Course Instructor: Attorney Robin M. Earnest, LL.M.
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Course and location: ENGL 392 (Sections 201 and 301) M/W/F 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. (respectively). Tawes location TBA.

Teaching Assistant: The teaching assistant for this course will be announce at the start of the semester.

Required Text: TBA


I. The Course

The structure this course employs takes the student from law school admissions, through to briefing cases and writing documents in law school. Accordingly, there are five progressive written assignments and one related oral presentation. The course begins with editing exercises and a grammar diagnostic to gauge each individual student's technical writing skill level. This prepares students for their first graded assignment—writing a persuasive personal statement. The second assignment teaching the skills necessary for students to learn to write with precision—a hallmark of good legal writing. In the third assignment students learn to brief a number of first year tort cases; while in the fourth and fifth they write an open and closed legal memoranda. The course concludes with students presenting an oral argument off their closed memorandum. The specific graded assignment which comprise this course are as follows:

1. Personal Statement or Resume/Cover Letter (worth 15% of the final grade). Students will write a statement for a law school program of special interest. This assignment is designed to produce a statement for use in your post-graduation applications and may provide the groundwork for writing a resume or preparing for a job interview.

2. The Definition of a Legal Term Assignment (10%). Because law is rooted in its own specialized language. At some point throughout the semester, each student will be responsible for making a short presentation on the definition of a legal term to the class.

3. Case Briefs (15%) requires students to brief cases from a first year torts' law book; that is, to extract the basic holding of a case and analyze the circumstances and rules that led to the decision. The objective is to show that rules in the common law tradition are connected to actual controversies and that new circumstances give rise to revisions of the rules; and sometimes to their replacement. Sound case briefs provide the cornerstone for compelling legal analysis and argument.

4. The Closed, Single-Issue, Legal Memorandum (15%), requires students to write a single issue memo addressing a particular tort law problem and using legal cases to argue its resolutions. As a "Closed Memorandum," students will be given the core cases upon which their legal problem
revolves so they can focus more fully on the heart of this assignment—legal analysis.

5. The Open, Complex Issues, Memorandum (20%), here students will work in groups of two to write an open legal memo and argue their findings and position in an oral argument at the semester’s end. As an "open" legal work, students will have to do the legal research to find relevant tort case law. Because of the complexity of this legal research based assignment, you will work with a partner on writing this work. This final written work will go through at least two rounds of peer-editing to help with audience appeal and writing proficiency.

6. Oral Argument (10%)—Students, with their partner, will present on the position taken in the final memorandum.

7. Professionalism (15%)—In this context, it includes more than just merely attending class and doing the home/class work. It means taking the opportunity to hone your argumentation skills through participating actively in class discussions. It takes into consideration meaningful contributions you make to discussions and related activities, along with the degree of civility you express in your interactions with your peers (such as through the peer-editing process and the Definition Assignment). Homework, in the form of reading and writing assignments, is also included in this grade. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each class.

II. Course Objectives:

1. Reflective Learning Assignments: In addition to the six, main, graded assignments (above) you must also write three, short, learning outcome reflectives as a part of your homework. The links to the assignment sheet for each of the three reflectives--which are due at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester--are:
   - reflective-learning-homework-assignment-first
   - reflective-learning-homework-assignment-second
   - reflective-learning-homework-assignment-third
   The specific grading criteria for this course is more fully defined on the attached grading criteria.

2. Use of Electronic Devices: We are fortunate to be able to meet in a computer laboratory. However, computer use will be limited in a manner consistent with the growing law school trend of limiting laptop use in the classroom. The Dynamics of A Contemporary Law School Classroom, 39 U, Dayton L. Rev. 201 Cellphones, although allowed, must be turned off at the start of class. All earbuds must be removed by the start of class also. Because of the high potential for viruses to attack, I do not accept assignments emailed to me as an electronic attachment. See New York Times article on computer hacking by email attachments. Accordingly, all main assignments must be turned in, in hard copy, on the day they are due.

3. Plagiarism: Plagiarism— the presentation of the words or work of someone else as your own—is not tolerated in this class. Penalties include an automatic “F” and possible dismissal from the University. In a legal employment setting, plagiarism would likely be considered a firing offense. Students must comply with the University's Code of Academic Integrity as set forth in the following website: www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html

4. For more information, consult the PWP Director's Welcome letter. PWP Director's Welcome Letter
By now you’ve realized that there are many benefits associated with being students of a top research university that strives for national excellence. Some of the responsibilities associated with a celebrated academic community include vigorous evaluation of student work. A significant percentage of the grade you’ll earn this semester will be based upon your out of class writing. I grade on the traditional A-F scale. In accordance with the University of Maryland’s high standards, the following grading rubric will be applied to each written assignment.

A – denotes work that exceeds the standards for the assignment.

These papers surpass all stated requirements in a mature, clear, and well-organized way. They attend specifically and completely to their appropriate audiences, are crafted using mature organizational strategies, and represent an original approach to the assignment in terms of both content and style. The papers must contain evidence of significant time spent on invention, drafting, correcting, rejecting, peer review, and revision. Finally, A papers have very few to no grammar, proof-reading, or spelling mistakes.

B – denotes work that meets the requirements of the assignment.

Generally these papers achieve all the stated goals of an assignment, and use apparent organizational strategies to present the content in a clear way. Audiences are attended to, though more effort could be made to address their specific needs. The content of a B paper is usually well-researched, though often falls on the side of obvious, and may reveal other issues that were not considered. B papers demonstrate that time was spent on the process of writing, though often more effort was needed in either the drafting, revision, or invention stages. B papers occasionally have a miniscule number of (if any) grammar, diction, or spelling issues.

C – denotes work that barely meets/just misses the requirements of the assignment.

These papers usually demonstrate that a student has not quite grasped a fundamental part of the assignment. Audience may either be poorly defined or the paper may not adequately address their needs; content may be too broad or too general; organization may be problematic on a paragraph-level or globally. Some requirements stated on the assignment sheet, in class, or from our text are not applied correctly, or are missing entirely. Often the paper’s problems are exposed by a lack of time spent on the assignment, evidenced through drafts and other supporting materials. Grammar mistakes may take away from the paper’s overall effectiveness.

D/F – denotes work that has fallen short of the requirements of the assignment.

Papers that fail to meet an assignment’s goals are often characterized by missing supporting materials, poor levels of organization, and skipped over requirements. Papers in this category often contain content that is inadequately researched or considered, and
often times do not attend to their audiences’ needs or goals. Writing is often unclear, and the objectives of the assignment are not met. Numerous spelling, grammatical, and proof-reading errors may lead to a paper earning a grade in this category as well. Please note that papers that don’t meet minimum page, or other assignment requirements, may receive a grade reduction.