Reason is the life of the law, nay the common law itself is nothing but reason... The law, which is the perfection of reason. - Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634)

In no country perhaps in the world is the law so general a study [as in America]... This study renders men acute, inquisitive, dexterous, prompt in attack, ready in defense, full of resources... They augur misgovernment at a distance, and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze. - Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

‘If the law supposes that,’ said Mr. Bumble... ’the law is a ass – a idiot.’ - Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

Whatever your profession or position, you’re going to have to deal with laws and lawyers and the threat of lawsuits. If you want changes in society, or want to resist those changes, or just want to be “left alone”, you need some understanding of the system of laws applicable to where you live. The U. S. Constitution describes the basic framework for what government can and cannot do in this country. This course will focus on the “rule of law” and how courts, legislative bodies, executive departments and the public have interacted and intersected to pass, change, interpret, and/or discard certain laws, particularly those impacting the political and civil rights of individuals referenced in the “Bill of Rights” and other Constitutional Amendments. I’ll draw on my experiences from 21 years of legal practice, 12 years as mayor, and 5 years as head of a national advocacy group to supplement the textbooks, cases, readings, materials, and participatory activities to help the class reach a better understanding of the role law plays in our society and decide which, if any, of the quotes above are still applicable today.

By the end of this course, students should be able to analyze controversial public issues and conflicting claims of “rights” by being able to cite key Constitutional provisions and court cases, summarize the relevant legal theories and decisions involved with past public issues, apply those theories and decisions to current controversies, and discuss the likelihood of success for current claims being advanced.