UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA SCHOOL OF LAW
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF LAW
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SYLLABUS, COURSE REQUIREMENTS, AND GRADING CRITERIA

I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to law school, and to your Introduction to the Study of Law course. This course’s goals are: to introduce the study of law; to provide some of the basic knowledge and skills that will prepare you for your 1L courses; to explore the American legal system, legal methods and concepts, and the role or roles played by law students and lawyers; to gain a basic understanding of the format of law school and its approach to teaching the law; to introduce the reading, writing, and communication skills that are central to legal education and practice; and to begin considering what it means to be a good law student—and a good lawyer.

II. COURSE MATERIALS AND BACKGROUND READING

The text for this course is Tracey E. George & Suzanna Sherry, What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: An Introduction to the Study of Law, 2nd edition (Wolters Kluwer, 2016). You are expected to read the entire book, but it is short and easy. I will also hand out a couple of additional readings in class.

Although you are expected to have read the entire book, for the first day of class focus especially on chapters 1 and 7. You might take a quick look at chapters 3 and 4 as well, but more for background purposes. For Friday’s class, please make sure again that you do have chapters 3 and 4 under your belt, and focus on chapter 2. I will also give you a take-home reading for Thursday night; please allow enough time to take a good look at it. On Friday, I will give you a short case to read as a handout and the assignment of preparing and handing in, by Monday morning, a “case brief” for that case. Please also take a look at chapters 5 and 6 for the Monday sessions. On Tuesday, during the session before the short exam, there will be general discussion. there will be a small "exam."

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III. GRADES, EVALUATION, AND ELECTRONICS POLICY

The class is graded on a pass/fail basis. To pass the class, you must read the assigned material, complete the few short assignments, and complete a short final exam on the last day of class, whose purpose is for you to display a basic understanding of the material. You must also attend the entire class. It is important to let me know if you will be missing any of the class for any reason. You will find that if you have read the materials, listened in class, and taken the course seriously, the exam should not be a great challenge.

This is a no-laptop class. Although most (but not all) of your teachers allow you to take notes by laptop, there are good reasons, both in general (as various studies have shown) and in law school in particular, not to rely, or over-rely, on laptops for note-taking. The goal in this as in every other class is not to transcribe everything that is said in class, or even everything just the professor says (although you will learn a great deal in law school from class discussion and from your fellow students), but to take notes selectively, both so that you can focus on and participate in class discussion and so that you can learn to distinguish between what is central and what is not in your readings and class discussions. Participating in class is the best way both to do well in your courses and to learn how to think and act as a lawyer. Simply sitting passively and silently in class and taking down every word you hear is generally not the best way to learn. If you are inclined to be nervous about talking in class, I encourage you not to be, and to challenge yourself to do so. Aside from the learning benefits involved and the contribution you will make to a lively and productive discussion, it’s a great way to practice being a lawyer without any clients suffering any serious consequences as a result.

If you require an accommodation for the use of laptops, or for other matters, please contact the Dean of Students.

Of course, everyone learns in slightly different ways, and (in those classes where laptops are permitted) it is possible to use your laptop for selective note-taking only and not to allow it, or other electronics, to distract you. But I recommend you think seriously about either minimizing or eliminating the laptop and learning to take notes by hand in class, supplemented if you wish by recording some or all of your classes (with your professor’s permission). It goes without saying that other electronics should also be absent from the classroom and that all texting, emailing, and compulsive surreptitious checking of Twitter or Facebook should cease while you’re in class. If you have a valid reason to be available by phone, please keep your phone on silent and leave the room if you absolutely must take a call.

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IV. OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

I will be in the building as much as possible during the days when this class is in session. Feel free to stop by my office, at Room 360, and knock or enter if you have any questions at all, about this class or anything else. I can also be reached by email at phorwitz@law.ua.edu, and my assistant, Alicia Randolph, can be reached at arandolph@law.ua.edu. I will try to return emails and calls promptly, but there may be delays depending on my availability or your question.

V. DISCLAIMER

This is a syllabus, not a binding contract. In the words of Justice Holmes, “It is an experiment, as all life is an experiment.” Dates and details are subject to change. Actual mileage may vary. Void where prohibited.

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