

PUBP 3610

Pre-Law Seminar: Syllabus

3.0 credit hours, Fall 2026

Mondays 5:00pm – 7:45 pm in Clough UG Learning Commons, Room 423

Professor McNeil: wmcneil6@gatech.edu

Office Hours: see Navigate360

General Information

Description

This course will cover two general areas of practicing law: (1) a focus on specialized fields; and (2) oral advocacy. The first section of the course will include examination of the legal profession in the areas of criminal law, torts, constitutional law, military justice, intellectual property, contracts and property/estate planning. The next section will be a general overview of oral advocacy components and litigation skills. Both of these sections emphasize skills and values that are essential to success in law school, competent lawyering and the practice of law in a variety of fields.

Pre- &/or Co-Requisites

While there are no required pre- or co-requisites for this course, a basic understanding of the structure of the American judicial system, such as that you likely gained in a high school or college introductory American government class, will be helpful to your understanding of the material covered.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Have a basic understanding of foundational concepts of some of the broad areas of law such as torts, contracts, criminal law, litigation, etc.
- Articulate your personal and professional motivations for considering a career in law and position those within the values and norms of the legal profession.
- Develop skills in trial advocacy, including persuasive writing and oral argument.

Course Requirements & Grading

This course is split into two segments. You will have the opportunity to earn up to **300** points over the course of the semester, spread across both segments.

The first segment runs through March 9th and is focused on Professionalism and Foundations of the Legal Profession. It is taught by Professor McNeil with guest lecturers for each topic and the assignments are worth **200** points total (*see below for more details*).

The second segment begins on March 16th and runs through April 20th and is focused on trial advocacy. It is taught by Professor McNeil, and the assignments are worth **100** points total.

Grading Scale

Your total points earned will be divided by **300** to determine a percentage grade, and your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| A | 90 – 100% |
| B | 80 – 89% |
| C | 70 - 79% |
| D | 60 – 69% |
| F | Below 60% |

Extra Credit Opportunities

Extra credit may or may not be provided during the course of the semester at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Grade Reconsideration/Change Policy

Assignment and final grades will be changed only in the event of an error in grading or calculations. Grades will not be changed for any other reason (i.e. you worked really hard, you feel like you deserve a higher grade, etc.) If you believe there is an error in your grade/a mistake in the calculation, you must submit your request for reconsideration by email to Prof. McNeil, explaining in detail the nature of the error.

Attendance

Given the small size of this class, once a week class meeting schedule, and the interactive nature of this class given the subject matter, **attendance is taken each class period and class participation is a significant portion of your grade.** Any requests for an absence to be excused must be made via e-mail to Prof. McNeil either before or immediately after class. Excused absences are at the professor's sole discretion, and documentation may be required. Excused absences will only be granted in narrow circumstances that include, but are not limited to, Institute sanctioned absences, illness, jury duty, requirement for military service, religious observances, and death of a family member. It is the student's responsibility to request that an absence be excused either before or immediately after the absence from class. **If you have an excused absence, it will not affect your participation grade.**

Please do not come to class at all if you are sick, whether it is COVID or something else. Please let me know via e-mail ASAP if you will miss or have missed class due to illness.

All absences not excused by the professor are unexcused absences, and your absence may affect your participation grade. Note that job interviews, career fair attendance, conflicts with other on-campus commitments (tour guide, students orgs, etc.), trips, etc. are generally unexcused absences.

Georgia Tech's official attendance policy can be found at <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>. In addition to the GT rules, it states "All students are responsible for obtaining an understanding of each instructor's policy regarding absences." Information about how to notify instructors when you need to miss class and what kind of documentation you should provide is at: <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/student-absence-regulations/>.

Course Materials

Course Texts

American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell, Lloyd Bonfield, West Academic Publishing, 2nd Ed. 2021.

Other materials may be assigned and available as files on Canvas.

Course Website

There will be a course website on Canvas. Canvas will be used for announcements, grades, and for posting of other documents relevant to the course.

Course Expectations & Guidelines

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment or exam will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Course Communications

I will communicate with you only using Canvas or your Georgia Tech e-mail address, and you should communicate with me using my Georgia Tech e-mail address (above) or via Canvas. All enrolled students have an e-mail account provided by Georgia Tech. This account is a student's official point of contact with the Institute, and you are expected to check it each school day. <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/3/>

I routinely send important class communications using Canvas announcements.
Please make sure you have your Canvas settings adjusted so that announcements are delivered to your e-mail inbox when they are sent and not in a digest format.

Collaboration & Group Work

Part of the fun of studying law and ethics is talking with your classmates about cases and the issues they raise outside of class. It's practically the favorite past-time of law students and law professors, too, and I encourage you to do so. Just make sure that when it's time to complete your work for the course, that your work is entirely your own, and that you are not sharing resources or work with your classmates or anyone else. If you wish to study for exams in groups, please feel free to do so, though of course your work during the in-class exam must be entirely your own.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at 404.894.2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

Georgia Tech's Center for Teaching and Learning has noted that, "Research on learning shows that unexpected noises and movement automatically divert and capture people's attention, which means that one student's use of a mobile device (laptops, cell phones, tablets, etc.) can distract another student, thus disrupting their ability to learn. In addition, students using mobile devices often become engaged in matters that are not related to the class they are attending. Further, research indicates that students taking notes on laptops tend to process less as they take notes, and the depth of their learning suffers."

For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand on paper. Understanding that you may prefer to use a tablet or laptop to take notes, they, too, are permitted. However, please put your phones away and on silent during class. If I notice you using a device for anything other than class, I will ask you to put it away.

Food and Drink

Eating or drinking without disruption in class is fine. Please follow a class “No Smelly or Noisy Foods” rule to avoid distracting your classmates and instructor.

Additional Resources for Students

I want to see you succeed not just in this course, but at Georgia Tech and during this time of your life in general. If you need assistance in the course, or in other areas, please don't hesitate to reach out for help. Resources to keep in mind if you're facing challenges while at Tech include the Dean of Students (<https://studentlife.gatech.edu>), the Counseling Center (<https://counseling.gatech.edu>), the GT Police (<https://police.gatech.edu>), Stamps Health Services (<https://health.gatech.edu>), and the LGBTQIA Resource Center (<https://lgbtqia.gatech.edu>).

If you are having issues with housing, food insecurity, clothing, or other financial issues, please be aware of possible assistance available to you through the STAR Program (Students' Temporary Assistance and Resources). More details on the STAR Program are available at: <https://studentlife.gatech.edu/content/star-services>

University System of Georgia Statement

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social or geographic relationships develop, persist or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Inclusion

The Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts supports the Georgia Institute of Technology's commitment to creating a campus free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or veteran status. We further affirm the importance of cultivating an intellectual climate that allows us to better understand the similarities and differences of those who constitute the Georgia Tech community, as well as the necessity of working against inequalities that may also manifest here as they do in the broader society.

No Legal Advice/No Attorney-Client Relationship

While your professor and visiting lecturers are attorneys, nothing expressed during this class, office hours, or any other interaction you may have with the professors in or out of class constitutes legal advice of any kind, and no attorney-client relationship exists between the professor and any student.

[syllabus continues]

Foundations of the Legal Profession: Segment Schedule and Assignments

Below is a list of class dates on which we will meet, along with important dates/due dates throughout the semester. The topics listed below are tentative and subject to change as the semester progresses. I will let you know if/when we modify what we will cover.

Assignments

Class Participation – 75 points

At the conclusion of this course, you will be assigned up to 75 points based on your class participation. This is not an arbitrary grade but is based on your willingness to contribute to class. Participation includes not only presence in class, but also asking questions, making comments, and generally showing a willingness to engage in class. I don't expect you to ask a question or make a comment in every class meeting, but to show that you are generally engaged in the class. I believe the majority of your learning in this course will happen because you engage with both the readings and me, guest speakers, and your colleagues in class. This grade recognizes that important goal of the course and your role as a student.

Professional Development Reflections – 25 points each x 3 = 75 points

During this segment of the course, you will complete three different professional development reflections, one at the beginning, one at the middle, and one at the end of the segment. These reflections will help you reflect on your motivations for considering a career as a lawyer, what makes a “good” lawyer, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. Details on each of these assignments will be provided at the appropriate times during the semester, however their due dates/times will be **September 14th, October 5th, and October 26th at 11:59:59 PM ET as a Canvas submission**. Taken together, these assignments should not only help you clarify your desires to pursue a career in law, but might also provide you with fodder for possible future personal statements for your law school applications.

Law Exam – 50 points

On **October 26th**, you will have an in-class exam covering the material you've read and been presented by our guest speakers up to that point. The exam will be given as a Canvas quiz, so please be sure to bring a device with you to class that day that you are comfortable using to take an exam.

Oral Advocacy – 100 points

Starting on **November 2nd** the class will shift gears to focus on oral advocacy and litigation skills. This will include general discussions on litigation components and structure of a trial as well as interactive components where you will see – either via recordings of the GT Mock Trial team’s performance or in-person of the same – these elements in action. You will submit four written assignments (totaling **80** points) for each of these components and will be doing only one oral presentation* (**20** points) during one of the sessions designated below.

*Although only one oral presentation is required and will be scored, you are more than welcome to do more presentations!

Readings

Readings will be assigned via a Canvas announcement to the class the week before the next class meeting. Please be sure your Canvas settings will not “digest” your e-mails but will deliver your Canvas messages/announcements to you immediately when they’re sent.

Schedule

24 August

Review of Syllabus

Introductions / Class Expectations and Structure

“What Does it Mean to be a Lawyer?” Exercise and Discussion

Reading for next class: pages 212 - 223 of Chapter 8 in the American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell course book

31 August

Intellectual Property – (1) Guest Speakers: *Laura Huffman, Senior Attorney, King & Spalding, LLP, and Lecturer, Georgia Institute of Technology, and (2) MK Kennedy, Associate, King & Spalding, LLP*

Reading for next class: Chapters 11 and 12 in the American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell book

7 September – NO CLASS – Labor Day

14 September

Criminal Law – Guest Speaker: *Siri Patel, Fulton County Prosecutor*

Reading for next class: Chapters 1 and 2 in the American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell book

21 September

Military Justice - Guest Speaker: *Irene Liscano, Attorney at Law and Assistant Staff Judge Advocate, United States Air Force*

Readings for next class: Chapter 3, 4 & 6 in the American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell course book

28 September

(1) Contracts – Guest Speaker: *Romy Smith, Chief Counsel, Georgia Tech Research Institute* **(2) Constitutional Law** – Guest Speaker: *Martha Correa-Jamison, Assistant Public Defender, Atlanta Judicial Circuit*

Reading for next class: Chapter 8 (save for pages 212 – 223) in the American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell course book

5 October – NO CLASS – Fall Break

12 October

Property and Estate Planning – Guest Speaker: *Lori Van Duyne, Founder and Principal Attorney, Peachtree Estate Planning, LLC*

Reading for next class: Chapter 7 in the American Law and the American Legal System in a Nutshell book

19 October

Torts – Guest Speaker: *Melanie Eyre, Eyre Law, PC*

26 October

In class law exam

2 November

Litigation Session 1

- Description of the assignments and presentations for these sessions, all handled by Professor McNeil
- General overview of the litigation process and components
- Review case - State of Midlands v. DJ Davis, 2024 American Mock Trial Association (“AMTA”) National Championship case
- Opening Statement 101

Assignment: Outline for Opening Statement - due March 30 by 2PM

9 November

Litigation Session 2

- Presentations of Opening Statements
- Direct Examination 101

Assignment: Outline for Direct Examination - due April 6 by 2PM

16 November

Litigation Session 3

- Presentations of Direct Examinations
- Cross Examination 101

Assignment: Outline for Cross Examination - due April 13 by 2PM

23 November

Litigation Session 4

- Presentations of Cross Examinations
- Closing Statement 101

Assignment: Outline for Closing Statement - due April 20 by 2PM

30 November

Litigation Session 5

- Presentations of Closing Statements

Verdict!

7 December – no class!