

Introduction To Law

Course Description,
Requirements,
and Syllabus

Widener University
School of Law
Wilmington, DE
August 2013

INTRODUCTION TO LAW

WILMINGTON, DE

Course Description

Many students find law school very different from other school experiences. The subject matters may be new, the workload is heavy, and the vocabulary used in law school seems alien. Even the testing and grading processes in law school are often different from processes employed in other education settings.

Introduction to Law is a required course designed to prepare you for unique features of a law school education. The course also provides a common core of understanding and shared experience for all students in the first semester. You will learn concepts and practice skills essential to a successful performance in law school. For example, you will address the following issues in class: the organization of legal systems within the United States, the study and use of judicial opinions, the processes of legal reasoning, the level of preparation necessary for class, effective use of class experiences, and law school exams.

Classes for Introduction to Law begin during orientation week. As noted on the semester schedule you received from the Registrar, classes for the course will continue throughout the semester. Students who fail to fulfill attendance requirements for Introduction to Law or who fail to complete course assignments in an acceptable manner will not receive a passing grade for the course. The syllabus for the first week of Introduction to Law is set forth below.

Course Materials

The required materials for Introduction to Law are the following: (1) Tracey George & Suzanna Sherry, What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: An Introduction to the Study of Law, and (2) the Introduction to Law Course Materials Supplement (2013). You may purchase the George & Sherry text from the bookstore on the law school's campus as well as from any online book vendor. The Course Materials Supplement is posted on the Widener Law School web site under Current Students/Orientation DE.

You should read chapters 1 through 6 of What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: An Introduction to the Study of Law before classes begin on Tuesday, August 13. We also strongly recommend that you have access to a law dictionary, such as Black's Law Dictionary, to assist you with the vocabulary you will encounter throughout your law school career.

Attendance

The Academic Code of the law school requires attendance at 80% of scheduled class time for the semester. Faculty will take attendance for each class of Introduction to Law by passing out an attendance sheet at the beginning of each class and having each student initial next to the student's name. Your initials will be the only record we have of your

attendance in class. Please remember that the Honor Code is in effect when you initial your name and represent that you are present in class.

Please do not be late for class. It is unprofessional, disruptive, and most of all, distractive, both to other students and to faculty. Anyone repeatedly late will be counted as being absent.

Preparation for Class

Competence is a foundation of the practice of law as a profession, and competence requires thorough preparation.¹ Accordingly, you are expected to read the materials assigned for each class and to prepare to address those materials in class. It is not too early to begin preparing the assigned readings on the syllabus. As noted above, the workload in law school is heavy and managing the time to handle that workload is a skill you should begin to develop.

The course syllabus for the first week is set forth on pages 3 through 6.

¹ For example, Rule 1.1 of the American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct provides: "A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation."

Syllabus for the First Week of Introduction to Law

Tuesday, August 13

Preparation

What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: chapters 1 through 4.

Introduction to Law Course Materials Supplement: Section I (through the Notes & Questions following *Teichmiller v. Rogers Memorial Hospital, et al.*).

Try your hand at creating “case briefs” for the opinions in *McCann* and *Teichmiller*.

Class 1

Course Introduction and Introduction to American Courts

Class will begin with a brief explanation of the Introduction to Law course. Most of the class, however, is devoted to reviewing American constitutional democracy and how a case typically proceeds through trial and appellate courts. The class also will address elements of judge-made law as it relates to the larger system of laws, including such concepts as “common law” and *stare decisis*. Although some of the material covered may be a review for some students, much of the material is likely to be new. This class provides an important foundation for understanding the origins of and contexts for the materials studied in law school.

Class 2

Introduction to Case Briefing and Analysis

Many law school subjects are taught through reading and discussing judicial opinions (“cases”). This class introduces students to the concept of case “briefing,” or extracting important information from cases to sharpen understanding of the material. This skill, which students will continue to hone throughout the first year of law school, is vital for class preparation, exam preparation, and for much of the legal analysis lawyers do.

Wednesday, August 14

Preparation

What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: chapter 5 (through page 106) and chapter 6.

Introduction to Law Course Materials Supplement: Section II (through *Big Town Nursing Home v. Newman*.)

Implement the skills you learned in Class 2 by creating case briefs for the opinions in Section II. You must have a hard copy of your brief for *Parvi* to hand in to your professor. You will receive comments on the brief the following week. Assume for this exercise you are operating under the Widener Honor Code that requires each student to work independently and without the assistance of others in certain circumstances.

Class 3

Effective Time Management and Use of Available Resources²

No one doubts that the novelty and complexities of the first year of law school require effective time management and an understanding of available resources. In this class successful students will lead a discussion of what worked for them and respond to questions you have about how to excel -- and not merely survive -- during the first year of law school.

Class 4

Case Analysis Revisited

This class has the following objectives: (a) to build upon the case analysis skills introduced in Class 2, and (b) to acquaint students with how a law school professor might conduct a typical class. Teaching methods, including the Socratic method, will be discussed. This class also will include discussion of Section II through the Notes & Questions following *Whittaker v. Sandford*. Please remember to have a hard copy of your case brief for *Parvi*.

Class 5

Success in the Classroom: Taking Notes in a Law School Class

Attending classes and being fully engaged in the classroom discussion are crucial steps in the learning process for law students; being fully engaged requires taking the most effective notes possible. This class will provide proven techniques for creating exceptional notes, as well as an overview of the essential types of material that should be included in your notes. This class also will include discussion of the remaining case in your packet, *Big Town Nursing Home v. Newman*.

² Please note due to issues of time management, this class will be Class 5 for students assigned to Section A.

Thursday, August 15

Preparation

What Every Law Student *Really* Needs to Know: chapter 6.

Introduction to Law Course Materials Supplement: Section III.

(A brief video-recording about outlining will be posted on line in early August 2013. Please watch the recording as part of your preparation for Class 6.)

Class 6

Pulling it all Together: Introduction to Outlining

Successful law students prepare for their final exams all semester. A critical step in the exam preparation process is the creation of course outlines. If done correctly, the process of outlining will help you understand and retain the large amounts of material on which you will be tested. This class will reinforce the outlining concepts covered in the video-recording by assessing each student's outline for the topic of false imprisonment.

Class 7

Exam Taking and Preparation

Most incoming students are unfamiliar with the essay examinations given by law professors. The essay examination tests a student's ability to not only know the rules studied in class, but also to apply the rules to new circumstances. The first half of the class will introduce students to the skills needed to succeed on essay exams. During the second half of the class, each student will complete a practice exam on false imprisonment. The exam will be returned with comments during a review session held in class in early September.

Glossary of Terms

Please familiarize yourself with the following terms before classes begin.

Appellant

Appellate court

Appellee

Cause of action

Civil liability

Common Law

Complaint

Constitution

Criminal liability

Defendant

Demurrer

Dictum

Dissent

Federalism

Issue

Holding

Jurisdiction

Motion

Plaintiff

Precedent

Prima Facie Case

Relief

Remedy

Respondent

Separation of Powers

Stare decisis

Statute

Torts

Trial court