

Family Law
Spring 2024 – In-Person

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. This course follows the outline provided by MEE (Multistate Essay Exam) subject matter outline.

Textbook & Course Materials

Required Texts

- Family Law, Cases, Comments, and Questions, Eighth Edition, Krause, Elrod and Oldham. *Please note that the Ninth Edition has been published, but we are still using the Eight Edition.*

Recommended Texts & Other Readings

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

Course Structure: In our 13 weeks together, each class will move through most of the MEE subject matter outline topics. 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 and give you a foundation if you wish to practice in this area.

Office Hours: All office hours will be virtual and held over Zoom. 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. 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. These classes will not be recorded and will not be available to view at any other time. 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:

- 5% - Attendance and participation
- 20% - Custody Memo (More information on this provided in class)
- 25% - Graded Essays (2)
- 50% - Final Exam
 - 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. The final will be on Blackboard and will be timed.

Reading Assignments: Following are the reading assignments for each class, organized by the topics provided by the MEE subject matter outline.

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.

Problems throughout the text = You are not expected to read the problems that are often at the end of a section. The reading assignment may include pages with problems, but those can be skimmed or ignored as a part of your reading assignment.

Reading schedule and topics

January 17, 2024, Class 1:

Introduction to the course

Introduction to Family Law

Read 9-11 and 595-597.

Topic 1: Getting married.

Read pgs. 100-102, Skim 102-143, and read 143-152

January 24, Class 2: (No in-person class, you will watch videos of lecture)

Topic 2: Family disputes, child abuse and neglect

Watch this video: (Domestic violence survivor):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vdtgmnlhEI>

Read pages 46-64, 556-594

Watch the two video lectures. Lectures will be uploaded to Blackboard.

January 31, Class 3:

Review of last week (from video lectures)

How to write for this class (in-class presentation)

Overview of a divorce case (in-class presentation)

Topic 3: Separation and grounds for divorce

Read pgs. 680-700

February 7, Class 4:

Topic 4: Property and debt division

Read 885-929, skim 929-952, read 952-966

First memo due on Blackboard

February 14, Class 5:

Topic 5: Custody

Read 800-821, 831-874

Memo feedback – in class

February 21, Class 6:

Custody discussion – scenarios presented in class; memo assignments made.

February 28, Class 7:

Topic 6: Child Support

Read 1025-1042, 1055-1066, Skim 1066-1088

March 6, NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

March 13, Class 8

Topic 7: Spousal Support

Read: 967-1007

Topic 8: Modification of Support awards:

Read 1157-1170, 1194-1196, 1203 (Lack of Access) and 874-884.

Custody essay due on Blackboard

March 20, Class 9

Topic 9: Marital Agreements

Read: 218-236 (but not the Gross case), 1093-1099, and 1105-1106

Review examples of marital agreements.

March 27, Class 10

Topic 10: Jurisdiction

Read 731 (Starting with Sosna) – 751, 757 (starting with UCCJEA at the bottom) – 771

Essay 2 due in Blackboard

April 3, Class 11

Topic 11: Mediation, Arbitration and Collaborative Law

Skim 631-646, 656-658, and review: <https://www.collaborativepracticedc.com/frequently-asked-questions/>

Topic 12: The realities of practices family law

Read 598-628

April 10, Class 12

Review of MEE topics not covered in this class (and review of recent ones that are): [MEE past issue breakdown - for the MEE and UBE \(jdadvising.com\)](#)

Feedback on all essays

Time set aside for individual questions/feedback

Time set aside for pour over from prior weeks

April 17, Class 13 – Review session (This will be very thorough. Also, be prepared with questions.)

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.

Blackboard Login Instructions

Access to [MyMason](#) and GMU email are required to participate successfully in this course. Please make sure to update your computer and prepare yourself to begin using the online format BEFORE the first day of class. Check [the IT Support Center](#) website. Navigate to [the Student Support page](#) for help and information about Blackboard. In the menu bar to the left you will find all the tools you need to become familiar with for this course. Take time to learn each. Make sure you run a system check a few days before class. Become familiar with the attributes of Blackboard and online learning.

Technology Requirements

Hardware: You will need access to a Windows or Macintosh computer with at least 2 GB of RAM and access to a fast and reliable broadband internet connection (e.g., cable, DSL). A larger screen is recommended for better visibility of course material. You will need speakers or headphones to hear recorded content and a headset with a microphone is recommended for the best experience. For the amount of Hard Disk Space required taking a distance education course, consider and allow for:

1. the storage amount needed to install any additional software and
2. space to store work that you will do for the course.

If you consider the purchase of a new computer, please go to [Patriot Tech](#) to see recommendations.

Software: Many courses use Blackboard as the learning management system. You will need a browser and operating system that are listed compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available on the [myMason Portal](#). See [supported browsers and operating systems](#). Log in to [myMason](#) to access your registered courses. Some courses may use other learning management systems. Check the syllabus or contact the instructor for details. Online courses typically use [Acrobat Reader](#), [Flash](#), [Java](#), and [Windows Media Player](#), [QuickTime](#) and/or [Real Media Player](#). Your computer should be capable of running current versions of those applications. Also, make sure your computer is protected from viruses by downloading the latest version of Symantec Endpoint Protection/Anti-Virus software for free [here](#).

Students owning Macs or Linux should be aware that some courses may use software that only runs on Windows. You can set up a Mac computer with Boot Camp or virtualization software so Windows will also run on it. Watch [this video](#) about using Windows on a Mac. Computers running Linux can also be configured with virtualization software or configured to dual boot with Windows.

Note: If you are using an employer-provided computer or corporate office for class attendance, please verify with your systems administrators that you will be able to install the necessary applications and that system or corporate firewalls do not block access to any sites or media types.