

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON LAW CENTER

PROFESSIONAL WRITING STRATEGIES

SPRING 2023 SYLLABUS

Office Hours: By Appointment

Class Sessions: Class is held twice each week for 1.5 hours
Mandatory one-on-one conferences are held throughout the semester. *

Class Room: See course description page

Class Webpage: PWS Spring 2023 (to be announced by your professor if it is on Canvas or Blackboard)

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the **Multistate Performance Test (“MPT”)**, which is a component of the Uniform Bar Exam (“UBE”). Through this course students will learn the skills necessary to successfully complete the MPT and hone legal writing and analysis skills. Students will receive regular feedback with regard to their individual MPT performance along with numerous strategies to attack the MPT.

The MPT tests six skills, which include (1) sorting detailed factual materials and separating relevant from irrelevant facts; (2) analyzing statutory, case and administrative materials for principals of law; (3) applying the relevant law to relevant facts in a manner likely to resolve a client’s problems; (4) identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas’, when present; (5) communicating effectively in writing; and (6) completing a lawyering task within time constraints.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to demonstrate the following:

1. Organization and management of a legal task under timed conditions.
2. Communication of effective legal analysis and reasoning as it pertains to the specific task assigned. This objective includes:
 - a. articulating relevant legal principles from the MPT library
 - b. discerning relevant facts from irrelevant facts within the case file.
 - c. clearly explaining how the relevant legal principles from the MPT apply to the relevant facts mentioned in the MPT to reach a thorough and complete answer.

3. A method by which to problem solve the information provided on the MPT.
4. Recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas within the confines of the applicable ethical standards of lawyering.¹

Reading Materials:

Required: None.

Attendance Policy:

80 percent attendance in class is required. (For most classes, this means each students has a five absence limit.) Students should be in their seat when class begins. Roll is taken at the beginning of class. Students will not be allowed to argue at a later time that they were actually present on days in which the student arrived tardy/after roll was taken. Those individuals not satisfying the attendance requirement will be reported to UH Law Center administrative officials and and may be dropped from, or fail, the course.

In the event the class must move to a remote setting, class will occur on Zoom. That means that you will need to be logged in throughout the class session **with the camera on**.

Regular class attendance, participation, and engagement in coursework are important contributors to student success. Additional policies address absences related to [military service](#), [religious holy days](#), [pregnancy and related conditions](#), and [disability](#).

Office Hours:

If you have any questions about the course, please ask me! Questions are welcome and encouraged. In light of COVID-19, most meetings will be held via Zoom.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, or would like to discuss preparing for the bar exam, you may reach out to me. Please make an appointment if you have questions about the course, any assignments, bar preparation, and licensing. During our appointment, we can review questions together, discuss study strategies, discuss the bar preparation process, and explore any questions, thoughts, or concerns you have about the course.

Grading Policy:

40% Assignments & Participation

- You are expected to discuss the assigned material in depth, so please make a commitment to be prepared. Your advanced preparation gives you the best opportunity to correctly synthesize and participate in our class discussion. Be prepared to actively engage – including completing any and all out of class assignments.
- Assignments must be typed and submitted prior to the deadline (see course calendar for deadlines and instructions). If the assignment is submitted late, the student will receive 50% reduction on the assignment. Assignments submitted 24 hours after the deadline will not receive any credit. Assignments will be considered late when submitted after the stated deadline on the course calendar.

¹ The above objectives are a summary of the listed skills outlined and described by the National Conference of Bar Examiners.

- Assignments will be graded on a good faith basis. Assignments that receive good faith points allow students to make some honest errors without receiving a point deduction. The professor determines honest errors. Where a student puts forth a good faith effort appropriate for graduate level study that is reflected in the submitted work, the student is likely to receive the full point allocation. Where a student's work does not reflect a full good faith effort, points will be deducted at the professor's discretion. Examples of submissions that do not reflect a good faith effort include a submission that does not follow instructions, is incomplete, late, does not reflect adequate thought and consideration, copies or uses someone else's work as their own, or one that is poorly edited and cannot be easily understood.
- Students will present one MPT to their peers. This project will be explained in class.

20% Midterm

- The midterm will consist of one 90-minute MPT.

40% Final

- The final will be a three-hour assessment most likely consisting of two MPTs.

Student Participation:

You are expected to discuss the assigned material in depth, so please make a commitment to be prepared. Your advanced preparation gives you the best opportunity to correctly synthesize and participate in our class discussion.

As this class is a graded course, the decision to drop a grade for participation is at my discretion and is non-negotiable. A drop in class participation can result from a combination of unpreparedness, not paying attention in class, and absences (even if you are within the five-absence limit).

In rare circumstances, a student may go up a 1/3 of a letter grade for making a substantial contribution to the class. Note that volunteering every class does not constitute a substantial contribution—quality, not quantity matters.

Student Responsibilities When Absent:

If a student is absent from class, the student has the obligation to reach out to the instructor, obtain all missed content, and submit all missed assignments. To assist in this effort, class assignments and presentations are posted to Blackboard after each class (as best possible). *The missed material must be completed and submitted to the instructor prior to the next class meeting.* Failure of the instructor to post the assignments does not relieve the student of the duty to reach out and ask for the missed assignments in a timely manner. For example, if a student misses a Monday 10:30am class (of a M/W 10:30am-12pm class section), the student must complete all assignments from that class meeting before class begins on Wednesday at 10:30am. Any assignment not timely completed will be deducted from the Completion portion of the student's grade. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Honor Code:

The UHLC Honor Code applies to this class. It is set forth in its entirety in the Student Handbook. You are responsible for knowing the provisions of the UHLC Honor Code, and for full compliance

with all of the UHLC Honor Code provisions. Failure to do so will result in referral to the UHLC Honor Court, and may result in you failing this class.

Of note, unless otherwise specifically instructed, all assignments are to be completed individually and you may not consult the internet, peers, or other resources not specifically included in the assignment instructions.

Students may be asked to sign an honor code statement as part of their submission of any graded work including but not limited to projects, quizzes, and exams: “ *I understand and agree to abide by the provisions in the (select: [University of Houston Undergraduate Academic Honesty Policy](#) , [University of Houston Graduate Academic Honesty Policy](#)). I understand that academic honesty is taken very seriously and, in the cases of violations, penalties may include suspension or expulsion from the University of Houston.*”

Computer and Phone Use:

The permitted use of personal computers in the classroom is permitted solely for the purpose of completing class assignments (i.e. MPTs, note taking). Specifically excluded from in-class computer usage is anything beyond these activities, e.g., “surfing the web” and messaging. When we are not completing an assignment for this class, your computer should be put away. Nonparticipation and nonresponsiveness in the classroom discussion attributable to diversionary uses of your personal computer or phone constitutes an absence from the class. The instructor reserves the right to disallow the use of laptops in the classroom at any time throughout the semester. The use of other electronics, including recording devices, is prohibited during class time. Please be sure that all noise-making devices, including cell phones, are in silent mode or powered off. Phones should be put away during class.

Your camera should be on during all class sessions that (may) occur vitrually. You are welcome to use a virtual background, provided it is school appropriate. If this is a problem, please reach out to me individually.

Communication:

Students should check their emails and Canvas regularly and consistently. I will send emails to the whole class or individually. These emails may contain important details and time sensitive materials. It is imperative that you check your emails frequently as you will be responsible for the content and information provided in those communications as it pertains to the course and assignments.

Please check and use your Cougarnet email for communications related to this course. To access this email, [login](#) to your Microsoft 365 account with your Cougarnet credentials.

Instructor Evaluations:

I welcome any comments or suggestions that you may have regarding instructor teaching style, class presentation, or any other related subject. Please feel free to provide me such comments during the course of the semester as they will help me improve this program. I will carefully consider all of the comments and suggestions that I receive.

Face Covering Policy:

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, the University strongly encourages everyone (vaccinated or not) to wear face coverings indoors on campus including classrooms for both faculty and students.

Presence in Class:

Your presence in class each session means that you:

- Are NOT exhibiting any [Coronavirus Symptoms](#) that makes you think that you may have COVID-19
- Have NOT tested positive or been diagnosed for COVID-19
- Have NOT knowingly been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or suspected/presumed COVID-19

If you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms that are not clearly related to a pre-existing medical condition, do not come to class. Please see [Student Protocols](#) for what to do if you experience symptoms and [Potential Exposure to Coronavirus](#) for what to do if you have potentially been exposed to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Information:

Students are encouraged to visit the University's [COVID-19](#) website for important information including on-campus testing, vaccines, diagnosis and symptom protocols, on-campus testing, and vaccine information. Please check the website throughout the semester for updates.

Vaccinations:

Data suggests that vaccination remains the best intervention for reliable protection against COVID-19. Students are asked to familiarize themselves with pertinent [vaccine information](#), consult with their health care provider. The University strongly encourages all students, faculty and staff to be vaccinated.

Recording of Class:

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the [Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#). If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with *anyone* without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.

Chosen Names and Preferred Pronouns:

I want to address each of you in a manner that corresponds to your identity. Although mistakes happen, chosen names and preferred pronouns – including non-binary ones such as they/them/their – must be respected in my classroom. Please feel free to reach out to me at any

time if you want to make me aware of your chosen name or preferred pronoun or if you have concerns about how I or your classmates address you.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Wellness:

This is an inclusive learning space.

At UHLC, we are committed to ensuring inclusive online and classroom learning spaces, where you'll be treated with respect and dignity, and where everyone is provided the equitable opportunity to participate, to contribute, and to succeed.

In this course, all students are welcome regardless of socio-economic status, age, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, national origin, veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, political affiliation, marital status, and other diverse identities that we each bring to class. Our class is richer for this diversity.

Inclusive learning spaces facilitate the innovation and creative thought that enhance student success. This success arises from the participation, support, and understand of you and your colleagues. I encourage you to speak up and share your views, but also understand that you are doing so in a learning environment in which we're all expected to engage respectfully and with regard to the dignity of all others.

If you feel like your class performance is impacted in any way by your experiences inside or outside of class, please reach out to me. I want to be a resource for you. If you feel more comfortable speaking with someone besides me, Student Services is an excellent resource: 713.743.2182. Finally, I encourage you to bring any issues negatively impacting UHLC's openness to diversity and inclusion to the Law Center's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The D&I Committee's charge includes "[b]uilding on the Law Center's strengths as a diverse and inclusive environment." You can contact the committee directly at UHLCD&I@uh.edu .

Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of this course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.

Accommodating Students with Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that the University of Houston make reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities as defined by and within the meaning of the statute. Students who have questions about or feel that they need assistance under the ADA should contact Student Services.

The University of Houston complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, pertaining to the provision of reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids for disabled students. In accordance with Section 504 and ADA guidelines, UH strives to provide reasonable academic adjustments/auxiliary aids to students who request and require them. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an academic adjustments/auxiliary aid, please contact [the Justin Dart Jr. Student Accessibility Center](#) (formerly the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with DisABILITIES).

Counseling and Psychological Services:

The University of Houston's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to the demands of a professional program, or feeling sad or hopeless. You can reach CAPS at www.uh.edu/caps and by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments of if you know someone who is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program (http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html), a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus.

Security Escorts and Cougar Ride:

UHPD continually works with the University community to make the campus a safe place to learn, work, and live. Our Security escort service is designed for the community members who have safety concerns and would like to have a Security Officer walk with them, for their safety, as they make their way across campus. Based on availability either a UHPD Security Officer or Police Officer will escort students, faculty, and staff to locations beginning and ending on campus. If you feel that you need a Security Officer to walk with you for your safety please call [713-743-3333](tel:713-743-3333). Arrangements may be made for special needs.

Parking and Transportation Services also offers a late-night, on-demand shuttle service called Cougar Ride that provides rides to and from all on-campus shuttle stops, as well as the MD Anderson Library, Cougar Village/Moody Towers and the UH Technology Bridge. Rides can be requested through the UH Go app. Days and hours of operation can be found at <https://uh.edu/af-university-services/parking/cougar-ride/>.

Helpful Information:

Coogs Care: <https://uh.edu/dsa/coogscare/>

Student Health Center: <https://www.uh.edu/healthcenter/>

Anti-Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Policies:

UHLC and the University of Houston are committed to maintaining and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from discrimination and sexual misconduct. If you have experienced an incident of discrimination or sexual misconduct, a confidential reporting process is available to you. For more information, please refer to the University System's Anti-Discrimination Policy SAM 01.07 and Sexual Misconduct Policy SAM 01.D.08.

Please be aware that under the sexual misconduct policy, SAM 01.D.08, faculty and other University employees are required to report to the University any information received regarding sexual misconduct as defined in the policy. Due to the reporting requirement, faculty members and other employees are not a confidential source. The reporting obligations under the sexual misconduct policy extends to alleged conduct by University employees and students.

Proposed Course Outline:

A separate proposed schedule for the semester ("Course Schedule") will be distributed by the instructor. It will include class assignments, homework, and relevant dates of assessments. The instructor may, of course, modify it as the semester progresses, to achieve course objectives.

Course instruction:

The course consists of both online instruction and in classroom lectures, as well as online and in classroom testing.

First Week's Assignments:

Your instructor will provide you with a schedule of assignments the week prior to class starting. However, no advance preparation is required for the first two classes.

Each class, please bring your computer and be prepared to take notes.

Syllabus Changes:

In light of the changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and to facilitate optimum learning, please note that the instructor may need to make modifications to the course syllabus and may do so at any time. Notice of such changes will be announced as quickly as possible through the course webpage and via email.