



SPRING 2026 COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Number: Law 106 (004) 20224

Course Title: Criminal Law

Credit Hours: 3

Grading Mode: Exam

Meeting Time(s): Monday, 6:05-9 pm

Meeting Mode: In Person

Exam Time(s): TBD

Exam Mode: On campus final exam

Prerequisite(s): None

Corequisite(s): None

Instructor(s):

Stephen C. Shannon

Contact Information and Office Hours:

If you need to contact me, please email me at sshanno4@gmu.edu. I do not have set office hours but will arrange to meet by request.

Reading(s) & Supplement(s):

Required Reading: Joshua Dressler & Stephen Garvey, Cases and Materials on Criminal Law (9th ed. 2022). As a supplement, I recommend Joshua Dressler, Criminal Law, Black Letter Outlines (5th ed. 2023) or any prior edition.

Course Overview:

This course covers basic, substantive criminal law and sets the foundation for understanding American criminal law. It is organized into three parts. First, students learn fundamental principles of criminal law, including theories of punishment. Second, students learn how to analyze criminal statutes. Third, students learn about several crimes (such as murder and manslaughter) and defenses (such as self-defense and insanity). The course is taught using actual cases, criminal statutes, and the Model Penal Code.

Course Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will know the Black Letter Law of Criminal Law. They will be able to apply the Black Letter Law to actual cases. Finally, they will be able to articulate their legal analysis in writing.

Grading Policies:

Participation: Class participation, including attendance, may adjust your grade up or down one-half of a letter grade.

Midterm Exam/ Paper %: Not Applicable

Final Exam/ Paper: Grades in this class will be based on a final exam, subject to possible modifications for participation as described above.

Additional Content: Not Applicable

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:

Students are assigned to be on call for particular class day. Some students will be on call for the first half of the class, and other students will be on call for the second half of the class. This does not preclude students who are not on call from participating.

Use of Technology & AI:

There are no restrictions on the use of technology during class.

Open Use Policy: 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 any quiz or exam. 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

Week 1:

Date: 1/21/26

Topic: Part 1: The Basics: Who?, What?, Where?, When?, and How?

Assignment(s): pp. 1-10; 14-23

Date: 1/21/26

Topic: Part 2: Why does the criminal law impose punishments?

Assignment(s): pp. 31-44; 47-49; 52 N.3b; 53-63 N.4

Week 2:

Date: 1/26/26

Topic: Part 1: Must the punishment always fit the crime?

Assignment(s): pp. 75-92

Date: 1/26/26

Topic: Part 2: “No crime without law, no punishment without law.”

Assignment(s): pp. 95-107 N.1; 109; 118-124

Week 3:

Date: 2/2/26

Topic: Part 1: “The person did what?” (*actus reus*)

Assignment(s): pp. 133; 137-141 N.6; 146-149 N.2; 152-157 N.1; 157-159 [social harm]

Date: 2/2/26

Topic: Part 2: “What was that person thinking?” (*mens rea*)

Assignment(s): pp. 161-182

Week 4:

Date: 2/9/26

Topic: Part 1: Is “I didn’t know” a defense? (strict liability offenses; mistakes of fact; mistakes of law)

Assignment(s): pp. 190-193; 200-207; 208-211; 213-221 N.1; 225-229 N.3

Date: 2/9/26

Topic: Part 2: Did the conduct really cause the harm? (causation)

Assignment(s): pp. 232-246 N.7; 249-255

Week 5:

Date: 2/16/26

Topic: Part 1: 3 Paradigms of Murder: Common Law/First & Second Degree/Model Penal Code

Assignment(s): pp. 257-260; 263-265 [California penal code]; 274-279 N.1; 281-291

Date: 2/16/26

Topic: Part 2: Common Law Manslaughter versus Model Penal Code
Manslaughter and Negligent Homicide

Assignment(s): pp. 293-300 N.6; 311-317 N.2; 333-336 N.3

Week 6:

Date: 2/23/26

Topic: Part 1: The Felony Murder Rule

Assignment(s): pp. 342-345 N.1; 354-361; 363-366; 368-371; 373 [unlawful act manslaughter]

Date: 2/23/26

Topic: Part 2: The evolution of sexual crimes

Assignment(s): pp. 417-418; 439-443; 445-452 N.2; 490-495 N.1

Week 7:

Date: 3/2/26

Topic: Part 1: “I was defending myself!” (self-defense)

Assignment(s): pp. 507-510; 524-546

Date: 3/2/26

Topic: Part 2: "I was defending [another] [my stuff] [my castle]!" (Defense of others; property; habitation)

Assignment(s): pp. 576-585 N.2

Week 8:

Date: 3/16/26

Topic: Part 1: "I had no good options, so I picked the least bad one." (necessity) versus "They made me do it." (duress)

Assignment(s): pp. 589-594 N.1; 617-620 N.1; 625 N.12-629

Date: 3/16/26

Topic: Part 2: When can intoxication be a defense?

Assignment(s): pp. 637-645

Week 9:

Date: 3/23/26

Topic: Part 1: Not guilty by reason of insanity

Assignment(s): pp. 645-651; 653-676

Date: 3/23/26

Topic: Part 2: Writing exercise

Assignment(s): Professor Shannon will provide a handout.

Week 10:

Date: 3/30/26

Topic: Part 1: When are attempted crimes punishable?

Assignment(s): pp. 764 N.1; 766-767; 773-777; 781; 794-799 N.1

Date: 3/30/26

Topic: Part 2: Special defenses to attempted crimes: Impossibility and Abandonment; When is soliciting someone to commit a crime punishable?

Assignment(s): pp. 802-812 N.7; 825-828

Week 11:

Date: 4/6/26

Topic: Part 1: When is a conspirator criminally responsible?

Assignment(s): pp. 831; 834 N.4; 835-842 N.1; 845-849; 871-872 N.1

Date: 4/6/26

Topic: Part 2: When is an accomplice criminally responsible?

Assignment(s): pp. 893-895; 897-899 N.2; 901 N.1; 904-909; 911-916

Week 12:

Date: 4/13/26

Topic: Part 1: Special defenses for conspirators and aiders and abettors:

Members of the protected class and Abandonment

Assignment(s): pp. 938-943

Date: 4/13/26

Topic: Part 2: Common Law Larceny; Embezzlement; False Pretenses

Assignment(s): pp. 965-967; 971-973 N.3; 979-982; 995-998 N.1; 999-1000 N.1

Week 13:

Date: 4/20/26

Topic: Part 1: Review Session

Assignment(s): None

Date: 4/20/26

Topic: Part 2: Writing Exercise

Assignment(s): Professor Shannon will provide a handout.

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](#)