

University of Florida Levin College of Law

COURSE SYLLABUS: PUBLIC DEFENDER CLINIC—SPRING 2026

LAW 6942 - 6 credits S/U, 2 credits graded

INSTRUCTORS' CONTACT INFORMATION

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Aaron's Office Hours: Wednesdays 5:00pm – 6:00pm; Fridays 3:00pm – 4:00pm.

Marley's Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:45am – 11:45am (in person); Wednesdays 10:45 – 11:45 am (virtual; link will be provided via email).

If these times do not work for you, please get in touch with us to schedule a meeting at another time. Students should feel free to contact us anytime to discuss legal issues or ask questions about their cases via email, text, call, or office drop-in.

MEETING TIMES AND LOCATIONS

Classroom location: MLAC 209

This course will meet on the following dates and times: Wednesdays from 6-8 pm

- Due to clinical exercises and various collaborations with the Prosecution Clinic, several special meetings may be held throughout the semester, and the Course Schedule will be modified accordingly. Please plan to attend a special class session on the following particular date, which is already scheduled:

Jury Selection Practicum: Friday, January 30, 2026, 8:00 am-5:00 pm (Each student will have a mandatory 1 hour session sometime during this day).

OTHER MEETINGS/EVENTS THAT ARE OPTIONAL BUT ENCOURAGED

Thursday, January 22, 2026 – Clinic Commitment Ceremony (5:30 – 7:00pm, Bailey Event Space)

Monday, March 23 to Friday, March 27, 2026 – Clinic Week (Tue, clinic info session. Wed, Clinic Fair. Thurs, Externship info session)

Monday, March 30 to Friday, April 2, 2026 – Clinic Connect (Tue tabling, 9:45am to 12:15pm. Wed tabling, 12:00pm to 1:15pm. Thurs. tabling, 2:30pm to 5:30pm)

Thursday, April 23, 2026 – Clinic Capstone Class

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The general learning objectives and goals for this classroom/lab section, consistent with the requirements of the American Bar Association, are as follows:

- To integrate doctrine, theory, and legal ethics in the performance of professional lawyering skills and tasks in a community-based field placement setting;
- To develop intercultural competencies in your client counseling and advocacy work; become aware of your unconscious biases and preferences; contextualize biases and preferences to the practice of law; identify ways to overcome them, enhancing your ability to serve in the legal role;
- To develop understanding of the concepts underlying the professional lawyering skills and tasks;
- To allow an opportunity for students to practice different lawyering skills and tasks to improve mastery;
- To provide a classroom instructional component to support the field placement experience throughout the semester; and
- To provide ongoing feedback, as well as ongoing student self-evaluation.

In addition, at the end of this experience, students will emerge as improved advocates, possessing the following skill set:

- Stronger understanding of the ethical obligations regarding clients' wishes, in addition to concurrent professional responsibilities, such as serving as an officer of the court and a public citizen lawyer with a duty to improve the legal system;
- Ability to provide zealous, holistic, culturally-aware, and client-centered representation outside of the courtroom context, which includes (1) conducting effective client interviews to develop trust and rapport, and ascertain important case facts and other information, (2) investigating case facts through witness interviews, community-based work, and formal discovery, and (3) developing sentencing mitigation evidence;
- Ability to carefully analyze elements of a charge, understand strengths and weaknesses of the adversary's case, and develop case theories and strategies, given this information;

- Competence advancing rights and interests of indigent accused clients beyond winning at trial, such as seeking pre-trial release and providing other holistic supports throughout the case, including at the time of community re-entry;
- Facility with negotiating outcomes before trial, consistent with the wishes of the client, and duties as zealous advocates, without any conflicts of interest;
- Familiarity with the practice of pre-trial motions and hearings, as appropriate, to challenge unconstitutional police actions, such as: (1) unlawful searches and seizures, (2) improper interrogations, and (3) suggestive identification processes;
- Commitment to holistic and client-centered representation during guilty/no contest plea colloquies, which includes advancing the client's wishes before the bench, ensuring that all client case-related decisions are knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily made, and advising clients of both direct and collateral consequences of the plea;
- Enhanced oral advocacy and trial advocacy skills, including the ability to thoroughly and timely prepare evidence, your client and witnesses for trial, draft and deploy direct and cross examinations, and argue legal matters to client's advantage, while being mindful of competing considerations and concerns of the court;
- Confidence and competence as legal writers, produce quality work in the context of real cases, utilize effective large-scale and small-scale organization, as well as strong legal analysis;
- Deeper awareness of the role that race, poverty, gender, sexual orientation, language difference, power, privilege and other factors may play in the legal system processes and outcomes, particularly within the context of indigent defense work; and
- Stronger communication skills in a range of contexts, including informal classroom discussions, across cultural and other differences, as formal public speakers, and in written documents, such as emails and letters to clients.

REQUIRED READING AND VIEWING MATERIALS

- There is no textbook required for this class, but there will be assigned readings throughout the semester. Readings and assignments will be posted in Canvas prior to the class during which they will be discussed. Occasionally we may view material as a class and discuss.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure
- ABA Standards for Criminal Justice: Prosecution and Defense Functions
- ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct
- Florida Rules of Professional Conduct

Additional readings will be posted on Canvas throughout the semester, and students are encouraged to draw the class's attention to current events and issues in the criminal justice system.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING EVALUATION

For this course, you will earn eight (8) total credits. Six (6) of these credits are pass/fail (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory), and two (2) of these credits are graded. The aim of this segment is not to focus your attention on grades. It seems only fair, though, to explain the grading system, as clinical grading differs from grading in standard examination and paper courses. Clinical students will be evaluated in three areas: Clinical Coursework, Clinical Methods, and Clinical Practice.

The Levin College of Law's mean and mandatory distributions are posted on the College's website and this class adheres to that posted grading policy. The following chart describes the specific letter grade/grade point equivalent:

Letter Grade	Point Equivalent	Letter Grade	Point Equivalent
A (Excellent)	4.0	C (Satisfactory)	2.0
A-	3.67	C-	1.67
B+	3.33	D+	1.33
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.67	D-	0.67
C+	2.33	E (Failure)	0.0

The law school grading policy is available [here](#).

Clinical Coursework (50%)

Weekly class participation and assignments as provided; One-on-One supervision meetings.

Clinical Methods (25%)

Case preparation at the PDO In-class exercises.

Clinical Practice (25%)

Performance on your feet (court appearances and classroom exercises).

Clinical Coursework (assigned journals, class participation, On-on-one supervision meetings): **50% of final grade**

If you get assigned journals, readings, and in-class discussions, then aim will be to challenge you to think about and form opinions about the way the criminal legal system works. This kind of critical reflection is essential for any lawyer who wants to be an ethical force in the profession. Clinical coursework also includes the feedback students give one another after class performances and court appearances. Such feedback need not be exhaustive, but should reflect close attention and thought.

Reflection Journal: This will be discussed during the first class, but throughout the semester you may be assigned a reflective journal assignment. If assigned, when the journal entry is due will also be discussed in class as well as expectations for the assignment.

Delivery via Canvas upload is best, but email is also acceptable. It may be helpful, but not required, to begin these entries with a brief description of what you did or saw in the previous week, but please do not merely recite events. The purpose to a journal entry is to encourage you to comment on the legal system as you see it. Ask yourselves whether the system is working, whether the various players are doing their jobs, and whether defendants are getting a fair shake. How could the system work better? What can you do to improve it, in your role? Do you like your role?

If it's been a slow week at the office, or if something else in the news or in the class readings or in your life experience bearing on the criminal legal system has grabbed your attention, please feel free to discuss these other matters. Again, the aim is to reflect on the legal system. Within that realm, you are free to explore widely. These journal entries also may serve as a forum for you to provide suggestions about the clinic. You may note that you would prefer a different classroom focus; that you would like different kinds of cases; or that you are having difficulties and want extra guidance. There is no page restriction on these papers, but it is unlikely you could reflect well on a week's work in less than three double-spaced pages. Please be sure to include your name and indicate the dates covered in your report.

One-on-One Supervision Meetings: Throughout the semester there will also be times where you will schedule a time to meet with one of the instructors one-on-one. These meetings should take about thirty minutes. Please come prepared to give a progress report

on old cases and to set out a plan of action for new cases. Try to become familiar with the facts of your cases and to read the relevant law in advance. If you have no pressing cases, this time may be used any way you choose. You may find it useful to practice direct or cross examinations or other trial skills or to discuss issues that have arisen in the Field Placement. Please come to the meetings prepared to say how we should use the time

Clinical Methods (Case preparation at PDO and in-class exercises): **25% of final grade** A component of this field placement is performance of not less than 21 hours per week of satisfactory work as a Certified Legal Intern (CLI) in the assigned Public Defender's Office (PDO) [Or as an extern if you are not CLI qualified]. While working at the assigned PDO, the CLI will conform to all canons of ethics and disciplinary rules of the Florida Bar, adhere to all performance requirements set by the assigned Assistant Public Defender, and perform to the satisfaction of the assigned PDO supervisor. Your professor and in-court supervisors at the PDO will assess both the energy you invest in preparing your cases and the initiative you show in setting tasks for yourselves and doing them. These tasks include researching the law, contacting and preparing your client and witnesses, contacting (when appropriate) opposing counsel, filing written materials, and searching out and weighing ethical issues presented in your cases. We recognize that you are just starting out and can't always know what needs to be done, and we don't expect you to work without guidance. But it's very important that you read the materials, look at the law and try to figure out for yourselves what needs to be done. And it's important that you have the energy and determination to follow through on tasks.

Clinical Practice (Performance on your feet): **25% of final grade**

This category addresses your court appearances and your class performances. To whatever extent possible, your in-class exercises will be based on the cases you are actually assigned at the PDO, as opposed to hypothetical scenarios. Opening statements, closing arguments, motion practice, cross and direct examinations, will be based on real cases. If, for some reason, your case assignments do not lend themselves to your performing these, or related exercises, a hypothetical scenario will be provided to the class in advance of the exercise. We will also collaborate with the Prosecution Field Placement for a jury selection exercise and a plea negotiation exercise.

In some ways, preparation and on-your-feet performance merge, because good preparation almost always improves performance in both court and class. Still, it's true that by crediting good performance, we reward native talent. Some people find it easier to work on their feet than others. Perhaps it's not fair to reward people for native skill. But talent is important: we

reward test-taking talent all the time, and talent is one thing prospective employers hope your grades reflect. A word on the Process: After reviewing all your work, I will confer with your supervisors in the PDO. Your final grades will reflect your performance in class, in the office, and in court. I'm generally not a fan of a grading structure. And this class should be one of the most enjoyable, and most useful experiences of your time in law school. But a grading structure is the reality we live in for the lab/classroom section of this course. Please keep in mind that grades are an imprecise tool for judging things that are hard to judge. My intent is that my grades reward effort more than raw talent and will provide feedback for your growth as a litigation attorney.

CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance in class is required by both the ABA and the law school. Any missed session will result in a 5-point reduction in a student's final grade (on the 100-point scale) for each missed class. If you have a legitimate reason for missing class, you should contact an instructor before or after class ends so that your absence can be excused. The law school's policy on attendance can be found at this link: <https://www.law.ufl.edu/uf-law-student-handbook-and-academic-policies#>.

ABA OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS REQUIREMENTS

ABA Standard 310 requires that students devote 120 minutes to out-of-class preparation for every "classroom hour" of in-class instruction. Our weekly class time is approximately two hours, requiring at least four hours of preparation outside of class, including reading any assigned materials, completing written assignments, and meeting preparation/meetings arranged. Articles and viewing materials relating to current events will be added to your assignments periodically throughout the semester.

COMMUNICATION COURTESY AND CIVILITY

Please follow the rules of common courtesy in all email messages and class discussions. Phone use during class is prohibited. Instructors reserve the right to lower your final grade if you engage in behavior that disrupts the learning environment for your classmates.

INTERNET USE DURING CLASS

Use of the internet during class is not permitted unless directed by an instructor. You may not check social media sites, email (even clinic- or career-related emails), or news sites. Consider class a vital client meeting and schedule your emailing needs accordingly. If you have concerns about this policy, please discuss them with an instructor.

UF LAW HONOR CODE

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Law Honor Code located [here](#).

PROFESSIONALISM

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to conduct yourselves in a way that is consistent with expectations for licensed attorneys. At the risk of stating the obvious:

- Your goal is that each client walks away from their experience with the belief that they have received the highest level of representation. We will assist you in providing our clients with high level, holistic, client-centered representation.
- You should interpret client confidentiality broadly. (Refer to Bar Rule 4-1.6 to review the requirements of client confidentiality.)
 - Simply put, conversations with non-clinic students or others about your cases should never happen. Neither should work-related postings on social media sites. Conversations with clients that take place in the courthouse, jail, or any other setting should not occur in a manner that allows an opportunity for them to be overheard. In short, prioritize discretion.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

On a related note, you may not use generative artificial intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT or Harvey to generate clinic work product or answers to class assignments. As a starting point, these tools carry significant risks related to confidentiality and privilege. Moreover, AI has been known to generate information that is inaccurate, incomplete, and/or completely fictitious. ChatGPT and other AI may also have knowledge “cutoff” dates that fail to account for important developments.

Additionally, as you prepare to enter the legal profession and serve clients, it is imperative that you develop your ability to think strategically and creatively about legal arguments, conduct thorough and nuanced legal research, and draft arguments that will be persuasive to your audience. The use of “shortcuts” like ChatGPT goes beyond motion templates and other more traditional resources in a way that is antithetical to that development. Having said all of this, we are in the business of advocacy. If you encounter a situation in one of your cases that you believe warrants an exception to our rule, speak with an instructor.

(This rule is not intended to limit the use of AI tools within legal research software such as Westlaw, Lexis, or Bloomberg. The use of such tools is within your discretion, but AI output should always be verified.)

STATEMENT RELATED TO ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must first register with the Disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/>). Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (Assistant Dean Brian Mitchell). Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester. Students may access information about various resources on the UF Law Student Resources Canvas page [here](#).

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students [here](#).

RECORDINGS OF CLASS

As the Field Placement is a legal, live-client clinic, it must adhere to the Rules Regulating The Florida Bar, court procedural rules, any other applicable rules. Pursuant to Rule 4-1.6, all information relating to a client's representation is confidential and may not be voluntarily disclosed by the lawyer without either the client's consent or the application of a relevant exception to the confidentiality rule. Because client information is frequently discussed during class, recording of Field Placement classes is prohibited. Students may not take, circulate, or post photos or videos of classroom discussions, whether they are in-person, hybrid, or completely online. Students failing to follow this rule will be referred to the College of Law Honor Code Council and the University's Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.

UF LEVIN COLLEGE OF LAW STANDARD SYLLABUS POLICIES:

Other information about UF Levin College of Law policies can be found at [this link](#).

UF ACADEMIC POLICIES AND RESOURCES:

Other information about UF academic policies and resources can be found at [this link](#).

COURSE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

This syllabus is offered as a guide to the direction of the course. Our pace will depend in part on the level of interest and difficulty of each section and is subject to change. Reading and supplemental assignments for this course will be posted in Canvas and may be augmented periodically throughout the semester. In addition to completing the assigned reading/viewing, be prepared to discuss your cases during each class. These “case rounds” enable students to form connections with one another and help them analyze legal, ethical, and practical problems more efficiently than doing it on their own. Learning by rounds is one of the best aspects of clinical legal education!

Week	Date	Exercise/Activities	Lecture
Week 1	1/21/26	None	Introduction to the criminal legal system and PD clinic program
Week 2	1/28/26	None	Jury (De)Selection
Week 3	2/4/26	Jury Selection practicum with SAO on Friday, September 5, 2025.	Q&A about jury selection preparation
Week 4	2/11/26	*No Class* in recognition of jury selection and 1-on-1s.	
Week 5	2/18/26	None	Cultural competency and multicultural lawyering
Week 6	2/25/26	Mock client interviews	None
Week 7	3/4/26	Mock change of plea colloquy	Plea Negotiations intro

Week 8	3/11/26	None	Violations of Probation
Week 9	10/15/25	Discussions and Q&A session for plea negotiations	None.
Week 10	3/18/26	ENJOY SPRING BREAK!	None.
Week 11	3/25/26	Joint Plea Negotiation class *6:30pm-8:30pm	TBD
Week 12	4/1/26	Guest Lecture	None.
Week 13	4/8/26	TBD	TBD
Week 14	4/15/26	TBD	TBD
Week 15	4/22/26	TBD	TBD