

CRIMINAL LAW

Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University
Spring 2024
Professor Erin Meyers
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COURSE INFORMATION

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

Meeting Time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:50–3:15 PM

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

Note: You can get a **15% discount** on the textbook if you purchase it from [West Academic's Website](#) and use the code WAGMU. You will receive a free 14-day digital access code with the purchase.

OFFICE HOURS

Office: 450B, Hazel Hall (inside the Global Antitrust Institute suite)

Open, In-Person Office Hours: TBA (we will pick a time that works well on the first day of class). Feel free to email me questions for office hours in advance. I will also often linger after class to answer questions.

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. The exam will be on **May 6**. 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 (in my class and all your classes), as references play a large role in the job application process.

Attendance: Per [school policy](#), you will be ineligible to receive credit for the course if you miss more than 20% of class sessions (in our case, more than 5 classes). 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.

Breaks: We will take a 5-minute break during each class session.

Computers: You are welcome to use your computer in class for note-taking purposes or to access course materials, but not for anything else. During our break, you are free to check texts, email, news, sports scores, social media, etc.

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 do not know about.

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: Classes 1-4

Except for the notes I specifically assign, you may skip all the sections labeled “Notes and Questions” within the assigned readings. I will update the syllabus throughout the semester to reflect upcoming reading assignments.

Class	Date	Sub-Topic	Main Reading	Notes Reading	
				Pages	Note #s
1	Jan. 17	Introduction	Syllabus 1-23	3	2
				5	6
				11	2
				18-19	4-5
2	Jan. 22	Theories of Punishment (i)	31-56	36	1
				41	1
3	Jan. 24	Theories of Punishment (ii)	56-76 83-92	63-64	5
4	Jan. 29	Statutory Law	95-109 118-31	107-08	3-4