

Introduction to Federal Courts

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA LEVIN COLLEGE OF LAW SPRING 2026 – LAW 6936 – 2 CREDITS

Ben Johnson

Email: johnson@law.ufl.edu

Office Hours: Friday 3:15-5:15

Co-instructors:

TBA

MEETING TIME: Friday 10:00-12:00

LOCATION: HOL 382

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

This course will consider contemporary problems in federal jurisdiction. Readings will primarily consist of opinions and briefs in recent cases that deal with current issues. Topics will largely be selected by federal judges to make sure that the course focuses on the most relevant issues.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the how questions of federal jurisdiction challenge courts at all levels.
- Identify and analyze issues of subject matter and personal jurisdiction.
- Respond to questions dealing with challenging jurisdictional issues.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS:

Reading materials will be available on Canvas.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING EVALUATION:

Students will be evaluated based upon class participation.

Class Participation: This seminar depends upon your careful reading of the texts and your participation in class discussion. Every week, as you do your reading, I expect you to write down at least 3 or 4 questions or issues you would like to discuss in class. Bring them with you to class to use as a reference, and then turn them in at the end of each class. You will be expected to participate in class discussion. NOTE: Class participation is not a competitive enterprise. If you prepare your questions and participate in discussion each week, you will get full credit. I will not grade based on the perceived quality or quantity of your answers, although I will mark you off if it's clear you are not prepared for class.

Also, we will be hosting several federal judges throughout the semester. Please come prepared to present yourself well in front of a judge.

CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance in class is required by both the ABA and the Law School. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. Students are allowed three absences during the course of the semester. Students are responsible for ensuring that they are not recorded as absent if they come in late. A student who fails to

meet the attendance requirement will be dropped from the course. The law school's policy on attendance can be found [here](#).

COMPLIANCE WITH UF 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](#).

Note on AI tools (Chat GPT, etc.). In my view, generative AI tools are going to become like spellcheckers. I have no objection to you using such tools to help understand the readings, but you should understand the limitations of these technologies. They may be very helpful to you to get started, but if you leave the actual analysis up to the machine, you should anticipate sounding like an idiot when you least expect it.

INFORMATION ON UF LAW GRADING POLICIES:

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 in place:

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 (Poor)	1.0
B-	2.67	D-	0.67
C+	2.33	E (Failure)	0.0

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

OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS:

UF Law respects students' [observance of religious holidays](#).

- Students, upon prior notification to their instructors, shall be excused from class or other scheduled academic activity to observe a religious holy day of their faith.
- Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered in their absence.
- Students shall not be penalized due to absence from class or other scheduled academic activity because of religious observances.

EXAM DELAYS AND ACCOMMODATIONS:

The law school policy on exam delays and accommodations can be found [here](#).

STATEMENT RELATED TO ACCOMODATIONS 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, available at <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/427635>.

MENTAL HEALTH

The law school has [collected various resources](#) to help students pursue various forms of wellness. I would like to focus attention on the mental health portion of the page:

- The University of Florida operates a Counseling and Wellness Center that provides services and information regarding mental health. [Visit their website for more information.](#)
- The University of Florida's [Disability Resource Center's website](#) can connect you with resources if you need special accommodations or services.
- UF's [U Matter, We Care](#) program offers health & wellness programs as well as programs for students in distress.
- [LawLifeline](#) – Law Lifeline is an online mental health resource designed specifically for law students.
- [Lawyers With Depression](#) – Lawyers With Depression is a website that offers information on dealing with depression.
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Toolkit for Law School Students and Those Who Care About Them](#) – This toolkit from the American Bar Association provides substance abuse and mental health information and resources tailored for law students.

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. Click [here](#) for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and may complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students [here](#).

RECORDINGS OF CLASS

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor and Student Conduct Code.

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. Each weekly class is approximately 2 hours in length, requiring at least **4 hours of preparation**.

UF ACADEMIC POLICIES AND RESOURCES:

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

TENTATIVE 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 the level of difficulty of each section and is subject to change.

Readings will be available on Canvas	
1/23	Some Basics: Chemerinsky (Excerpts from Chapters 1, 7)
1/30	No Class (Make Up 3/5)
2/6	TBA
2/13	Judge Skip Dalton (MDFL)
2/20	Judge Jenn Mascott (3 rd Circuit)
2/27	TBA
3/5-6	Originalism Conference
3/13	TBA
3/27	TBA
4/3	TBA
4/10	TBA
4/17	TBA
4/24	TBA