

WRS: Animal Law
Summer 2026
Professor Sarah Morath
(moraths@wfu.edu)
Distance Learning

Course Description: Animal Law is one of the fastest-growing fields of legal practice and involves issues of constitutional law, administrative law, environmental law, family law, and estates and trusts. In this class, we will address a broad range of topics including the historical status of animals in the law; state legislative efforts and citizen initiatives to strengthen animal protection laws; the application of federal laws, including the Endangered Species Act and the Animal Welfare Act, to captive animals, wildlife, and farm animals; animal-related torts; constitutional standing to sue on behalf of animals; companion animals and the law; and the movement to obtain legal recognition of the rights of animals.

Online Aspects: This course is asynchronous and online, with prerecorded short lectures related to the assigned reading posted each week. Unless otherwise noted, video recordings will be posted by Monday at 9:00 a.m. and can be viewed at any time during the week. Some weeks, there will be more than one video for you to watch. Most videos end with a prompt for you to answer to demonstrate that you've completed the reading and watched the video. (I recommend completing the reading before you watch the videos.). The prompt(s) for the week will be reposted on the Canvas site. Failure to respond to the prompt(s) will result in a deduction from your class participation grade. All perspectives will be considered in online discussions and assignments.

Textbook: *Animal Law: Welfare, Interests, and Rights*, David Favre, Wolters Kluwer Press (3rd ed., 2020). Most of the assigned chapters are for background purposes. Please skim these assigned readings. The material will be supplemented with newspaper and journal articles, law review articles, and cases posted on Canvas. Please read these assigned readings.

Learning Outcomes/Course Goals: Upon the completion of this course, you should:

- Understand the major issues in animal law.
- Understand how animal law intersects with other areas of the law, including property, tort, criminal, and family law.
- Be aware of some Texas animal law cases and statutes.
- Be aware of the major federal animal law statutes.
- Understand how to craft a scholarly thesis.
- Gain further instruction on research and writing a scholarly paper.

Assessment: You will be assessed through written reflections, online discussions, and a final paper.

Final Paper

The purpose of the paper is to assess your ability to critically analyze a real-world situation based on the content and skills you learned in this course. Your paper can address any topic related to animal law, including:

- Ethical treatment of animals by businesses (medical research facilities, circuses, farmers) and individual pet owners
- Keeping exotic animals as pets
- Regulating animal “ring” fighting
- Rights of those with emotional support or service animals
- Providing for pets after death or divorce
- Breeding or slaughter laws
- Protecting endangered or threatened species
- Cloning animals
- Ag-Gag laws
- Factory farms/CAFOs
- Zoos/circuses/animals as entertainment
- Animals in the military
- Bioengineering
- Sale and distribution of animal parts (ivory tusks, etc.)
- International animal law.

If you are having trouble finding a topic for your paper, consult the following resources:

- <http://www.abajournal.com/topic/animal+law/>
- <https://guides.ll.georgetown.edu/AnimalLaw>
- <https://www.animallaw.info/browse-topics>

Below is a tentative schedule for assignments. Assignments should be uploaded to CANVAS by the assigned date and time.

A paragraph describing your paper topic: Monday, June 22 at 9:00 a.m. (5% of grade)

List of References: Monday, June 30 at 9:00 a.m. (5% of grade)

Thesis Statement & Outline: Friday, July 10 at 9:00 a.m. (5% of grade)

Draft: Monday, July 27, 9:00 a.m. (20% of grade)¹

Longer Reflection: Monday, August 3 at 9:00 a.m.

Final paper: Tuesday, August 18 at 9:00 a.m. (50% of grade) (Last day of summer classes)

In accordance with the Law Center handbook, WRS papers must be at least 10,000 words, including footnotes. Specifics on the paper and presentation will be available later in the semester.

¹ I reserve the right to require you to submit a second draft if I feel that the first draft does not display sufficient work and effort on your part.

Class Participation

You are expected to watch all video lectures and participate in all online discussions. Each week, I will post a prompt on Canvas related to that week's readings and video. You will have a week to respond. You are also required to have at least one conference with me. If you complete the videos and actively participate in the online discussions and conference, you will receive full credit for participation (10 % of grade).

Written Reflection

Over the course of the summer, you will be asked to respond to a prompt in a more detailed and organized manner than in the online discussions. Your reflection should demonstrate thoughtful consideration of the prompt. The reflection should be approximately 500 words. The due date is in the syllabus. (5 % of grade)

Curve and Deduction

In accordance with the Law Center handbook, this course will be graded on a 3.0 to 3.4 curve. You must turn in all assignments on time. If you are ill or otherwise unable to turn in a graded assignment on time, please notify me via e-mail before the time the assignment is due to seek an accommodation. If your assignment is late, and you have not received a prior extension from me, I reserve the right to reduce your grade on the assignment by one grade level for the first hour (or part of an hour) the assignment is late. After the first hour, I will impose one additional grade reduction for each hour the assignment is late.

CANVAS

I will maintain a course website on Canvas. Please register for the course and provide an email address that you check frequently. I will send all class-related emails to the email address registered with Canvas. I will post all video lectures on this site.

Student Services

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 and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. <https://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets-talk/index>

The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP) also supports law students who are dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and other mental health problems. You can reach TLAP at any time at 1-800-343-8527. TLAP's website includes a page with links to sources about mental health that are of interest to law students: <https://www.tlaphelps.org/law-students>.

Honor Code

The UHLC Honor Code applies to all aspects of this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any

questions regarding how the Honor Code's provisions apply to specific activities or situations related to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you under the Honor Code to comply with the Honor Code in relation to this course and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus. AI-generated text will be treated as from another/other in applying the plagiarism policy to this course.

Animal Law Organizations

The Houston Bar Association has an animal law chapter as does the Texas Bar Association. Membership is free for students.

- Houston Bar Association <https://www.hba.org/sections/animal-law/>
- Texas Bar Association <http://www.animallawsection.org/>

Class Period	Class Topic	Reading Assignment
Week 1 June 8	Intro to Animal Law	Skim Chapter 1; Read <i>Consistently Inconsistent</i> and <i>Animals and the Law</i> (on CANVAS) Generative AI Video & Readings
Week 2 June 15	Finding a Paper Topic (Topics vs. Thesis)	Read Finding Your Topic and Developing Your Thesis and Sample Articles on CANVAS
Week 3 June 22	Animal Ownership/Property Status	Skim Chapters 2 (pg. 29-50) (skip <i>Robert v. Melendez</i>) & Ch. 3 (pg. 79-98) Read <i>An Elephant's Personhood on Trial</i> and <i>Should Animals be Considered People</i> on CANVAS Read: <u><i>Moving from property to personhood</i></u> https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/29/world/australia/whale-personhood-polynesia-maori.html
Paper Topic Due Monday, June 22		
Week 4 June 29	Criminal Law: Animal Cruelty, Domestic Violence, Puppy Mills, Hoarding, Animal Fighting; Possession Bans	Skim Chapters 6 (pg. 191-216, 227-242) (skip <i>State v. Avery</i> , <i>State v. Wrobel</i> , <i>T.J. v. State of Indiana</i> , <i>People of State of Michigan v. Norfleet</i>) & 7 (skip <i>Martinez v. State</i> and <i>State v. Mauer</i>) Read <i>The Growing Trend of Animal Abuse Registries</i> and the article on the federal animal cruelty ban and puppy mills on CANVAS
List of References Due Monday, June 30 Touch-base conferences		
Week 5 July 6	Family Law, Pet Trusts, Wills & Estates	Skim Chapter 2 (pg. 51-71) Read <i>Pet Animals: What Happens When Their Humans Die</i> and <i>New California Divorce Law</i> on CANVAS. https://allisontait.substack.com/p/trust-fund-pets
Thesis and Outline Due Friday, July 10		
Week 6 July 13	Torts and insurance, emotional distress damages, breed-specific legislation; vet malpractice Texas-specific laws	Skim Chapter 4 (skip pg. 126-131; 147-151) & skim 5 (skip pg. 177-189)

		Read: <i>Strickland v. Medlen</i> , 397 S.W.3d 184 (Tex. 2013), <i>McGee v. Smith</i> on CANVAS Read <i>Irrationality Unleashed</i> and <i>Going to the Dogs</i> on CANVAS. Read the article on Delta banning bit-bulls on CANVAS
Week 7 July 20	Agriculture Animals and Constitutional issues I: Ag-gag and crush videos	Skim Chapter 8 (skip the case <i>New Jersey for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals</i>) & Chapter 6 (pg. 220-227) Read <i>Ten Lessons</i> and <i>Big-Ag Exceptionalism</i> on CANVAS
Week 8 July 27	Constitutional issues II: Standing & AWA	Skim Chapter 9 & Chapter 10 (pg. 394-430) Read: <i>The Legal Rights of All Living Things</i> on CANVAS
First Draft Due Monday, July 27 Review Writing Mechanics PowerPoint Reflection Due Monday, August 3 at 9:00 a.m. What legal status should we give to animals and why?		
Week 10 August 3	Required conferences with Professor Morath via zoom.	
Week 11 August 10	Optional Conferences with Professor Morath	
Week 12 August 17	Work on Papers Papers Due Tuesday, August 18 (Last Day of Classes)	