

Family Law Syllabus Fall term 2026

David Bedingfield (B.A Eng. Lit Florida State University 1977; J.D. Emory University 1983)

I am in London this semester. My email is dbedingfield@fsu.edu. I will discuss office hours and the scheduling of meetings during our first class session.

The Course is on Zoom. Please email me if you anticipate having difficulties with access.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

I seek in this course to explore the legal concepts applicable to family relationships. Family law is about the balancing of “rights” and “duties,” and is about our understanding of the meaning of those two legal terms. The course asks the student to analyze and assess a wide range of legal issues arising from family relationships, including but not limited to questions of constitutional law, property law, contract law, statutory construction, and the interpretation of legal instruments such as wills and pre-nuptial agreements. The goal of the course is to enable the student to litigate, adjudicate, and legislate issues surrounding the make-up and break-up of families, the rights of parents and children, and the duties of the state to children and families in need.

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to attend each class.

The College of Law requires a student to attend a minimum of 80% of class meetings to receive credit for the course. Attendance includes the obligation to arrive on time and to satisfactorily complete reading assignments prior to class. There will be a component of the final grade that will include classroom participation. Students will be told in advance when they may be questioned in class about assigned materials. Excused absences include illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND READING LIST

D. Kelly Weisberg and Courtney G. Joslin, Modern Family Law; Cases and Materials (Eighth Edition Aspen Publishing)

I will also be posting articles and cases of interest on your Canvas web site each week.

There are 28 class sessions scheduled. I have scheduled the material for 26 sessions. It is likely certain topics will require more time than scheduled. The following topics will be covered:

Classes 1, 2, 3 and 4: Chapter 1 The Family and the Constitution

Classes 5 and 6: Chapter 2 Getting Married.

Classes 7 and 8: Chapter 3 Regulating Marriage

Classes 9, 10 and 11: Chapter 4 Intimate Partner Violence

Classes 12 and 13: Chapter 5 Nonmarital Relationships

Classes 14 and 15: Chapter 6 Divorce

Classes 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20: Chapter 7 Financial Consequences of Dissolution

Classes 21, 22 and 23: Chapter 8 Child Custody

Classes 23, 24, 25 and 26: Chapter 9 Parentage

GRADING REQUIREMENTS

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy>.)

The grades will be assessed as follows:

There will be a final exam. The exam will consist of fact situations presented where students will be asked to identify the issues presented and the likely outcomes, setting out your reasons.

There will also be reasonably frequent very short quizzes regarding the reading, designed to help the student understand the principles involved. The point of the quizzes is to help students with the reading and will not form part of the final grade.

USE OF AI

Students are not permitted to use Artificial Intelligence programs during final exam. We shall be discussing during the class how these programs might (or might not) be useful to practitioners, judges, and legislators.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should:

1. register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and
2. bring a letter to Nancy Benavides, Associate Dean for Student Affairs, indicating the need for accommodations and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

Please note that professors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)

(850) 644-8504 (TDD)

My background: I am a dual citizen of the U.S. and United Kingdom. After graduating from Emory University School of Law in 1983 I practiced for 7 years in Atlanta, Ga., first with a large law firm that represented Ted Turner's numerous and varied enterprises, then with a law firm that specialized in civil rights and voting rights cases.

I moved to London in 1990 and re-qualified as a barrister. My practice involved all aspects of family law, including financial remedies, child custody, and human rights issues under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. I was appointed to the judiciary in 2012.

I am the author of two family law texts in the U.K.: The Child in Need: Children, the State and the Law (Jordan Publishing 1997); and Advocacy in Family Proceedings: Theory and Practice (Family Law Publishing 2nd Ed 2012)