Law 178-001 | Legal Fundamentals | Fall 2025 | 3 credits
Instructor: Laura Soprana-Dec, Director of Bar Support
Wednesdays, 1:00 – 3:55 p.m. EST | Final Exam: Dec. 2, 2025

Welcome to your Legal Fundamentals Class!

Overview

Legal Fundamentals is a specialized course designed to give an early opportunity to develop and practice essential bar exam skills and strategies by focusing on developing critical lawyering and exam-taking skills needed for success. Specifically, you will receive instruction in reading comprehension, issue identification, rule mastery, critical thinking (including spotting misleading answer choices), and legal analysis – all practiced in the context of bar exam–style problems. Throughout the semester, we will review substantive law topics and highly-tested doctrines, practice multiple-choice questions (MBE) and essay writing (MEE), and become familiar with the Multistate Performance Test (MPT) format. The goal is to enhance both your knowledge of frequently tested material and your ability to apply that knowledge strategically under exam conditions.

Instructor Contact Information
Laura Soprana-Dec, Director of Bar Support: lsoprana@gmu.edu
Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST (in person). Should I not be on campus for either Monday or Wednesday mornings, students will be notified in advance and office hours will be held virtually. To connect during these times, use the Zoom link on Canvas.

Class Meeting Times
Classes will meet on Wednesdays from 1:00 p.m. to 3:55 p.m. EST

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate mastery of bar exam skills including reading comprehension, rapid issue identification, rule recall, critical thinking, and legal analysis in the context of MBE, MEE, and MPT-style questions.
- Apply a systematic problem-solving method to multiple-choice, essay, and performance test questions under time constraints.
- Recognize and analyze highly tested doctrines and apply them strategically in bar exam–style problems.
- Develop and refine exam-taking strategies for multiple-choice and essay questions, including effective use of the IRAC method.
- Interpret and respond to Multistate Performance Test (MPT) tasks by reading, synthesizing, and applying facts and law to produce effective work product.
- Implement effective bar preparation habits including time management, memorization strategies, stress management, and study planning.
- Self-assess strengths and areas for improvement using performance feedback from quizzes, essays, midterm, final exam, and individual counseling sessions.
- Engage in professional conduct and communication consistent with law school and bar admission expectations, including preparedness, participation, and adherence to deadlines.

Course Delivery

This class combines weekly in-person sessions with online learning modules through BARBRI. Course content is organized into modules by subject. We will utilize BARBRI's online platform (Desire2Learn, or D2L) for assignments and course materials. Each week will generally operate as follows:

- **Pre-Class:** Complete the assigned BARBRI online modules (e.g. video lectures, readings, and practice questions) on the D2L platform. These modules deepen your understanding of the rules and concepts for that week's subject. (Prior to the first class, you will also complete an MBE diagnostic pre-test to gauge your baseline knowledge.)
- **In-Class:** Attend the Wednesday class sessions to work through practice questions and guided exercises. Class time will be devoted to applying a systematic problem-solving approach to bar exam questions – including MBE multiple-choice questions, essay hypotheticals, and occasionally MPT-style tasks – with instructor guidance and discussion.
- **Post-Class:** After each class, complete reinforcement exercises and additional practice assignments on the BARBRI D2L platform. These assignments solidify your grasp of the material and skills covered.

Course Site

This module-based approach of pre-class study, in-class practice, and post-class review is designed to provide iterative learning and feedback. All online assignments and course content will be accessible via the BARBRI D2L course site. You will receive an e-mail with log-in information to access the classroom prior to the first day of class. If you did not receive an e-mail, please contact your instructor. You can also reach out to support at support@lawstudentonline.com for technical questions. Important course announcements and additional materials, if any, will be posted on Canvas, so please check Canvas and your email regularly for updates or communication from the instructor.

Attendance Requirements

Regular attendance is mandatory in accordance with law school policy and Academic Regulations. If you are absent for any reason for more than 20% of the class sessions (which is 2 out of 13 meetings for this course), you are not eligible for credit. If you must miss a 3rd or 4th class (up to ~30% of sessions), you must seek approval by communicating with your instructor in writing and completing substitute work approved by the instructor to make up for those additional absences. Substituted work is solely at the instructor's discretion, an no instructor is compelled to permit it. More than 4 absences, at the above-described conditions, will violate the attendance requirements and will result in a grade of NC for the course.

Please plan to attend every session and arrive on time. If an emergency or illness will cause you to miss class, notify the instructor as soon as possible to discuss make-up assignments. Your attendance and active participation are critical to your success in this course and on the bar exam.

Evaluation

Grading Basis: This course is graded Credit (CR)/No Credit (NC). There is no curve or letter grade; you will receive a grade of "CR" (Credit) if you meet the course requirements, or "NC" (No Credit) if you do not. CR indicates work equivalent to a C or better on the A+* through F scale. The grade of NC indicates work that falls below the equivalent of a C on the A+* through F scale and does not qualify for credit

towards the Juris Doctor degree. Unlike traditional law school courses, and very much like the bar exam, assignments are not graded on a curve. Your success in the course is dependent on the effort you put in and not based how you measure with your peers. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments must be completed on an individual basis. It will be a breach of the school's Academic Standards if students collaborate or work on these assignments together.

To earn a grade of "CR" for Legal Fundamentals, **you must meet the Attendance Requirements described above and satisfactorily and timely complete all of the following requirements**. Percentages indicate how each element contributes to your overall course evaluation:

- **Lecture Completion (10%)** – Timely completion of any assigned BARBRI lectures.
- **Pre-Test, Quizzes, Essays and MPTs (20%)** – Completion of the required diagnostic pre-test on the BARBRI platform. Timely completion of any assigned BARBRI practice questions, essays, and performance tasks via D2L. You are expected to submit all work by the established deadlines and complete each week's assignments as outlined on BARBRI platform.
  - All assignments are tracked and reported to the instructor. You will receive an automatic email the Wednesday morning if you have missed any work for the given week. You will be given 24-hour grace period (until Thursday morning) to submit any missing assignments.
  - If any assigned work is not completed by Thursday morning (after the 24-hour grace period), you will have up to three (3) opportunities to submit it, each within its own 24-hour grace period.
  - If you submit work past the 48-hour cumulative grace period after these three (3) opportunities, you will not be considered to have completed the Assignment component of the class, and you will not earn a grade of "CR".
- **Midterm Exam (20%)** – A closed-book mid-semester assessment administered in class. It will include multiple-choice questions and essay questions.
- **Final Exam (40%)** – A comprehensive in-class assessment given during the final class meeting. This exam will include multiple-choice questions and essay questions. It is designed to assess your mastery of the skills and subjects covered throughout the course.
- **Individual Counseling Session (5%)** – Mandatory participation in a scheduled one-on-one advising session over the two-week period of October 20 through 31, to review your performance in the course, in the mid-term, and determine a plan for addressing any areas of growth. You must attend your session and complete any assigned self-assessment forms.
- **Attendance and Class Participation (5%)** – Regular attendance (see Attendance Requirements above) and meaningful in-class engagement are expected. Each class builds on concepts from earlier classes, so it is important to prepare for, and attend, each class, exhibiting the requisite level of preparedness if called upon. I reserve the right to mark a student absent if unprepared.

Final Determination: Students must (1) earn an overall weighted score of at least 70%, and (2) timely meet all mandatory requirements listed above (e.g., timely submissions, attendance compliance, completion of pre-test, midterm, final, and counseling sessions) in order to receive "Credit" for the course.

Note: I reserve the right to alter course content and/or adjust the pace to accommodate class progress. Students are responsible for keeping up with all adjustments to the course calendar.

<u>**Course Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)**</u>
All work submitted in this course, including assignments and exams, must be your own original work; use of AI writing tools, such as ChatGPT, are prohibited in this course and will be considered a violation of academic standards. Original work is required in this course to meet its learning objectives. Work produced

by Generative AI is not original work and will not aid in the learning process for this course. Law school instructors and administrators reserve the right to use AI detection software to find instance of AI in student submissions.

Professionalism and Expectations

You are entering the final stretch of law school, and this course should be approached with a high level of professionalism. Preparation, participation, and respect are expected at all times. This means completing all pre-class work, engaging actively in class discussions and exercises, and conducting yourself in a courteous, professional manner with your classmates and instructor. All students must abide by Academic Standards and Academic Regulations in doing coursework – all work you submit (quizzes, essays, etc.) must be your own.

Remember that this course is designed to help you pass the bar exam and transition into practice. It will only be effective if you commit to it and take the assignments seriously. Treat each task as an opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that you will need on the bar exam. By keeping up with the work, attending class, and putting forth your best effort, you will not only earn credit for this class, but also set yourself up for success on the bar exam and your legal career.

Course Book

You will receive a course book containing outlines, initial learning questions, and other materials.

Reading and Homework Assignments
You are expected to complete the reading and homework assignments prior to each class. This will include uploading completed assignments to the D2L course site. You may be given additional assignments during class. Your instructor reserves the right to change assignments with sufficient notice.

Additional Resources (free access)
- NCBE website: https://www.ncbex.org/study-aids - Free Study Aid Resources
- Ask Edna! With JDEdge – Module "Bar Success: Your Guide to the Bar Exam"
- Cali Lessons – Module "Bar Success and Planning"
- MAX by AccessLex: https://www.accesslex.org/max-by-accesslex – Financial Planning Module
- Lexis Study Aids
- West Academic Study Aids – "Bar Exam Success"
- Scalia Law Library Resources – "Bar Exam Support Guide"

Please see the assignment schedule below.

Assignment Schedule

Date	Topic	Homework assignments to be completed after class
Pre-Course		*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 8/19:* • Access D2L online classroom • Read course syllabus • Complete 30 questions MBE Pre-Test on D2L
Class 1 8/20	**Introduction** • Course Overview • Bar Admission and Uniform Bar Exam Overview • Introduction to Systematic Problem Solving	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 8/26:* • Complete Contracts Substantive Lecture: Overview and Formation • Complete Contracts Substantive Lecture: Defenses
Class 2 8/27	**Contracts (Part I): MBE** • In-class discussion of 6 initial learning questions	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 9/9:* • Complete Contracts Substantive Lecture: Remedies • Complete Contracts Skill Reinforcement: Formation
9/3	**No Class**	
Class 3 9/10	**Contracts (Part II): MBE and Essay Writing** • In-class discussion of 3 initial learning questions • Introduction to the MEE and Essay Writing • In-class discussion of Contracts Essay #1 with focus on issue spotting	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 9/16:* • Complete Contracts Skill Reinforcement: Damages • Complete Contracts Skill Reinforcement: Remedies • **Submit answer for Contracts Essay #2 to D2L**
Class 4 9/17	**Contracts (Part III): MBE** • Review of Contracts Essay #2 • In-class Retention Building Quiz • Review of Retention Building Quiz questions	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 9/23:* • Complete Evidence Substantive Lecture: Hearsay • Complete Evidence Substantive Lecture: Character

Class 5 9/24	**Evidence (Part I): MBE** • In-class discussion of 6 initial learning questions	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 9/30:* • Complete Evidence Skill Reinforcement: Hearsay • Complete Evidence Substantive Lecture: Impeachment
Class 6 10/1	**Evidence (Part II): MBE and Essay Writing** • In-class discussion of 3 initial learning questions • In-class discussion of Evidence Essay #1 with a focus on IRAC paradigm	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on10/7:* • Complete Evidence Skill Reinforcement: Character • Complete Evidence Skill Reinforcement: Impeachment • **Submit answer for Evidence Essay #2 to D2L**
Class 7 10/8	**Evidence (Part III):** • Review Evidence Essay #2 • In-Class Retention Building Quiz • Review of select Retention Building Quiz questions	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on10/14:* • Complete practice Midterm on D2L and review • Prepare for Midterm Exam
Class 8 10/15	**Midterm Exam (90 minutes)** • 33 multiple-choice questions (60 minutes) • One essay (30 minutes)	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on10/21:* • Read MPT Primer • Read NCBE MPT Grading Rubric • Outline a response to MPT #1 and submit to D2L
10/20 – 10/31	**Individual Counseling Sessions**	
Class 9 10/22	**Midterm Review & Introduction to the MPT** • Midterm Exam Review • Introduction to the MPT	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on10/28:* • **Submit answer for MPT #2 to D2L** • Complete Torts Substantive Lecture: General and Special Duties of Care • Complete Torts Substantive Lecture: Special Duty Rules & Breach
Class 10 10/29	**Torts (Part I): MBE** • Review of MPT #2	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 11/4:*

	• In-Class discussion of 6 initial learning questions	• Complete Torts Skill Reinforcement: General and Special Duties of Care • Complete Torts Substantive Lecture: Causation, Damages, and Defenses
Class 11 11/5	**Torts (Part II): MBE and Essay** • Review of 3 initial quiz questions • In-class discussion of Torts Essay #1 with a focus on building a strong analysis	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 11/11:* • Complete Torts Skill Reinforcement: Special Duty Rules & Breach • **Submit answer to Torts Essay #2 to D2L**
Class 12 11/12	**Torts Part (III): MBE** • In-Class Retention Building Quiz • Review of select quiz questions	*Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 11/18:* • Complete Torts Skill Reinforcement: Causation, Damages & Defenses
Class 13 11/19	• Bar Exam Success Strategies • Final Exam discussion	• Study for final exam
Final Exam 12/02	**Final Exam (2 hours)** • 50 multiple-choice questions (cumulative) • 1 essay	