

Syllabus: CRIM-423, Fall 2023

George Mason University

Course Name: Constitutional Law, Civil Rights/Liberties

CRN: 77238

Section Number: CRIM 423-001

Meeting times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12pm - 1:15pm

Where: ENT 276

Instructor Name: Steven Basha

E-mail Address: sbasha2@gmu.edu

This syllabus is a guide. The instructor reserves the right to make changes, as needed, in his sole discretion.

Course Materials:

Required textbook- *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice* (11th Edition). ISBN for paperback: 9781544391250; ISBN for ebook: 9781544391274.

Required readings- In addition to required readings from the textbook, I will assign readings from my lecture PowerPoint presentations, and occasionally from readings available on the internet (for example, news/magazine/web articles, scholarly papers, etc.).

Course Description:

Studies First Amendment freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and religion; the right to privacy; and Fourteenth Amendment right to due process and equal protection.

Course Objectives (Learning Outcomes):

On completing this course, the student should be able to:

Describe the U.S. legal system, including the Constitution of the United States, and the basic structure and role of federal and state courts.

Understand the Supreme Court of the United States, including its composition, jurisdiction, and role under the Constitution.

Comprehend fundamental institutional powers and constraints of the federal judiciary.

Explain the civil liberties, civil rights, and privacy rights protected by the First Amendment; the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment; and related federal legislation.

Understand how the Supreme Court has approached and dealt with cases involving the above stated liberties and rights.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Grading for the course will be based on the following 3 components that total a maximum 400 points:

1. 3 examinations (on Blackboard Assessments) each worth 100 points (300 points total);
2. 3 Group Discussion Sessions, each worth 13.3 points (40 points total); and
3. In-Class Active Learning Assignments (60 points total)

Grading Scale:

100%-90% (400-360 points)	A
89%-80% (359-320 points)	B
79%-70% (319-280 points)	C
69%-60% (279-240 points)	D
Below 60% (< 240 points)	F

*I do not give + or - grades.

Description of Course Requirements:

1. Examinations (75% of final grade; maximum of 300 points):

There will be 3 examinations, each worth a potential 100 points (this component counts as 75% of final grade for the course). There will be a maximum of 50 questions per exam and the exams will cover material presented during lectures and from assigned readings. All exams will be given on Blackboard Assessments, and there will be no class on exam days.

Absent an exceptional reason, such as medical emergencies and other true emergencies, there will be no make-up exams. Failure to take an exam when scheduled will result in the grade of "0" for the missed exam.

2. Group Discussion Sessions (10% of final grade; maximum 40 points):

There will be 3 class breakout sessions for group discussions on hypothetical cases involving constitutional issues we will study as part of this course. Students who attend and participate in all Group Discussion Sessions will receive the maximum 40 points toward their final course grade (thus, this component counts as 10% of final grade for the course). Failure to attend and participate in a Group Discussion Session will result in the loss of a *pro rata* amount of points for each session missed.

3. In-Class Active Learning (15% of final grade; maximum 60 points):

In almost every class I will give students active learning assignments. These assignments will be short, in-class activities. For example, in a particular class I may pose a question requiring brief written responses from students. Students will prepare a brief written response to the question, and will turn in their responses during the same class.

Students who attend classes and complete in-class active learning assignments will receive the maximum 60 points toward their final course grade (this component counts as 15% of final grade for the course). Failure to attend and complete in-class active learning assignments will result in the loss of a *pro rata* amount of points for missed responses to assignments.

Extra Credit for Class Participation: Up to 2 extra credit points toward the course final cumulative point total may be earned by students who ACTIVELY AND CONSISTENTLY participate in class discussions. *Note – these extra credit points are added to the final cumulative point total for the course. Further, the award of these extra credit points will be in the instructor's sole discretion.*

Other than Extra Credit for Class Participation (see above) there are NO extra credit opportunities so it is vital that you satisfy the stated requirements.

Blackboard:

Assignments, announcements, and other important information concerning this course will be posted on Blackboard. Thus, it is your responsibility to check Blackboard on a frequent and regular basis to stay abreast of important class information.

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance - The subjects we will cover in this course are complex. Though the textbook and required readings will provide a basic framework on many of these subjects, class lectures will deliver the critical points and explanations that are vital to understand the course. Further, the examinations will cover material presented in the lectures that may not be covered in the textbook or assigned readings.

Regular attendance will be critical for success in understanding course material, participating in Group Discussion Sessions, participating in active learning assignments, and for achieving good grades. ***Moreover, in the case of a borderline grade I may take into account, in my sole discretion, the attendance history of the concerned student.***

NOTE: failure to attend a class that results in a student missing a Group Discussion Session or an Active Learning Assignment will result in the student losing *pro rata* points for those missed components unless the student provides me with prior notice of a *legitimate* reason for missing the relevant class. ***Generally, such legitimate reasons for which I will excuse absences are those due to illness or emergencies.***

NOTE: Students who fail to regularly attend class will also be ineligible for Class Participation Extra Credit.

Participation - Lectures will be interactive, largely through student-instructor discussions. Toward that end, student questions will be encouraged, and I will often ask questions to generate discussion with the aim of elucidating and emphasizing critical points. Accordingly, it is important to read required assignments before class, and to be prepared to ask and answer questions.

Participation in Discussion Board Conversations: from time to time, I will use the Blackboard Discussion Board tool to pose questions on subjects we are studying. These

conversations will provide another avenue for us to explain and explore major topics in our course. Students are expected to participate in these Discussion Board conversations.

NOTE: Students who fail to regularly participate in Discussion Board conversations will be ineligible for Class Participation Extra Credit.

Policies and Procedures:

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this course. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes (deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website at registrar.gmu.edu).

Classroom civility - Students are expected to respect each other and the instructor.

Copyright - I use PowerPoint presentations as part of this course. These PowerPoint presentations are solely for the personal use of students for and during this course. Any audio or visual recording of lectures, reuse or remix of course materials (including uploading to a website) or further dissemination of course content is not permitted without *prior* written consent from me and George Mason University, unless the recording is part of an approved accommodation plan.

Academic Integrity - Students are responsible for their own work, and both students and faculty are responsible for dealing with academic integrity violations.
See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/distance>.

Honor Code - Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code. See <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/>.

Inclement Weather and Other Closing Information - Information regarding weather related changes in the University's schedule (e.g., closing or late opening) will be provided on the GMU website and via MasonAlert. Changes to schedule or deliverable due dates, if any, will be communicated via email and on Blackboard.

Academic Accommodations - If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Virtual Office Hours - contact me by email to make an appointment.

Email - Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information including messages related to this class.

Course of Study:

Aug. 21, 23	Constitution of the United States
Aug. 28, 30	United States Legal System
Sept. 4	No class, Labor Day (university closed)

Sept. 6, 11	Supreme Court of the United States (Chapter 1)
Sept. 13	Institutional Powers and Constraints on the Judiciary (Chapter 2)
Sept. 18	<i>Group Discussion Session 1 (groups meet)</i>
Sept. 20	<i>Group Discussion Session (group reports/class discussion)</i>
Sept. 25	Incorporation of the Bill of Rights (Chapter 3)
Sept. 27	Exam 1
Oct. 2, 4	Freedom Religion, part 1 (Chapter 4)
Oct. 9	No class (Fall break)
Oct. 10, 11	Freedom of Religion, part 2
Oct. 16	<i>Group Discussion Session 2 (groups meet)</i>
Oct. 18	<i>Group Discussion Session (group reports/class discussion)</i>
Oct. 23, 25	Freedom of Expression, part 1 (Chapter 5 and 6)
Oct. 30	Freedom of Expression, part 2 (Chapters 7 and 8)
Nov. 1	Exam 2
Nov. 6, 8	Privacy and Personal Liberty (Chapter 10)
Nov. 13, 15	14th Amendment, Foundations of Equal Protection (Chapter 13)
Nov. 20	Contemporary Approaches to Equal Protection (Chapter 14)
Nov. 22	No class (Thanksgiving Break)
Nov. 27	<i>Group Discussion Session 3 (groups meet)</i>
Nov. 29	<i>Group Discussion Session (group reports/class discussion)</i>
Dec. 4	No class (Reading day)
Dec. 11	Exam 3

Important Dates:

Last day to add a class:	Aug. 28
Last day to drop (no tuition penalty):	Sept. 5
Last day to drop (50% refund):	Sept. 12

Unrestricted withdrawal period: Sept. 13 - 26 (100% tuition liability)

Selective withdrawal period* Sept. 27 - Oct. 23 (100% tuition liability)

**See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.*

NOTE: the above important dates are included for your general information. Please check the Registrar's Website at registrar.gmu.edu to confirm these dates and for other related information.