

Syllabus Law 178: Legal Fundamentals
Spring 2026 | 3 credits
Instructor: Melanie Knapp
Thursdays, 1:00-3:55 p.m. | Final Exam: TBD

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

Melanie Knapp: moberlin@gmu.edu

Office Hours: TBD; will announce first day of class

Bar Director Laura Soprana-Dec's Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST (in person or via Zoom) via appointment.

Class Meeting Times

Classes will meet on Thursdays from 1:00 p.m. to 3:55 p.m. Note that we will need to schedule a class 13 make-up time later in the semester.

Course Book

You will receive a course book containing outlines, initial learning questions, and other materials. Most of your work will be completed on the Course Site. Access to the Course Site will be provided at no charge.

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, and final exam.
- 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 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.

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 platform. You may be given additional assignments during class. Your instructor reserves the right to change assignments with sufficient notice.

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, and 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 on 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.

Percentages below indicate how each element contributes to your overall course evaluation:

- **Pre-Test and Lecture Completion (15%):**
 - Timely completion of the **Diagnostic Pre-Test** on the BARBRI D2L platform (administered by BARBRI prior to the first class).
 - Timely completion of any assigned **BARBRI lectures**, including watching the full lectures and completing embedded quizzes.
- **Quizzes, Essays and MPTs (20%):**
 - Completion of three (3) **In-Class Quizzes** on the BARBRI D2L platform. These quizzes are timed, open-book, and will be **scored** immediately upon submission.
 - If you are absent for any of the three (3) scheduled In-Class Quiz dates (see Assignment Schedule below), you are required to complete the missed Quiz by the same deadline as the weekly assignment for the following class. Late assignments will receive a score of 0.
 - *For example: If you miss the In-Class Contracts Retention Building Quiz on February 12 (Class 4), you must complete the Quiz by 11:59 p.m. on February 18, which is the weekly assignment deadline for Class 5. If you complete a Quiz outside of class due to an absence, the Quiz will still be open-book, and you are strongly encouraged to time yourself to 30 minutes for completion.*
 - Timely completion of any assigned BARBRI **Essays** and **Performance Tasks** via D2L. Two (2) Essays total will be **scored**. 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. If you miss any work for the week, you will receive an automatic email on the day following the deadline. You will then have a 24-hour grace period to submit the missing assignments.

- If the work is still not submitted within the 24-hour grace period, you will have up to three (3) additional opportunities, each with its own 24-hour grace period, to complete the assignment.
- In total, you will have up to three (3) opportunities to submit a late assignment. Late assignments submitted after these three (3) opportunities will receive a score of 0.
- **Midterm Exam (20%)** – A closed-book and timed mid-semester assessment administered by the Records Office. It will include multiple-choice questions and essay questions.
- **Final Exam (40%)** – A closed-book and timed final assessment administered by the Records Office. 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.
- **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.

Final Determination: To receive a grade of “CR” for this course, students must meet the Attendance Requirements described above, achieve an overall weighted score of at least 65%, and complete both the Midterm Exam and Final Exam. Academic Regulation 4-5 (Examinations) apply to both exams.

Any assignments not completed, or submitted past the deadlines indicated above, will receive a score of 0 and will count toward the overall weighted score, potentially jeopardizing your ability to reach the 65% weighted score threshold for “CR”.

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.

Course Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

All work submitted in this course, including assignments, essays, and exams, must be your own original work. Use of AI writing tools, such as ChatGPT, for submitted assignments is 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. Using AI tools to support learning through quizzing, creation of flashcards, additional practice, or other ways that do not substitute for original submitted work is permitted. Please ask your instructor if you are unsure about a particular use of AI.

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.

Additional Free Resources

- [NCBE website](#) - Free Study Aid Resources for extra practice questions:
 - [MEE Preparation | NCBE](#)
 - [MBE Sample Test Questions](#)
 - [MPT Preparation | NCBE](#)
- Ask Edna! With JDEdge – Module “Bar Success: Your Guide to the Bar Exam”
- Cali Lessons – Module “Bar Success and Planning”
- [MAX by AccessLex](#) – Financial Planning Module
- Lexis Study Aids
- West Academic Study Aids – “Bar Exam Success”
- Scalia Law Library Resources – “Bar Exam Support Guide”
- BARBRI free resources for extra practice questions:
 - [BARBRI 1L Exam Success | Quimbee](#)
 - [Unlock Free 2L and 3L Success](#)
 - [Free Bar Exam Digest | BARBRI Resources](#)

Please see the assignment schedule below.

Assignment Schedule

| Date | Topic | Homework assignments to be completed after class |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Pre-Course | | <p>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 1/14:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access D2L online classroom Read course syllabus Complete 30 questions MBE styled Diagnostic Pre-Test on D2L |
| Class 1 1/15 | Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Overview Bar Admission and Uniform Bar Exam Overview Introduction to Systematic Problem Solving | <p>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 1/28:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Contracts Substantive Lecture: Overview and Formation Complete Contracts Substantive Lecture: Defenses |
| 1/22 | No Class | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We need to stay on the same schedule as the Wednesday section. Since 1/21 is a constructive Monday, the Wednesday section does not meet this week so neither will we.</i> |
| Class 2 1/29 | Contracts (Part I): MBE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class discussion of 6 Contracts Initial Learning Questions <i>Studying for the Bar Bar Exam Practice NCBE Website + Video regarding bar preparation</i> | <p>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 2/4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Contracts Substantive Lecture: Remedies Complete Contracts Skill Reinforcement: Formation |
| Class 3 2/5 | Contracts (Part II): MBE and Essay Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class discussion of 3 Contracts Initial Learning Questions Introduction to the MEE and Essay Writing In-class discussion of Contracts Essay #1 with focus on issue spotting <i>Selecting a commercial Bar Prep Provider</i> | <p>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 2/11:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Contracts Skill Reinforcement: Damages Complete Contracts Skill Reinforcement: Remedies Submit answer for Contracts Essay #2 to D2L (this assignment will be scored) |
| Class 4 2/12 | Contracts (Part III): MBE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of Contracts Essay #2 <i>Hallmark 1 of a Strong Essay Answer</i> | <p>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 2/18:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Evidence Substantive Lecture: Hearsay Complete Evidence Substantive Lecture: |

| Date | Topic | Homework assignments to be completed after class |
|-----------------|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class Contracts Retention Building Quiz (<i>this assignment will be scored</i>) Review of Retention Building Quiz questions <i>Funding Your Bar Exam Experience – AskEdna!</i> | Character |
| Class 5 2/19 | Evidence (Part I): MBE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class discussion of 6 Evidence Initial Learning Questions <i>Hallmark 2 of a Strong Essay Answer</i> | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 2/25:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Evidence Skill Reinforcement: Hearsay Complete Evidence Substantive Lecture: Impeachment |
| Class 6 2/26 | Evidence (Part II): MBE and Essay Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class discussion of 3 Evidence Initial Learning Questions In-class discussion of Evidence Essay #1 with a focus on IRAC paradigm <i>Hallmark 3 of a Strong Essay Answer</i> <i>Sample Bar Prep Schedule + Demos</i> | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 3/4:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Evidence Skill Reinforcement: Character Complete Evidence Skill Reinforcement: Impeachment Submit answer for Evidence Essay #2 to D2L (<i>this assignment will be scored</i>) |
| Class 7 3/5 | Evidence (Part III): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Evidence Essay #2 In-Class Evidence Retention Building Quiz (<i>this assignment will be scored</i>) Review of select Retention Building Quiz questions <i>Hallmark 4 of a Strong Essay Answer</i> <i>Essay Grading Rubric</i> | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 3/18:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete practice Midterm on D2L and review Prepare for Midterm Exam |
| 3/12 | No Class- Spring Break | |

| Date | Topic | Homework assignments to be completed after class |
|------------------|--|--|
| Class 8 3/19 | Midterm Exam (90 minutes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33 multiple-choice questions (60 minutes); One essay (30 minutes) | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 3/25:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read MPT Primer Read NCBE MPT Grading Rubric Outline a response to MPT #1 and submit to D2L |
| Class 9 3/26 | Midterm Review & Introduction to the MPT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Midterm Exam Review Introduction to the MPT | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 4/1:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <p><i>*Students taking a bar exam that does not test MPTs (i.e., Virginia) will be required to submit an extra Essay.</i></p> |
| Class 10 4/2 | Torts (Part I): MBE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of MPT #2 MPT #2 Self-Assessment In-Class discussion of 6 Torts Initial Learning Questions <p><i>Special Guest: Prof. Sockett – Virginia Bar Exam Essay Writing mini-course</i></p> | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 4/8:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Torts Skill Reinforcement: General and Special Duties of Care Complete Torts Substantive Lecture: Causation, Damages, and Defenses |
| Class 11 4/9 | Torts (Part II): MBE and Essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of 3 Torts Initial Learning Questions In-class discussion of Torts Essay #1 with a focus on building a strong analysis | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on 4/15:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Torts Skill Reinforcement: Special Duty Rules & Breach Submit answer to Torts Essay #2 to D2L |
| Class 12 4/16 | Torts Part (III): MBE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Torts Essay #2 Torts Essay #2 Self-Assessment In-Class Torts Retention Building Quiz (this assignment will be scored) Review of select quiz questions <i>Bar Exam Study Strategies</i> | <i>Complete assignments below by 11:59 PM on TBE (evening before Class 13):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Torts Skill Reinforcement: Causation, Damages & Defenses |

| Date | Topic | Homework assignments to be completed after class |
|---|--|--|
| Class 13 TBD <i>Last day of classes is 4/22; we need to schedule one make-up class</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Class Essay and MCQs timed practice • Final Exam discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study for final exam |
| Final Exam TBD | Final Exam (2 hours) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 multiple-choice questions (cumulative); 1 essay | |