

PLSC 260 ~ Introduction to American Law  
Andrews University  
Fall 2008

Course Syllabus

<b>Credit Hours</b>	3
<b>Class Location &amp; Time</b>	NH214; T, Th 2:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.
<b>Instructor</b>	Brent G. T. Geraty, J.D.
<b>Contact Information</b>	Office phone ~ 269.471.6504 Home phone ~ 269.422.1817 E-mail ~ bgeraty@andrews.edu
<b>Office Location &amp; Hours</b>	Rm. 321, Administration Building T, Th 8:30 a.m.-10:20 a.m. (or by appointment)

These are the hours I normally will be in the office and available to students. Occasionally, other responsibilities will call me away during these hours and I apologize, in advance, if this happens. It might be worth your time to call or send an e-mail message to see if I am available. I value the interactions I have with students and I encourage you to seek me out when I can be of help. As long as your requests are reasonable, I pledge to find time for you.

**Course Description** As stated in the University bulletin, the description of this course is as follows: “A study of the roles that law and the legal system play in American life. Topics include: the Constitution, civil rights, property, employment, consumer protections, criminal punishment and judicial activism/restraint.”

**Course Objectives** Students in the class should be able to demonstrate in class discussions, quizzes, research assignments, essays and examinations:

- ~ Understanding of the framework and functions of various parts of the American legal system
- ~ Familiarity with basic legal terminology
- ~ Ability to understand and analyze judicial decisions/opinions
- ~ Familiarity with legal research sources
- ~ Ability to think critically and probe ideas
- ~ Ability to communicate clearly
- ~ Knowledge of basic rules of substantive law
- ~ Understanding of the manner in which law interacts with daily American life

**Your Goals for this Course** Below are three places for you to list your goals in the course. After you have listed your goals below, *please send me an e-mail message containing your goals.*

1)

2)

3)

**Teaching Methods** This course will include a mixture of lectures, Socratic dialogues, discussions, student presentations, readings and, perhaps, multi-media and field trips.

**Attendance** “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” -Woody Allen  
I expect all students to attend class regularly and on time. As a practical matter for those who want to earn a good grade in the course, the quizzes will encourage attendance. All students are expected to attend during the full class period and any late entry, early exit or temporary absences are to be done with the least amount of distraction possible. It will be assumed that students have read the assigned readings before the class sessions for which an assignment has been made.

**Class Atmosphere** Regardless of the particular class format, questions are strongly encouraged. Ask questions of me and of your classmates. I will encourage the atmosphere to be informal/relaxed, yet professional. Many discussions require participants to be vulnerable to a certain extent. All questions, comments and ideas are to be treated respectfully. Criticism of ideas – mine and yours – is essential; personal criticism, however, is unnecessary and counterproductive. If you are asking a question, be sure to address the idea and not the owner of the idea; if you are the recipient of a question, assume the questioner’s good faith.

**Class Philosophy** A successful course is one in which the faculty member and students undertake their efforts with intellectual curiosity in the secure context of academic freedom. Intellectual curiosity drives us to understand as much about ourselves, the subject and the world as we can. Academic freedom means we may question virtually any idea and that we may say virtually anything so long as we say it in the quest for knowledge. Again, let’s assume each other’s good faith.

## **This Syllabus**

All students in the course are expected to read and be familiar with this syllabus. The syllabus has been prepared to assist you in understanding what is expected of you and to permit you to plan your time in conjunction with demands from other courses.

Although care has been taken in preparing this syllabus, there may be times when the syllabus (e.g., policies and due dates) will need to be changed as necessary and appropriate. Any changes will be announced in class as far in advance as practicable.

## **Required Text**

American Law: An Introduction (2d edition), by Lawrence Meir Friedman. W. W. Norton & Co. (1998). ISBN: 0393972739.

## **Grading**

The following categories will be considered in determining your grade for the course (the percentage is of the final grade):

- ~ Quizzes (8%)
- ~ Essays (36%)
- ~ Essay presentation and defense (8%)
- ~ Examinations (33%)
- ~ Class participation & Exercises (15%)

The grading scale will be as follows:

- |                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| ~ A (93.5-100%)   | ~ C+ (76-79.4%)  |
| ~ A- (90-93.4%)   | ~ C (72.5-75.9%) |
| ~ B+ (86.5-89.9%) | ~ C- (69-72.4%)  |
| ~ B (83-86.4%)    | ~ D (60-68.9%)   |
| ~ B- (79.5-82.9%) | ~ F (0-59.9%)    |

## **Quizzes**

A quiz will be given at the beginning of many class periods. The subject matter of the quizzes will be material discussed in the class period immediately prior to the quiz *and* material from any assigned reading. Students who arrive to class after a quiz has been picked up will not be permitted to take the quiz (and students who arrive just before the quizzes are to be picked up will not receive extra time to take the quiz). No make-up quizzes will be given, except under extraordinary circumstances. A student who fails to take a quiz for any reason will, not surprisingly, earn a 0 score for that quiz. The lowest quiz score for each student will be dropped at the end of the term.

## **Essays**

The completion of three essays will be required during the term. Essay assignments generally will be handed out two weeks prior to the corresponding deadline. If a student misses the class period in which the essay assignment is handed out, it is her/his responsibility to find out what the assignment is and to turn it in on

time. *Late essays will be penalized at the rate of 10% of the grade for each 24-hour period late, unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor.*

The essays are primarily opinion pieces. You should not feel limited (up or down) to this range, but I expect that most essays will be completed in approximately five, double-spaced pages. Although the essays are not research papers, you will want to do some outside reading to inform your opinion and your essay should include evidence and reasoning which supports your opinion. A list of sources consulted must be attached to your essays.

*Note for History majors:* You should keep the graded copies of your essays. You will need them for the portfolio you will be putting together for your Senior Seminar course.

### **Essay Presentation and Defense**

Each student will be have the opportunity (and responsibility) to make a presentation on, and provide an oral defense of, one of her/his written essays. After the presentation, the oral defense will consist of responding to questioning from classmates and from the professor.

### **Examinations**

There will be two examinations in this course. The first is likely to be administered in October and will count 13% of your final grade. The second will be administered on during exam week and will count 20% of your final grade. We have been asked not to alter the final examination schedule and thus the answer to the question: "Can I take the exam early?" is, unfortunately, "No" (unless, as a group, you lobby the dean). Both examinations will cover the material learned in the course to that point (i.e., the final examination will include material from the complete term, not just the material following the first examination). The examinations will utilize a combination of questions and question-types. You should expect, for example, multiple choice, matching, identification, true/false, short answer, and essay questions.

If a student misses an examination because of (a) a medical reason with a written excuse from a physician or nurse or (b) a death of a close friend or family member, the examination may be made up for full credit. *If an examination is missed for any other reason, the examination may be made up with a penalty of a 10% deduction from the examination score.*

## **Class Participation**

I will assign a grade in class participation. For this portion of your grade, I will emphasize quality over quantity. That is, you should not feel obligated to speak in every class for fear that your grade will suffer. Indeed, speaking without clarity and focus can impair your class participation score, rather than aid it. I consider attentive listening (an underrated virtue) to be a component of quality participation. If you are present but dozing, I do not consider that to be quality class participation. If you deride or ridicule a classmate's comment or question, that will negatively affect your class participation score, as such behavior negatively affects the class and individual's willingness to participate. Honest, even vigorous, disagreement with a classmate is encouraged, as long as it is done respectfully.

I will also, from time to time, ask you to engage in various exercises. These exercises will be combined with your class participation score to determine this portion of your grade.

## **Extra Credit**

Extra credit is not available in this course, *except that* I may be willing to substitute participation in a presidential debate for one of the course requirements. Keep up and take the assigned work seriously.

## **Academic Dishonesty**

Because grades are important for many reasons, there are temptations to cheat. Resist those temptations. Becoming a person of integrity is not something to which you should aspire once your career is under way; start being who you want to be now. Students who cheat on quizzes, essays, papers or examinations will receive a 0 on the compromised task and, most likely, an "F" for the course.

## **Course Schedule, Assignments and Topics (subject to change)**

August 26		Introduction
August 28		Review syllabus; What is law? What is a legal system?
September 2	Friedman pp. 9-74	Background of American Law
September 4	Friedman pp. 335-339	The U.S. Constitution
September 9		Constitution con'd & Library field trip
September 11	Friedman pp. 108-127	Statutes & ordinances

September 16	Friedman pp. 146-162	Statutes; federalism; <i>Essay #1 assignment given</i>
September 18	Friedman pp. 75-107	Courts & judicial decisions/opinions
September 23	assigned judicial opinion(s)	Common law con'd
September 25	Friedman pp. 128-145	Agencies, policies & regulations;
September 30	assigned regulation(s)	Executing policy con'd; <b>Essay #1 due</b>
October 2		Essay defenses & discussion
October 7	Friedman pp. 231-251	Legal culture & behavior
October 9	Friedman pp. 252-266	Legal culture & behavior con'd
October 14 (Fall recess ~ No class)		
October 16		<b>Mid-term examination; Essay #2 assignment given</b>
October 21	Friedman pp. 267-291	Lawyers
October 23	Friedman pp. 163-179	Introduction to substantive law
October 28	Friedman pp. 207-230	Constitutional law & civil liberties
October 30	assigned judicial opinion(s)	Constitutional law & civil liberties con'd; <b>Essay #2 due</b>
November 4		Essay defenses & discussion
November 6		Constitutional law & civil liberties con'd
November 11	Friedman pp. 180-206	Criminal law; <i>Essay #3 assignment given</i>

November 13		Privacy & Employment law;
November 18		Contracts
November 20		Torts & Property
November 25		Wills & trusts; Corporate law; Family law; <b>Essay #3 due</b>
December 2		Essay defenses & discussion
December 4	Friedman pp. 292-332	Law & social change; law's future
December 11 (Thursday), 1:30 p.m.- 3:30 p.m.		<b>Final examination</b>

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