The Stanford Constitutional Law Center grows out of the long and distinguished tradition of constitutional law scholarship at Stanford Law School. The Center seeks to carry 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 by Kathleen M. Sullivan, Stanley Morrison Professor of Law, after she stepped down as the Dean of the Law School. The Center focused particularly on the separation and scope of legislative, executive, and judicial powers; the structure of constitutional democracy; the freedoms of speech, press, and academic research; 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.
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.

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. The topic of the 2014 conference is the role of history in constitutional interpretation. Past conference subjects include the constitutional rights of corporations, 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. In 2013 former Richard E. Lang Professor of Law and Dean, Larry D. Kramer, led the workshop with Princeton History Professor Dirk Hertog on the public/private distinction. The theme of the 2014 workshop is constitutional history, and it will be led by Professor Robert W. Gordon.

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. 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 14th Amendment. Scheduled talks in 2014 will address 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, and the constitutionality of the National Security Agency’s surveillance programs.

LECTURES

The Center also serves as Stanford University’s designated host of the annual Constitution Day lecture on September 17 each year. The 2013 lecturer was Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The Center plans to maintain these lofty standards with a 2014 lecture by Cass Sunstein of Harvard Law School. Past lecturers include 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”), and Professor Stanley Fish (“Academic Freedom”).

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW SCHOLARS

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

POST-GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

The cornerstone of the Center’s scholarly mission is its support of postgraduate scholars, including Academic Fellows and an Executive Director. With great accomplishment, these 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 postgraduate 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 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. In 2014 the Center is launching a weekly reading group to bring fellows and students together to read and discuss classic works of American legal scholarship. 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.

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CURRENT ACADEMIC FELLOWS

JONATHAN ABEL became a fellow at the Constitutional Law Center in 2013. His research interests are in criminal justice, the First Amendment, and public-records law. His scholarship has appeared in the Stanford Law Review and the Georgetown Law Journal. In 2012, he received a J.D. from Stanford Law School, where he served as President of the Stanford Law Review. Jon subsequently clerked for Chief Judge Alex Kozinski of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Before law school, he spent three-and-a-half years covering the police and local-government beats for the St. Petersburg Times. He has also written news stories for the Washington Post, Boston Globe, Miami Herald, and Harvard Crimson.

DEREK WEBB joined the Constitutional Law Center as a fellow in 2012. He works in the fields of constitutional law, statutory interpretation, American political theory, and legal history. After receiving his B.A. in philosophy from Yale University, he earned a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Notre Dame and a J.D. from Georgetown University. He has held research and teaching fellowships at the University of Virginia and Princeton University and held summer clerkships in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. In law school he was on the winning team of the Spong Moot Court competition, held annually at William and Mary Law School, receiving the Best Brief for respondent’s side as well. In 2012 he received the American Inns of Court’s Warren E. Burger Prize for his article, “The Original Meaning of Civility: Democratic Deliberation at the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention.” Derek is also the co-author of a book about Anti-Federalists in New York.

DANIELLE ZIMMERMAN became a fellow at the Constitutional Law Center in 2013. Her academic work focuses on constitutional and administrative law, with a particular focus on the First Amendment and judicial review of agency interpretation. Danielle earned her J.D. from the University of Michigan Law School in 2008 and an M.Phil. in Modern History from Oxford University in 2005. Following law school, she clerked for Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson III of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, and practiced in the litigation and regulatory groups of Covington & Burling LLP in Washington, D.C. Danielle holds a bachelor’s degree in government and religion from The College of William and Mary.

ERIK ZIMMERMAN joined the Constitutional Law Center as a fellow in 2013. His academic work focuses on the fields of federal jurisdiction and remedies. After earning his J.D. from Stanford Law School in 2007, he clerked for Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. of the U.S. Supreme Court, and Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson III of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. He also practiced in the appellate litigation group of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP in Washington, D.C. He holds a bachelor’s degree in astronomy and astrophysics from Harvard University.

Stanford Constitutional Law Center
Stanford Law School
conlawcenter@law.stanford.edu