-syllabus>).

PSPS 3320 – Spring 2026 – Schedule

Readings are expected to be completed before the week they are assigned (unless another due date is specified). For example, you should read chapter 3 of the Epstein, McGuire, and Walker (notated as “EMW”) book before you come to class week 2 of the semester. All reading assignments can be found either in the assigned textbook or on Canvas. Important dates are in bold. The schedule is subject to change during the semester at my discretion. Generally, such changes will move the due dates for some readings/assignments back or remove some readings/assignments from the schedule. I will announce any changes in class and by email.

Week 1 – Course Introduction – January 13th and 15th

Readings: EMW chapter 1 and chapter 2

Week 2 – Incorporation – January 20th and 22nd

Readings: EMW chapter 3

Briefs:

Hurtado v. California (1884)

Palko v. Connecticut (1937)

Week 3 – Religion: Exercise and Establishment – January 27th and 29th

Readings: EMW chapter 4

Briefs:

Sherbert v. Verner (1963)

Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971)

Week 4 – Foundations of Freedom of Expression – February 3rd and 5th

Readings: EMW chapter 5

Briefs:

Schenck v. United States (1919)

Brandenburg v. Ohio (1969)

Week 5 – Modern-day Approaches to Free Expression – February 10th and 12th

Readings: EMW chapter 6

Briefs:

Texas v. Johnson (1989)

303 Creative v. Elenis (2023)

Week 6 – Freedom of the Press – February 17th and 19th

Readings: EMW chapter 7

Briefs:

New York Times v. United States (1971)

Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier (1988)

Week 7 – The Boundaries of Free Expression – February 24th and 26th

Written Assignment 1 due March 1st at 11:59 PM

Readings: EMW chapter 8

Briefs:

Miller v. California (1973)

Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union (1997)

Week 8 – The Right to Keep and Bear Arms – March 3rd and 5th

Readings: EMW chapter 9

Briefs:

District of Columbia v. Heller (2008) **OR** *McDonald v. Chicago* (2010)

New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen (2022)

Week 9 – Privacy and Personal Liberty – March 10th and 12th

Readings: EMW chapter 10

Briefs:

Roe v. Wade (1973)

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization (2022)

Week 10 – Spring Break – March 17th and 19th

Week 11 – Investigations and Evidence – March 24th and 26th

Readings: EMW chapter 11

Briefs:

Mapp v. Ohio (1961)

Hudson v. Michigan (2006)

Week 12 – Attorneys, Trials, and Punishments – March 31st and April 2nd

Written Assignment 2 due April 5th at 11:59 PM

Readings: EMW chapter 12

Briefs:

Gideon v. Wainwright (1963)

Batson v. Kentucky (1986)

Week 13 – Racial Discrimination and Equal Protection – April 7th and 9th

Readings: EMW chapter 13

Briefs:

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

Week 14 – Contemporary Approaches to Equal Protection – April 14th and 16th

Readings: EMW chapter 14

Briefs:

Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College (2023)

Lawrence v. Texas (2003)

Week 15 – Voting and Representation – April 21st and 23rd

Readings: EMW chapter 15

Briefs:

Miller v. Johnson (1995)

Rucho v. Common Cause (2019)

Finals Week – Final Exam – April 30th

Final Exam is Thursday, April 30 from 3:30 – 5:30 PM