



SPRING 2026 COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: 211-001

Course Title: Law of Armed Conflict & Military Operations

Credit Hours: 2

Grading Mode: Letter graded

Meeting Time(s): Mondays 6:05p-8:05p

Meeting Mode: On campus

Exam Time(s): TBD

Exam Mode: On campus final exam

Prerequisite(s): N/A

Corequisite(s): N/A

Instructor(s):

Todd McDowell

Contact Information and Office Hours:

tmcdowe@gmu.edu

Office hours by appointment only.

Reading(s) & Supplement(s):

The primary source for readings for this class will be the [Department of Defense Law of War \(LoW\) Manual](#), June 2015 (updated July 2023).

Course Overview:

The Law of Armed Conflict course provides students with an introduction and overview of the law of armed conflict (LOAC) and answers key questions like: Why do we have this body of law? How does it apply? When may a country use force against another country? Are there limits to the kinds and types of force used in armed conflict? Who can be targeted and when? Detained? What role does law and policy play? How does technology change our conceptions of accountability? The course will be delivered through a variety of methodologies that seek to maximize the learning experience, with an emphasis on scenario- based learning from different perspectives of those who

encounter LOAC, including the armed forces, non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, and civilians.

Course Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Identify and apply the five LOAC principles in armed conflict scenarios however characterized.
- Understand the classification of personnel in the context of LOAC.
- Understand how the means and methods of war are regulated by LOAC.
- Explain how LOAC is enforced.
- Apply LOAC concepts appropriately in scenario-based issue analysis.

Grading Policies:

Grades for the course will be based on a written final examination and your class participation consistent with GMU policy. Students are expected to come to class having done the assigned readings and to be prepared to discuss topical issues related to the course material.

The final exam will provide students with essay questions based on real world events or relevant matters. Students will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge of LOAC. The examination will be open book, open notes, and the essay responses will be structured as legal advice to a client seeking advice on the topic. Electronic text books are permissible during the final examination.

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:

Open Use: Students are encouraged to explore generative AI tools in this course, and are authorized to use AI for any purpose during this course except during the final

examination. 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

Class 1 – January 21 (Wednesday) - Introduction to the Law of War

Topics: Course Overview, DoD Law of War Manual, Historical context

Reading: DoD LoW Manual, Chapter I, Sections 1.1 - 1.5

Class 2 – January 26 – Legal Foundations and Principles

Topics: Treaties, Customary International Law, Jus ad Bellum

Reading: Chapter I, Sections 1.7 - 1.11

Class 3 – February 2 – Core Principles of the Law of War

Topics: Military Necessity, Humanity, Proportionality, Distinction, Honor

Reading: Chapter II, Sections 2.1 - 2.6

Class 4 – February 9 – Application of the Core Principles in Various Contexts

Topics: Situations and Parties, Relationship Between Jus in Bello and Jus ad Bellum

Reading: Chapter III, Sections 3.2 - 3.9

Class 5 – February 16 – Protection of Persons in War

Topics: Combatants, Non-Combatants, Rights and Duties

Reading: Chapter IV, Sections 4.2 - 4.8

Class 6 – February 23 – Conduct of Hostilities

Topics: Protection of Civilians, Attacks, Proportionality, Military Objectives

Readings: Chapter V, Sections 5.1 - 5.10

Class 7 – March 2 – Weapons and Warfare (Means and Methods)

Topics: Legality of Weapons, Prohibited and Lawful Weapons

Readings: Chapter VI, Sections 6.1 - 6.5

March 9 *No Class* Spring Break

Class 8 – March 16 – Protection of Wounded, Sick, and Shipwrecked

Topics: Respect and Treatment, Roles of Medical Personnel

Readings: Chapter VII, Sections 7.1 - 7.5

Class 9 – March 23 – Detention and Treatment of POWs

Topics: Humane Treatment, Security Measures, Interrogation

Readings: Chapter VIII & IX, Sections 8.2 - 9.3

Class 10 – March 30 – Civilians in Armed Conflict

Topics: Protected Person Status, Treatment, Internment

Readings: Chapter X, Sections 10.1 - 10.5

Class 11 – April 6 – Implementation and Enforcement

Topics: National and International Mechanisms, Individual Responsibility

Readings: Chapter XVIII, Sections 18.1 - 18.5,

Class 12 – April 13 - Military Occupation, Cessation of Hostilities and Neutrality

Topics: When Occupation Law Applies, Protection of Occupied Population, Law of Neutrality, Non-Hostile Relations Between Belligerents

Readings: Chapter XI, XII, & XV, Sections 11.1 - 11.5, 12.1 - 12.4, 15.1 - 15.4

Class 13 – April 20 – Contemporary Challenges & Course Review

Topics: New technologies and the evolution of armed conflict, course review

Reading: Will be provided

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

703-991-2831

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

[Student Health Services](#)

[Student Disability Services](#)

[Student Conduct](#)

[University Life](#)