



FALL 2026 COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: 212-001

Course Title: Family Law – Virginia Focus

Credit Hours: 3

Grading Mode: Letter Graded

Meeting Day(s)/Time(s): Wednesday 6:05 pm – 9:00 pm

Meeting Mode: In Person

Exam Day(s)/Time(s): DEC 2, 6:00PM

Final Exam Mode: In Person Final Exam

Prerequisite(s): N/A

Corequisite(s): N/A

Instructor(s): Jacob Alzamora

Contact Information: jalzamora@gmu.edu

Office Hours: Office hours available by request – please email at least 24 hours in advance

Please feel free to contact me via email at the address listed above. If you prefer to talk in person, please email me to arrange office hours. If anything is unclear at any point, please ask questions! During class, by email, before or after class, or in office hours – just ask!

Course Overview

This three-credit course provides an overview of Virginia family law with a focus on the practical application of Title 20 and related Virginia statutes in litigation and dispute resolution. Topics include divorce procedure, custody and visitation, child and spousal support, equitable distribution, protective orders, jurisdictional issues, marital agreements, and enforcement remedies. The professor of this course is a founding partner of a boutique family law firm in Fairfax with 18 years of family law practice.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course students should be able to:

- Understand family law as practiced in Virginia;
- Analyze and apply Virginia family law statutes and case law; and
- Understand the practical realities of how Virginia family law is applied in real world scenarios.

Reading(s) & Supplement(s)

There are no assigned books or materials for this course. With that said, students should have access to the Virginia Code (with annotations), Rules of Supreme Court of Virginia (with annotations), and Virginia Forms. The current edition of (2020 or newer) of *Family Law: Theory, Practice, and Forms* by Cecka, Diehl, and Cottrell is highly recommended. This book is available electronically through Westlaw. You are not required to purchase this book. The professor will assign additional cases and articles throughout the semester including but not limited to those indicated herein.

Assignments and Participation

The syllabus below will be posted on the law school's web site and on Canvas. I will call on several students randomly during each class.

Grading Policies

Participation: 20%

Final Exam: 80%

Classroom Policies

Attendance: Per AR 3-1.4, "maintenance of matriculation requires regular class preparation, participation and attendance, registration in the course of study required for the student's program (full-time or part-time), successive registration for each fall and spring term of each academic year until study is completed, and compliance with all other relevant requirements."

Absences: Per AR 4-1.1, "if a student is absent for any reason for more than 20 percent of the sessions of a course, the student is not eligible for credit in that course. A student who is not present for at least 75 percent of a session of the course is absent from that session."

Use of Technology & AI:

Moderate Use Policy: Generative AI tools may be used in this course for the following purposes, and with the following guidelines. Students may use AI in this course to study, review course material, and prepare for class discussion but may not use AI as the primary source for research, as the primary source for text of written assignments, during any quiz or exam, or during Socratic dialogue. Students must use AI tools responsibly, verify facts presented by AI, disclose when AI tools are used to create course work product, properly cite any AI tools utilized, and should be prepared to produce the transcript of prompts and responses upon request. Misuse will be treated as a violation of academic standards.

Use of Electronic Text Books During Exams:

Students are permitted one laptop computer for exam taking purposes. Additional laptop computers or any other electronic data storage devices are not allowed in an exam room, unless permitted by the course instructor's written exam instructions. Electronic text books (e-books) may be used during exams that are designated as open book by the instructor, and the instructor allows text books to be used during the exam and allows access to a student's computer files during the exam (open exam). E-books may not be used in exams where the instructor does not allow students to access their computer files during the exam (secure exam) even if the instructor permits access to text books. If the instructor has blocked access to the internet or computer files, you must bring a hard copy of the allowed text book(s) you wish to consult. Students will need to borrow or otherwise locate a hard copy of the e-book or print resources needed from the e-book to take into the exam room. The instructor determines the length of the examination and whether or not it is secure or open and what, if any, study materials are permitted during the exam. Students are responsible for adhering to the instructor's standards for all examinations, which are included in the examination materials.

Course Schedule & Assignments

Schedule is subject to change as we make our way through material. At the end of each class I will announce any necessary adjustments to the schedule for the following week.

Week 1

Date: 8.19.26

Topics:

- Course introduction
- Course expectations
- Basics of family law practice
- Description of Virginia court system (jurisdiction and appeals)
- Divorce procedure
- Grounds for divorce
- Jurisdiction
- Service
- Initial pleadings

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 16.1-226 to 16.1-228
- Va. Code 16.1-241 to 16.1-245
- Va. Code 16.1-296 to 16.1-297
- Va. Code 20-91
- Va. Code 20-94 to 20-97
- Va. Code 20-116 to 20-121.02
- Va. Code 20-99 to 20-99.2
- Va. Code 8.01-261(19)
- Va. Code 8.01-288
- Va. Code 8.01-296
- Va. Code 8.01-320
- Va. Code 8.01-322
- Va. Code 8.01-328.1A(8)-(9)
- Blackson, 40 VA App 507 (Va. Ct. App. 2003)
- Petachenko, 232 Va. 296 (1986)

Week 2

Date: 8.26.26

Topics:

- Custody introduction
- Definitions and overview of relevant statutes
- The “best interests” analysis

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-124.2 to 20-124.3
- Va. Code 20-103
- Va. Code 16.1-228
- Vissicchio, 27 Va. App. 240 (Va. Ct. App. 1998)
- Canedo, 2013 Va. App. LEXIS 61 (Va. Ct. App. 2013)

Week 3

Date: 9.2.26

Topics:

- Modification of custody
- Parental relocation
- UCCJEA

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-124.2
- Va. Code 20-124.5
- Keel, 225 Va. 606 (Va. 1983)
- Carpenter, 220 Va. 299 (Va. 1979)
- Sullivan v. Knick, 38 Va. App. 773 (Va. 2002) “Sullivan I”
- Sullivan v. Jones, 42 Va. App. 794 (Va. Ct. App. 2004) “Sullivan II”
- Chapter 7.1 of Title 20 of Code of Virginia
- Middleton, 227 Va. 82 (Va. 1984)

****NO CLASS 9.9.26 – OBSERVE MONDAY SCHEDULE****

Week 4

Date: 9.16.26

Topics:

- Divorce fault and custody
- Third party custody
- Child testimony
- Role of a Guardian *ad litem* for children
- Abuse and neglect overview

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-124.3
- Va. Code 20-124.1
- Va. Code 20-124.2(B)
- Va. Code 16.1-241(A)(7)
- Brown, 218 Va. 196 (Va. 1977)
- Brinkley, 1 Va. App. 222 (Va. Ct. App. 1985)
- Ford, 14 Va. App. 551 (Va. Ct. App. 1992)
- Bailes, 231 Va. 96 (Va. 1986)

- Shortridge, 224 Va. 589, 299 S.E.2d 500 (Va. 1983)
- Patrick, 228 Va. 691 (Va. 1985)
- Florio, 277 Va. 566 (Va. 2009)
- Brown, 30 Va. App. 670 (Va. 1999)
- Denise, 46 Va. App. 372 (Va. 2005)
- Williams, 256 Va. 19 (Va. 1998)
- Dotson, 29 Va. App. 635 (Ct. App. 1999)
- Moore v. Joe, Record No. 0098-22-1 (Ct. App. Jan. 24, 2023)
- Va. Code 20-124.2:1
- Va. Code 16.1-266
- Va. Sup. Ct. R. 8:6
- Va. Code 16.1-228 definition of “Abused or neglected child”
- Va. Code 16.1-251-253
- Va. Code 16.1-278.2
- Va. Code 16.1-283
- Va. Code 63.2-100
- Va. Code 63.2-1509
- Haase, 20 Va. App. 671 (Va. Ct. App. 1995)
- Rhodes, 2015 WL 6690098 (Va. Ct. App. 2015)
- Canedo, 2013 Va. App. LEXIS 61 (Va. Ct. App. 2013)

Week 5

Date: 9.23.26

Topics:

- Support overview
- Pleading spousal support
- Spousal support factors
- Amount and duration of spousal support

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-107.1
- Va. Code 20-109.1
- Va. Code 20-79
- Boyd, 2 Va. App. 16
- Ozfidan, 2017 Va. App. Lexis 5
- Floyd, 1 Va. App. 42
- Lightburn, 2009 Va.App.Lexis 459
- Smith, 2008 Va. App. Lexis 62
- Johnson, 2011 Va. Cir. Lexis 32
- Decamp, 64 Va. App. 137
- Wiley, 2017 Va. App. Lexis 33
- Lee, 2000 Va. App. Lexis 689
- Barnes, 16 Va. App. 98
- Jaffe, 1997 Va. App. 399
- Bacon, 3 Va. App. 484
- Millner, 2004 Va. App. Lexis 338

- Mundy, 66 Va. App. 177
- Giraldi, 64 Va. App. 676

Week 6

Date: 9.30.26

Topics:

- Modification of spousal support
- Termination of spousal support
- Enforcement

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-79.1 to 20.79.3
- Va. Code 20-80
- Va. Code 20-109
- Va. Code 20-99.1:1
- Va. Code 20-110
- Va. Code 20-113 to 20-114
- Miller, 2015 Va. App. Lexis 201
- Slye, 2014 Va. App. Lexis 26
- Allison, 1996 Va. App. Lexis 271
- Antonelli, 242 Va. 152
- Driscoll, 59 Va. App 22
- Zipf, 8 Va. App. 387
- Cid, 2012 Va. App. Lexis 213
- LaBrie, 2015 Va. App. Lexis 102
- Blair, 2015 Va. App. Lexis 151
- Childress, 88 Va. Cir. 403
- Smith, 2012 Va. App. Lexis 148

Week 7

Date: 10.7.26

Topics:

- Child support overview
- Child support guidelines
- Deviation from guidelines – child support factors
- Duration of child support
- Modification of child support
- Termination of child support
- Enforcement

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-79
- Va. Code 20-107.2
- Va. Code 20-108.1
- Va. Code 20-108.2

- Va. Code 20-108
- Va. Code 20-113
- Va. Code 20-114
- Va. Code 20-115
- Acree, 342 S.E.2d 68 (1986)
- Jones, 595 S.E.2d 501 (2004)
- Tidwell, 67 Va. App. 668 (2017)

Week 8

Date: 10.14.26

Topics:

- UIFSA
- Mid-semester review

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-88.32 to 20-88.82

Week 9

Date: 10.21.26

Topics:

- Equitable distribution introduction and overview
- *Pendente lite* orders
- Valuation of property
- Dissipation and waste
- Alternate valuation dates

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-107.3
- Va. Code 20-103
- Fox, 61 Va. App. 185 (Va. Ct. App. 2012)
- Wright, 61 Va. App. 432 (2013)

Week 10

Date: 10.28.26

Topics:

- Classification of property (separate, marital, hybrid)
- Transmutation of property
- Division of property
- Equitable distribution factors

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-107.3

Week 11

Date: 11.4.26

Topics:

- Business interests
- Real estate
- Retirement assets
- Stock options

Assignment(s):

- Howell, 31 Va. App. 332 (Va. Ct. App. 2000)
- Wright, 61 Va. App. 432 (Va. Ct. App. 2013)
- Hart, 27 Va. App. 46 (Va. Ct. App. 1998)
- Brandenburg, 617 S.W.2d 87 (Ky. 1981)
- Keeling, 47 Va. App. 484 (Va. Ct. App. 2006)
- Rinaldi, 53 Va. App. 61 (Va. Ct. App. 2008)
- Sawyer, 1 Va. App. 75 (Va. Ct. App. 1985)
- Dietz, 17 Va. App. 203 (Va. Ct. App. 1993)
- Ranney, 45 Va. App. 17 (Va. Ct. App. 2005)
- Schuman, 282 Va. 443 (Va. 2011)

Week 12

Date: 11.11.26

Topics:

- Fault and property division
- Unique personal property (engagement rings, pets, collectibles)
- Domestic violence and protective orders
- Mini-review of second half of semester

Assignment(s):

- Aster, 7 Va. App. 1 (Va. Ct. App. 1988)
- O'Loughlin, 20 Va. App. 522 (Va. Ct. App. 1995)
- Hicks, 80 Va. Cir. 412 (Va. Cir. Ct. 2010)
- Conahan-Baltzell, 2004 Va. App. LEXIS 412 (Va. Ct. App. 2004)
- Arbuckle, 22 Va. App. 362 (Va. Ct. App. 1996)
- Va. Code 16.1-228 definition of "Family abuse" and "Family or household member"
- Va. Code 16.1-253.1
- Va. Code 16.1-253.2

Week 13

Date: 11.18.26

Topics:

- Premarital agreements and Marital settlement agreements
- Alternative dispute resolution
- Final course review (come ready with questions!)

Assignment(s):

- Va. Code 20-147 to 20-155
- Va. Code 20-109.1
- Va. Code 20-124.4

Student Resources

[Antonin Scalia Law School Academic Regulations](#)

[GMU Common Course Policies Addendum](#)

[Mason Square Services](#)

[Mason Square Police](#)

Van Metre Hall, Room 110

Emergency - Dial 911

Escort Services - 703-993-8070

Dispatch – 703-993-2810

[Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#)

Mason Square Sexual Assault Services:

Van Metre Hall, Room 222D

703-993-8186

Notice of Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, Interpersonal Violence, and Stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If a student wishes to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. Students may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

[Mason Square Clinic](#)

Van Metre Hall, Room B102

703-993-2831

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

[Student Health Services](#)

[Student Disability Services](#)

[University Life](#)