

# Generally Applicable Syllabus Information

## Professor Greg R. Vetter

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This document contains syllabus information that is generally applicable to all my courses. All information in this document is considered incorporated into the course syllabus.

After reading this document once carefully, students should not have to refer to it on a regular basis. However, students should become accustomed to regularly visiting the web page for a course in order to have the most current information for course coverage and other particulars.

### **II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Attendance**

Students should attend class sessions, and arrive on time. If you arrive late, out of respect for the other students and the class environment, please try to minimize the disturbance. The Law Center attendance policy requires sufficient attendance or a student risks being dropped from the class.

I will take attendance by distributing a roll sheet at the beginning of each class. Each student should personally initial by his or her name for that class session. It is your responsibility to insure that you have initialed the roll sheet before you leave the classroom each day. Students who do not sign the role sheet are deemed to have been absent.

Please note that you are responsible for managing your absences from class and ensuring that your total number of absences does not exceed the threshold for the class. If you are unable to attend a class, or you need to arrive late or leave early, I prefer that you notify me in advance by email if your group is on-call for that class. I request this notification primarily because I call on students and it is useful to know in advance that a student will not be available.

Even if you have notified me that you will be absent, that absence still uses one of your available absences. If your situation is such that you are close to the limit, you are required to consult with me to determine precisely the number of absences available. Do not exclusively rely on your own calculation as to the limit. Also, I advise you to use caution in taking absences early in the semester. Early semester absences reduce your "margin for error" for the remainder of the semester and can create a difficult situation if sicknesses or other life events arise.

When you notify me that you will miss a class, you need not provide a reason. I am not putting myself in the position where I am evaluating the reasons for student absences. Exceeding the absences threshold has consequences. On the other hand, there is no loss of goodwill on my part toward any student if he or she takes most or all of their absences.

I enter the roll sheet into my records immediately after each class. My records, then, are the source for determinations about whether a student is within the absences limit. Thus, if you discover on a Thursday that you did not sign the roll sheet on Wednesday, but attended on Wednesday, you must not simply sign on Thursday for both Wednesday and Thursday. Rather, please send me an email, requesting a correction for the previous day. I will only be able to consider such correction requests going back one class day.

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### **Preparation & Participation**

Preparation and participation are expected, and in my view make the class more enjoyable and fruitful for everyone. I welcome questions and participation from any student at any time.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, to facilitate participation and preparation, depending on the size of the class and other factors, in my discretion I will implement one of the following options, effective for the entire semester:

- (i) segment the class into groups along some easily recognizable metric and on a rotating periodic basis put one of the groups on call, from which group I will randomly call on students to contribute to the class discussion.
- (ii) randomly call on students from the entire class to contribute to the class discussion.

Please note that I am not guaranteeing that every student will be called on, or that a student will be called on only once. My goal with this system is simply to have a default locale for student contributions to our discussions. In a small class I will probably call on everyone in the list. In this case I will then call on students a second time, re-randomizing the list, and might process the list a third time if necessary. Also, students on call for a particular day should be prepared both for the materials assigned for that day as well as for any material assigned for the previous (just completed) class period, but not yet covered in class.

During these discussions, I expect participants in the class to be respectful, civil to each other, incorporate constructive comments, and not dominate the discussion. This does not mean students cannot express disagreement in a significant way, but should do so using the sort of language they might use in court and in a way that displays respect for other persons in the class. In essence, students should argue in class as if they were arguing before a judge to engender the good will of the judge yet working to state their case as persuasively as possible.

Also, I ask that students speak loud enough to be heard – some of the rooms are large and I want everyone in the room to have the chance to follow the dialogue.

To support this system there will be a seating chart with assigned seats, so please prepare to choose a seat at the start of the class date indicated on the web page for the specific course at issue.

In addition to participation by class discussion, I may periodically assign short learning exercises or other activities. If these occur they will take minimal out-of-class time. However, I will expect students to complete them. I reserve the right to adjust a student's final course grade downward for flagrant disregard and/or nonperformance of such exercises or activities.

My teaching style is a mixture of lecture, traditional "soft" Socratic method, and occasional collective problem solving. Sometimes I orally review and probe a particular case in detail, but in some contexts I may directly pose a problem or hypothetical without laying any

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<sup>1</sup> I also welcome student questions outside of class via email or the telephone. I reserve the right to use such a student question by answering it in a writing distributed to the entire class, but which does not disclose the identity of the student asking the question.

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foundation – with the goal of providing a “life-like” opportunity for students interactively to synthesize the materials into a broader understanding of the subject.

### **III. EXAMINATION AND GRADING**

Your grade in this course will be primarily derived from your score on an open-materials final examination to be administered during the Law Center scheduled examination period for this class. “Open-materials” means any non-electronic and non-interactive materials prepared by you and/or others, including traditional study guides available for purchase, and outlines from other students. Further details concerning the examination and any other grade evaluation mechanisms will be provided as the semester progresses.

### **IV. USE OF COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONICS**

Out of respect for other students and the class environment, during class sessions computers are to be used only for note-taking purposes. This prohibits computer use for Internet surfing, chat rooms, e-mail, or other uses not related to note-taking for class. I reserve the right to treat violations of this policy as either a lack of preparation, a constructive lack of attendance, or, in appropriate circumstances, as a disruption of the class. In addition, during class please disable the speaker on your computer and refrain from displaying wallpaper, screen savers, or other material on your laptop computer screen that can reasonably be expected to offend or distract your classmates. Also, please ensure that all other noise-making electronics, such as watches, cell phones, pagers, etc., are in a silent mode or powered off.

### **V. COVERAGE**

Assignments for the first day or week of class will be posted using the Law Center’s posting mechanism for first-day assignments and on the course web page. Continuing assignments will be made available in a table on the course web page that sets forth the coverage plan for the material. Typically, a class will proceed with the material in the order presented by the casebook, although the reading assignments may not necessarily include all the material the casebook offers. Certain days between major topics may be designated as “flex” days to allow for variations in the rate of progress through the material.

### **VI. OTHER ITEMS**

Below are additional items for your consideration.

#### **Americans With Disabilities Act**

Whenever possible, and in accordance with 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the University of Houston will attempt to provide reasonable academic accommodations to students who request and require them. Please contact student services for more information.

#### **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**

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](http://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.  
[http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)