

CRIMINAL LAW

Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University

Spring 2026

Professor Erin Meyers Matsick

emeyers6@gmu.edu

Please read the syllabus carefully. Note that it is subject to change during the semester.

COURSE INFORMATION

Meeting Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:40–11:05 AM

Casebook: Dressler & Garvey, [Criminal Law: Cases and Materials](#) (9th ed.)

Note: There is a 10th edition now, but make sure you purchase the 9th edition. It is the same book I have used for the past two years, if you'd like to purchase a used copy from a 2L or 3L.

OFFICE HOURS

Location: 440C (inside the Law & Economics Center suite)

Open, In-Person Office Hours: Mondays, 12 – 1:30 PM

Virtual Office Hours: I'm always happy to meet virtually. Email me if you would like to schedule a meeting outside of office hours.

ASSESSMENTS

Grading: Your grade in the class will be determined solely by the final exam. I will discuss more details about the exam as the semester progresses. For now, note that it will be a mixture of multiple choice and essay questions.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Criminal law is unique in the sense that, as opposed to other areas of the law, it attaches moral values to actions and is primarily focused on punishment. We will be exploring criminal law from the perspective of how society defines crimes and determines guilt.

By the end of the course, students should understand:

- (1) The purposes of punishment
- (2) The role of common law, statutes, and the Model Penal Code in criminal law
- (3) The general elements of a crime (actus reus, mens rea, causation)
- (4) Available defenses (e.g., self-defense, insanity, etc.)
- (5) The contours of specific crimes (e.g., murder, theft, etc.)

CLASSROOM LOGISTICS AND RULES

Class Structure: I will use PowerPoint slides and will post them to the course website after each class. Classes will consist of a mix of lectures and class participation, including cold calling. Once per semester, each student may “phone-a-friend” if they don’t know an answer to a cold call (i.e., ask for volunteers to help).

Participation: To avoid any subjectivity in grading, I do not include a class participation component in your grade. However, I strongly encourage you to participate actively.

Attendance: Per [school policy](#), you will be ineligible to receive credit for the course if you miss more than 20% of class sessions. You must be present for at least 75% of a class session to be counted as present. To the extent possible, please email me in advance regarding any absences.

Timeliness: Please do your best to be on time for class. If you are consistently late, I reserve the right to not allow you to enter the classroom after class has started.

Computers: You are welcome to use your computer in class exclusively for note-taking purposes or to access course materials.

Respect: I expect everyone to contribute to a welcoming and respectful learning environment. Unsurprisingly, some topics in criminal law are extremely dark. Please keep in mind that your classmates may have personal experiences you are not aware of.

Class Flow: I encourage everyone to participate and ask questions. However, to stay on track, I will defer some comments and questions for after class or office hours.

ADDITIONAL SCHOOL POLICIES AND RESOURCES

- The course learning objectives will generally track with the general learning outcomes listed on the law school’s [curriculum page](#).
- I expect every student to adhere to the [Student Honor Code](#).
- Please be aware of the [Academic Regulations](#).
- University Life provides student support resources such as:
 - [Counseling and Psychological Services](#)
 - [Student Health Services](#)
 - [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#)

SCHEDULE

Note: We will not have class on 1/15. For a makeup, I will be posting a recorded lecture on additional bar exam crimes (arson, assault, battery, burglary, kidnapping, rape, robbery) midway through the semester.

Class	Date	Sub-Topic	Reading	MPC
	Jan 15	NO CLASS		
1	Jan. 20	Introduction	Syllabus 1-29	
2	Jan. 22	Theories of Punishment (i)	31-56	
3	Jan. 27	Theories of Punishment (ii)	73-92	
4	Jan. 29	Statutory Law	95-109 118-31	
5	Feb. 3	Actus Reus	131-159	§ 2.01
6	Feb. 5	Mens Rea (i)	161-82	§ 2.02
7	Feb. 10	Mens Rea (ii)	182-208	
8	Feb. 12	Mistake of Fact/Law	208-30	§ 2.04
9	Feb. 17	Causation	231-255	§ 2.03
10	Feb. 19	Homicide (i)	257-260 261-73 (skim) 281-304	§ 210.0-.3
11	Feb. 24	Homicide (ii)	305-21 324-41	§ 210.4
12	Feb. 26	Homicide (iii)	342-73	
13	Mar. 3	Intro to Defenses Self Defense	507-48	§ 3.04
14	Mar. 5	Defense of Self/Others	549-80	§ 3.05
Spring Break March 10, 12				
15	Mar. 17	Necessity Duress	589-95 613-30	§§ 2.09, 3.02
16	Mar. 19	Intoxication Insanity (i)	637-66	§§ 2.08, 4.01
17	Mar. 24	Insanity (ii)	667-90	
18	Mar. 26	Infancy Diminished Capacity	690-713	§ 4.10

19	Mar. 31	Attempt (i)	763-90	§ 5.01
20	Apr. 2	Attempt (ii)	791-825	
21	Apr. 7	Attempt (iii)	825-58	§§ 5.02-.05
22	Apr. 9	Complicity (i)	893-915	§ 2.06
23	Apr. 14	Complicity (ii)	915-943	
24	Apr. 16	Drug Crimes	Chapter from Stuntz & Hoffman, Defining Crimes (to be posted on Canvas)	
25	Apr. 21	Review		