

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF LAW

FAMILY LAW
Spring 2025

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Room 102
M & W 11:00-12:15pm

SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Family law is an interesting and ever-changing area of law governing the interrelationship between the state and the family. In this course, we will explore the impact of the law on the formation and dissolution of intimate partner relationships and parent-child relationships. Our focus will be on the practice of family law and the considerations practitioners must make in representing clients; however, we will also pay considerable attention to family law public policy. This semester, we will cover the process for marrying and we will examine alternative forms of legally recognized intimate partner relationships. We will also cover dissolution of these relationships, paying special attention to the topics of child custody, jurisdiction, child support, property division and property settlement agreements. In addition to these topics, we will discuss adoption and the use of assisted reproductive technologies.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

As a student in this class, you should expect to achieve the following learning outcomes throughout the semester:

- Students will be able to critically examine the Constitutionality of regulations regarding marriage; students will make critical and effective arguments regarding the meaning of these regulations and their constitutional validity, and confidently predict the outcome of a challenge to these regulations.
- Students will be able to identify relevant facts necessary to gather from a client seeking to establish or modify child custody or to establish parentage, including those related to jurisdiction. Students will be able to identify legal issues related to paternity and child custody disputes from a relevant fact pattern, make critical and effective arguments through application of statutory and case law, and determine the likely resolution of those issues in each fact pattern. Students will be able to critically evaluate sample parenting plan language and confidently predict the enforceability of the provided plans.
- Students will be able to identify relevant facts necessary to gather from a client seeking a

divorce or an annulment, including those necessary to resolve jurisdictional considerations. Students will be able to identify legal issues related to divorce, including property division and economic support, from a relevant fact pattern, make critical and effective arguments through application of statutory and case law, and determine the proper resolution of these matters in the case.

- Students will be able to identify the legal issues raised by a fact pattern involving cohabitation agreements and premarital agreements, make critical arguments regarding the enforceability of such agreements and confidently predict whether a particular agreement will be enforced.
- Students will be able to identify proper techniques for interviewing child clients and will be able to articulate the various representational models used in representing child clients. Students will be able to evaluate interviewing techniques they observe in demonstrated child client interviews. Students will demonstrate proper techniques for interviewing child clients, including cultural competency and awareness of child development.
- Students will be able to identify and critique various interviewing and rapport building techniques used in representing adult clients in family law matters. Students will develop strategies for representing diverse populations and demonstrate cultural competency.
- Students will be able to identify potential ethical dilemmas common in family law practice and articulate strategies for avoiding or resolving these dilemmas.

REQUIRED TEXTS, UNIFORM CODES and ILLINOIS FAMILY CODE:

WORK OF THE FAMILY LAW by Oliphant & Ver Steegh (Wolters Kluwer 2020, 5th edition)
(herein **casebook**).

I selected this casebook because it provides an opportunity to focus on the practice of family law. You should always read and be prepared to share your thoughts on the “Reflective Questions,” “Discussion Questions” and “Chapter Problems” in the casebook. You do not need to look up the referenced cases with these problems and you should not limit your thinking to the court’s analysis of the problem. Sometimes you will be asked to write out and submit your answers to these questions. I will specifically indicate when a written submission is required. While we will be using several of the “Preparation for Practice” exercises as a focus for class, you do not need to prepare these for class unless specifically instructed to do so.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: FAMILY LAW by Mark Strasser (Carolina Press 2018, 3rd edition)
(herein **Q&A**)

This book will provide you with helpful multiple choice questions. This will let you “test” your understanding and help you prepare for our exam. We will cover some of these questions in class.

I have also assigned various sections of the Illinois Code for you to read and prepare for class.

Family law in Illinois has undergone some significant revision in recent years; we will focus on the current law in class. Finally, while we will examine Illinois law, we will explore trends in family law across the country. For the exam, you should be familiar with any Uniform Code we cover in addition to Illinois law; you should also be prepared to read and interpret statutes (drawing on information discussed in class) provided on the exam.

Finally, there will be additional reading materials and videos posted on D2L (discussed below).

CLASS PREPARATION:

Reading Assignments:

The tentative reading assignment is posted to D2L. Students are required to carefully read assignments prior to attending class and work through the “Reflective Questions,” “Discussion Questions” and “Chapter Problems” in the casebook. Occasionally, I will assign supplemental reading material or study questions created by me that are intended to guide you through the assigned readings and get you thinking about the issues prior to class. The supplemental materials will be available at all times on the D2L website so that you can print them out at your leisure. Check for supplemental material under the heading “Content” on D2L.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:

Attendance Policy

Active class participation is essential to success in this course. As such, attendance is mandatory and you may miss no more than five (5) classes during the semester. An absence may be excused through a separate make-up assignment only in extraordinary situations, which will be addressed at my sole discretion on a case-by-case basis. I would advise that you not use up all of your absences early in the semester. Those exceeding the maximum number of absences will be subject to the ramifications described in the Law School’s attendance policy. *See* School of Law Rules III.5 (f)-(g).

An attendance sheet will be distributed at the beginning of each class. To be marked present for class, you must (1) complete the entire assignment for that day by the start of class; (2) participate in the class discussion and in any in-class quizzes or polls **and** (3) **correctly answer the “attendance” question (based on our reading assignment) given via D2L at the start of class.** If you miss the attendance question, but you were otherwise prepared for class, you may upload your casebriefs for the day to D2L immediately after the result is released to be marked present. **If you miss more than five minutes of class for any reason (other than an approved accommodation), you will be counted as absent.** Repeated tardiness will also result in being marked absent.

Class Participation, Group Work and Class Polling Tool

You are also required to **actively participate** in class. When called on, be prepared to share your thoughts with the class. You are not expected to know every answer, but you are expected to demonstrate that you have given some consideration to the assigned materials.

For many of our classes, we will work in student groups. I will let you select your student group members. These groups will provide you with an opportunity to collaborate with your peers and to think through the course material. While you are welcome to work with your fellow group members outside of class, you are not required to do so. Additionally, your group members will **not** play a role in assessing your performance in this course. During class, you should contribute to the group discussion and be prepared to share your thoughts with the class.

Finally, as part of class, we will be using an online polling program called Socrative. **You must log on individually, using your name, every day.**

OFFICE HOURS:

You can arrange a time for a phone conference or virtual meeting at any time. Just email me to arrange a meeting.

COURSE WORK LOAD:

You might be interested to know that the ABA standards incorporate out of class work in the calculation of credit hours. Under the ABA standards, **you should expect to spend 150 minutes per week in class (2.5 hours), plus (a minimum of) six hours of study a week, for a total of 8.5 hours per week.**

PROFESOR AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

As a law student, I expect that you will treat your time spent in class and preparing for class as a professional. You can expect the same from me. While the following list is not exhaustive, these guidelines will assist in the creation of a comfortable and productive learning environment throughout the semester.

You can expect me:

- To start and end class on time.
- To reply to e-mails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends.
- To be available during my posted office hours (and to provide alternative office hours should any require rescheduling).
- To assign out of class work that adequately covers the material and meets the learning objectives of the course while adhering to the time expectations for a 3 credit course.

- To give an exam that accurately reflects the material covered in class and assigned in our readings.

I can expect you:

- To come to every class and to be on time.
- To be attentive and engaged in class.
- To refrain from using laptops, cell phones and other electronic devices during class **for anything other than class work.**
- To spend an adequate amount of time on the reading assignments each week, making an effort to understand the legal principles covered, generating answers to the questions stated in the syllabus and working through the problems in the book.
- To seek help when appropriate.

GRADING:

Your grade in this course will be calculated as follows:

- **10% Attendance Questions**
 - You will get credit for correctly answering the attendance question. If you are not able to answer the question correctly, you may upload your class preparation notes/casebriefs to D2L immediately after the answer is revealed.
- **10% MEE Questions**
 - More information about these assignment will be distributed in class.
- **80% Comprehensive Final Exam**
 - The final exam will take place on the date designated by the Law School. More information about the exam will be distributed in class.

BAN ON COLLABORATION ON WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

You are not allowed to obtain help from any other person (including any other student or professor) or from generative alternative intelligence (including, but not limited to, ChatGPT) on **any** written assignment in this course. This ban on collaboration **includes obtaining written materials online from any source** (including publically posted materials that are not specifically authorized in the assignment itself) and communicating with anyone other than Professor Upchurch or generative alternative intelligence about the assignment. **If you violate the ban on collaboration policy, you can be found in violation of the Honor Code, which can lead to serious penalties, including expulsion. An Honor Code investigation must also be reported to the Bar Examiners, even if you are cleared of any violation. When in doubt about how to proceed, please do not hesitate to contact me for clarification.**

PLAGIARISM:

Plagiarizing another's work, in whole or in part, is a violation of the Honor Code and can lead to serious penalties, including expulsion. An Honor Code investigation must also be reported to the

Bar Examiners, even if you are cleared of any violation. The Honor Code defines plagiarism as:

passing off another's ideas, words, or work as one's own, including written, oral, multimedia, or other work, either word for word or in substance, unless the student author credits the original author and identifies the original author's work with quotation marks, footnotes, or other appropriate designation in such a way as to make clear the true author of the work.

NOTICE OF RECORDING POLICIES:

For the benefit of students who are unable to attend a particular class due to an unavoidable circumstance, and for students who wish to review a particular class to better facilitate learning objectives, class sessions will be recorded via Echo360 by Professor Upchurch and made available by request. Because of the possibility of a technical malfunction, Professor Upchurch cannot guarantee the successful recording of every class.

ATTACHMENTS:

This Syllabus incorporates by reference the Law School Syllabus Attachment and the Provost Syllabus Attachment on the course D2L page.