

Family Law
Fall 2022
6:05-9:00 p.m. on
Wednesdays Credit hours: 3

Instructor: Lisa Mathews

Office Hours: by appointment (all office hours are held via Zoom)

Email: lmathew2@gmu.edu (preferred contact method)

Course Description: This course covers the fundamentals of Family Law. It is focused primarily on practical application of family law.

Textbook & Course Materials

Required Texts

- Family Law, Cases, Comments, and Questions, Eighth Edition, Krause, Elrod and Oldham

Recommended Texts & Other Readings

A. Other readings may be posted to Blackboard throughout the semester.

Course Structure: This course will be delivered in person on Wednesday evenings from 6:05-9:00 p.m. Course content will primarily come from the text, though there may be additional reading to review throughout the semester. Throughout the course, you will be exposed to family law vocabulary and concepts. You will be tested on these concepts during the exam.

Important Note: This syllabus, along with course assignments and due dates, are subject to change. It is the student's responsibility to check Blackboard for corrections or updates to the syllabus. Any changes will be clearly noted in a course announcement or through email.

Course Objectives: By the end of this course, students should have a basic understanding of the practical concepts and vocabulary involved in a family law practice. Some concepts overlap with other areas of law, such as contract law, constitutional law, property law, and estate planning. Most of the content that you will learn in the course is practical and important for family law practitioners to know for their day-to-day practice. The course will help you prepare for the Bar Exam.

Attendance Policy: Students should attend each class and this class will follow the policies set forth here: [Academic Regulations Adopted April 7, 2022 \(gmu.edu\)](#)

Office Hours: All office hours will be virtual and held over Zoom. I will also be available after class each week. My office hours are by appointment only. In addition, please don't hesitate to email me with questions. When received Monday through Friday, I will attempt to respond to

emails within 24 hours. Emails sent over the weekend may have a longer response time. Students are also encouraged to post questions to the course's Blackboard site. I reserve the right to post to Blackboard any substantive student questions emailed to me (with the student's name redacted) that I feel would benefit the entire class.

Course Policies: Students should attend all classes. We will move quickly through the topics, and it will be very difficult to be adequately prepared for the exam if you miss even one class. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from another student.

Grades & Assessments:

Your grade will be determined based on a

- **Participation (10%)**
 - This class requires participation. Students will be called on during class and are expected to be active in class discussions.
- **Negotiation activity and reflection paper (20%):**
 - We will use one of the class periods to allow students the opportunity to negotiate a settlement with case details that will be given to you. Your active participation and reflection on the experience will account for 20% of your grade in this class.
- **Final exam (70%):**
 - **30% - Vocabulary and concepts**
 - This portion of the final exam will consist of multiple choice or true/false questions that test your understanding of family law concepts and vocabulary.
 - **40% - IRAC and essay questions**
 - This portion of the final exam will consist of hypothetical scenarios that ask you to analyze and predict an outcome based on facts which may or may not be relevant to your analysis. Each essay will test multiple concepts that were covered during the course. These are intended to mirror the writing and analysis expected on the Multistate Essay Examination (MEE).

Reading Assignments: Following are the reading assignments for each class:

SKIM = Briefly review. Any information you need to retain on these pages will be discussed during class.

READ = Read and be prepared to discuss these pages.

Reading schedule and topics

Class 1 – August 24, 2022:

Introduction to course

The new family law: Read 9-11.

The lawyer's role in family law: Read 595-629

Substantive Requirements for Marriage: Read 100-103, Skim 102-109, Read 110-143

Class 2 – August 31, 2022:

Lecture: Introduction to practical family law and the lifecycle of a case with some basic terms

Intake demo

Procedures relating to the entry into marriage: Read 143-152

Common law marriage: Read 154-161

Premarital agreements: Read 218-262

Class 3 – September 7, 2022:

Cultures of privacy: Skim 43-46

Culture of relational harmony: Read 47-71

Culture of decisional autonomy: Skim 71-88

Contraception and abortion: Read 323-325, Skim *Dobbs* summary – first 8 pages of the opinion
[Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization - SCOTUSblog](#)

Class 4 – September 14, 2022:

Separation agreements: Read 1093-1121

Grounds for divorce: Read: 680-700

Class 5 – September 21, 2022:

Jurisdiction: Read: 727-786

Class 6 – September 28, 2022:

Property Division and divorce: 885-929, Skim 929-954, Read 952 (starting with Debts)-966

Class 7 – October 5, 2022:

Nonmarital relationships: Skim 275-322

Alimony: Skim 967-971, Read 971 (starting with PA code) – 1007

Class 8 – October 12, 2022:

Custody/visitation: Best interests of the child: Read 800-821, 831-836, Skim 836-844

Parenting time, nonparent custody: Read 845-874

Class 9 – October 19, 2022

Modifying custody orders: Read 874-884

Child support: Read 1025-1042, Skim 1042-1055, Read 1055-1066, Skim 1067-1083

Class 10 – October 26, 2022

Modification and enforcement of support awards: 1157-1196, 1203-1206

Mediation: Read 631-646, Arbitration, Collaborative Law: Skim 630-658

Class 11 – November 2, 2022

Child, parent, and state: Read 495-555

Discuss assignments for next week

Class 12 – November 9, 2022

Roll Play negotiation – materials to be given out the week before.

Class 13 – November 17, 2022

Reflection paper due

Where is family law going? Read: [The Past, Present, and Future of Family Law - Family Lawyer Magazine](#)

Lecture – pulling it all together

Review for final exam

FINAL EXAM: December 7, 2022**University Policies and Resources**

- a. Academic Honesty: You are expected to be familiar with and abide by the University's Honor Code. The Code can be found [here](#). It is your responsibility to see me if you have questions about these policies. George Mason University has an honor code that states the following: *To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the*

desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this:

- b. Students must follow the university policy for [Responsible Use of Computing](#).
- c. Student services: The University provides range of services to help you succeed academically and you should make use of these if you think they could benefit you. I also invite you to speak to me (the earlier the better).
- d. Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- e. [The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. Counseling Center: Student Union I, Room 364, 703-993-2380.
- f. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the [George Mason University Office of Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Please note that accommodations MUST BE MADE BEFORE assignments or exams are due. I cannot adjust your grade after the fact.
- g. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- h. [The George Mason University Writing Center](#) staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. University Writing Center: Robinson Hall Room A114, 703-993-1200. The writing center includes assistance for students for whom English is a second language.
- i. Diversity: George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.