



FALL 2026 COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: 891-001
Course Title: Civil Rights Law Seminar
Credit Hours: 2
Grading Mode: Letter grade
Meeting Time(s): MON 8:10-10:10PM
Meeting Mode: ON CAMPUS
Exam Time(s): N/A
Exam Mode: N/A
Prerequisite(s): N/A
Corequisite(s): N/A
Instructor(s): BRANDY WAGSTAFF

Contact Info

Email: bwagstaf@gmu.edu. Absent extenuating circumstances, I answer all emails within 24 hours. If you haven't heard back from me within 24 hours, please text me. My phone number will be provided on the first day of class. I do not hold regular office hours but am available by appointment. I am on campus four evenings a week and can meet in person before or after my classes. I also have the flexibility to meet via Zoom 7 days a week.

Reading(s) & Supplement(s)

There is no textbook for this class—but we are putting together a reading packet that will be available. However, all readings will also be made available on Canvas or can be accessed through Westlaw/Lexis.

Course Overview

This seminar course examines key legal and policy issues related to the enforcement of federal civil rights laws. The course will include a survey of statutory civil rights and their evolution in modern legal discourse.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

1. Have an understanding of the basic principles of civil rights laws, with a focus on the enforcement of federal civil rights statutory law and relevant constitutional rights.
2. Have an understanding of anti-discrimination law, including discrimination based on race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability.
3. Be able to analyze civil rights enforcement in areas of housing, employment, education, voting, public accommodations, institutions, and federally funded programs.
4. Be able to analyze a current conflict, debate, or civil rights issue, including the current legal status and major interpretations of the law.

Grading Policies

Your grade will be based on (1) a research paper (75% of final grade); and (2) class participation (25% of final grade). Attendance will be taken at every class. The reading assignments are designed to stimulate discussion. Question prompts will be posted each week to help facilitate class discussion. Supplemental reading materials may be placed on Canvas throughout the semester. See further details below on professor expectations for assignments and class participation.

Research Paper

Students will complete a research paper on a civil rights legal topic of their choice, and approved by me. The topic must relate to a topic or law that is covered in this class. The topic proposal is due by September 14, 2026, and an extensive outline is due by November 2, 2026.

The topic proposal due on September 14 is an overview of your topic of choice and a bare bones outline of no more than 2 pages. An example topic proposal will be posted on Canvas for you to reference. The outline due on November 2 is somewhere between an outline and a rough draft. It should include the entire structure of the paper with appropriate headings, and bullet points of issues to be discussed and resources to be cited under each heading. It should be between 5-10 pages. I will post an example of the preferred research paper structure on Canvas for you to reference.

The length of the final research paper must be a minimum of 20 pages, but most will likely end up between 25-30 pages. The paper should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and numbered at the bottom of the page. Please use Times New Roman Font #12 on both the body of the paper and your footnotes. Please also use proper citation, syntax, and spelling. Please properly attribute all directly quoted and paraphrased material in your paper. The research paper is due on the last day of exams.

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."

Participation & Preparation:

Class participation is mandatory and accounts for 25% of your final grade. Topic Selection and Outline count towards participation. There will be discussion questions provided each week. Please come prepared to discuss the reading material and posted discussion questions each week. Your ability to effectively answer discussion questions during class will factor into your class participation grade. Students will also have the opportunity to volunteer to lead discussion on assigned optional readings, which will also be factored into your class participation grade. The best seminar classes are the ones where there is lively discussion and debate. We encourage everyone to share their opinions and points of view but remind you to do so in a respectful and professional manner.

Use of Technology & AI:

Strict Use Policy: The use of generative artificial intelligence tools (GAI) is not permitted for any

coursework in this course. Unauthorized use will be treated as a violation of academic standards. Consistent with Academic Regulation 4-3, you may not use GAI to draft your research paper. If you have any questions about whether a particular use of generative AI is permissible under this policy, you should consult with your professor **before** using the tool.

Course Schedule & Assignments

For all assigned opinions, we will provide the page or section numbers for you to focus on to make the reading more manageable. For the assigned statutes, there is no need to read those in detail, just review the statutory structure and main provisions (or an online summary). For optional readings, you may volunteer to read and lead discussion on those readings. I will seek volunteers ahead of each class where we have optional readings assigned.

Class #	Date	Class Topic	Assignment(s)
1	8/17	Introduction to Civil Rights Enforcement	Find a recent court opinion, law review article, or news article regarding enforcement of a federal civil rights statute. Be prepared to briefly discuss it in class. If it is on a topic of interest, it could also be a starting point for picking a paper topic!
2	8/24	Employment Discrimination • Race Based • Sex Based	Required: • Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000e et seq. • McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792 (1973) • Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 490 U.S. 228 (1989) • Bostock v. Clayton Cnty., Georgia, 590 U.S. 644 (2020) • Ames v. Ohio Dep't of Youth Servs., 605 U.S. 303 (2025) Optional: • Mitchell N. Berman & Guha Krishnamurthi, <i>Bostock Was Bogus: Textualism, Pluralism, and Title VII</i>, 97 Notre Dame L. Rev. 67 (2021)

Class #	Date	Class Topic	Assignment(s)
3	8/31	Employment Discrimination - Sex-Based Harassment - Disability	Required: - Meritor Sav. Bank, FSB v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57 (1986) - Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Servs., Inc., 523 U.S. 75 (1998) - Burlington N. & Santa Fe Ry. Co. v. White, 548 U.S. 53 (2006) - Title I of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. 12111-12117 - Bd. of Trs. of Univ. of Alabama v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356 (2001) - Raytheon Co. v. Hernandez, 540 U.S. 44 (2003)
Monday, September 7—No Class (Labor Day) Class will be held on Wednesday, September 9 (Monday Schedule Observed)			
4	9/9	Education Discrimination - Race-Based Discrimination - Sex-Based Discrimination	Required: - Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) - Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Bd. of Educ., 402 U.S. 1 (1971) - Parents Involved in Cmty. Schs. v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1, 551 U.S. 701 (2007) - Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard Coll., 600 U.S. 181 (2023) - Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 et seq. - Cannon v. Univ. of Chicago, 441 U.S. 677 (1979) - U.S. v. Virginia, 518 U.S. 515 (1996) Optional: - Chenglin Liu, <i>The Evolution of Race-Based Admissions in American Higher Education</i>, Ohio N. Univ. L. Rev. 77 (2024)
Topic Proposal Due 9/14 by 11 PM			

Class #	Date	Class Topic	Assignment(s)
5	9/14	Education Discrimination - Sexual Harassment - Disability Discrimination	Required: - Franklin v. Gwinnett Cty. Pub. Schs., 503 U.S. 60 (1992) - Davis v. Monroe Cty. Bd. of Educ., 526 U.S. 629 (1999) - Southeastern Cmty. Coll. v. Davis, 442 U.S. 397 (1979) - Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-12134 - Individuals with Disabilities Educ. Act (IDEA), 10 U.S.C. §§ 1400 et seq. - Fry v. Napoleon Cmty. Schs., 580 U.S. 154 (2017) - A.J.T. v. Osseo Area Schs., Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 279, 605 U.S. 335 (2025) Optional: - Lauren Micek Vargas, Elizabeth McClelland, Elizabeth Eynon-Kokrda, <i>Title IX and Special Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools: Conflicting Rights, Challenging Opportunities</i>, 56 Creighton L. Rev. 369 (2023) - Emily Harvey, <i>Protecting Title IX's Promise: The Injustice of Indifference in Title IX Peer Sexual Harassment Cases</i>, 73 Emory L.J. 703 (2024)
6	9/21	Title VI Discrimination in Federally Assisted Programs & Activities	Required: - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d et seq. - Guardians Ass'n v. Civ. Serv. Comm'n, 463 U.S. 582 (1983) - Alexander v. Sandoval, 532 U.S. 275 (2001) (majority and dissent) - Benjamin Labow, <i>Federal Courts: Alexander v. Sandoval: Civil Rights Without Remedies</i>, 56 Okla. L. Rev. 205 (2003) Optional: S. Camden Citizens in Action v. New Jersey Dep't of Env't Prot., 274 F.3d 771 (3d Cir. 2001)

Class #	Date	Class Topic	Assignment(s)
7	9/28	Title II Discrimination in Public Accommodations	Required: - Title II of the Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000a et seq. - Heart of Atlanta Motel, Inc. v. U.S., 379 U.S. 241 (1964) - Katzenbach v. McClung, 379 U.S. 294 (1964) - Daniel v. Paul, 395 U.S. 298 (1969) - Radiance A. Walters, Denny v. Elizabeth Arden Salons, Inc.: <i>Condoning Race Discrimination in Resembling Places of Public Accommodation Under Title II</i>, 8 U. Md. L.J. Race, Religion, Gender & Class 407 (2008)
8	10/5	Disability Discrimination - American with Disabilities Act - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	Required: - Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-12134 - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794 - City of Cleburne, Tex. v. Cleburne Living Ctr., 473 U.S. 432 (1985) - U.S. v. Georgia, 546 U.S. 151 (2006) - Barden v. City of Sacramento, 292 F.3d 1073 (9th Cir. 2002) Optional: - Derek Warden, <i>Ex Tenebris Lux: Buck v. Bell and the Americans with Disabilities Act</i>, 51 U. Tol. L. Rev. 57 (2019)
10/8 – 10/12 Fall Break! No Class on Monday, October 12			
9	10/19	Disability Discrimination American with Disabilities Act	Required: - Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181-12189 - Bragdon v. Abbott, 524 U.S. 624 (1998) - PGA Tour, Inc. v. Martin, 532 U.S. 661 (2001) - Spector v. Norwegian Cruise Line Ltd., 545 U.S. 119 (2005) Optional:

Class #	Date	Class Topic	Assignment(s)
			• Elliza Guta, <i>Clicks, Bricks, and Politics: Website Accessibility Under Title II and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act</i>, 73 Mercer L. Rev. 693 (2022) • <i>Laufer v. Acheson Hotels, LLC</i>, 50 F.4th 259 (1st Cir. 2022)
10	10/26	Housing Discrimination • Fair Housing Act • Sexual Harassment	Required: • 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601 et seq. • <i>Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.</i>, 392 U.S. 409 (1968) • <i>Texas Dep't of Hous. & Cmty. Affs. v. Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.</i>, 576 U.S. 519 (2015) • <i>Bank of Am. v. City of Miami, Fla.</i>, 581 U.S. 189 (2017) • <i>Fox v. Gaines</i>, 4 F.4th 1293 (11th Cir. 2021) Optional: • John Leiner, <i>Environmental Justice as Housing Justice: Hud, Land Use, and the Case for the Fair Housing Act's Application to Discriminatory Siting Claims</i>, 42 Minn. J.L. & Ineq. 1 (2024)
Paper Outline due 11/2 by 11 PM			
11	11/2	Voting Rights • Voting Rights Act of 1965	Required: • 52 U.S.C. §§ 10301-10314, 10501-10508, and 10701-10702 • <i>Shelby County, Ala. v. Holder</i>, 570 U.S. 529 (2013) • <i>Brnovich v. Democratic Nat'l Comm.</i>, 594 U.S. 647 (2021) • <i>Allen v. Milligan</i>, 599 U.S. 1 (2023) • <i>Louisiana v. Callais</i>, 146 S. Ct. 1131 (2026) Optional: • Listen: Divided Argument - Majordoma Episode, available at https://www.ivoox.com/en/majordoma-audios-mp3_rf_173310718_1.html

Class #	Date	Class Topic	Assignment(s)
12	11/9	Discrimination in Institutions, Land Use & Religion • Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act • Religious Land Use & Institutionalized Persons Act • Olmstead	Required: • 42 U.S.C. §§ 1997 et seq. • 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000cc et seq. • Olmstead v. L.C. ex rel. Zimring, 527 U.S. 581 (1999) • Cutter v. Wilkinson, 544 U.S. 709 (2005) • Khatib v. Cnty. of Orange, 639 F.3d 898 (9th Cir. 2011) (majority and concurrence) Optional: • Roman P. Storzer, Blair Lazarus Storzer, Christian Parking, <i>Hindu Parking: Applying Established Civil Rights Principles to RLUIPA's Nondiscrimination Provision</i>, 16 Rich. J.L. & Pub. Int. 295 (2013) • Abby Porter, <i>RFRA at the Border: Immigration's Entry Fiction and Religious Free Exercise</i>, 108 Va. L. Rev. 223 (2022)
13	11/16	Presentations on Paper Topics Optional Individual Meetings	5-7 minute in-class presentation per student (visual materials optional) Schedule optional one-on-one meeting with Prof. Wagstaff to go over outline and feedback.
Final Paper due 12/14 by 11 PM			

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

Student Conduct

University Life

Additional Information

Preferred Names and Pronouns

All people have the right to be addressed by the name and personal pronouns that correspond to their identity. If you would like to be addressed by a different name or pronoun than what is in Patriot Web, please let the professor know. As part of our commitment to inclusion in this course, you are expected to respect your classmates and use their affirmed name and pronouns. Mistakes may happen. If you make a mistake or are corrected, please briefly apologize and correct yourself. To learn more about personal pronouns and why they are important please review the University’s Chosen Name and Pronouns Policy and visit [pronouns.org](https://www.gmu.edu/pronouns.org).