

FAQs for Adjunct Professors

Lewis & Clark Law School, August 2017

1. How many pages of reading per class is reasonable to assign?

There is no magic page range, but typical assignments run between 20 and 40 pages.

You should consider the type of reading when making assignments. For example, a 50 page assignment that consists of a single law review article could be appropriate, but 50 pages in a casebook, with several cases covering more than one topic, along with numerous notes and hypots, would almost certainly be too much.

Also remember how long it took to read these materials when you were a student and first encountered them (as opposed to how easily and quickly you can read these materials now, as an expert).

2. What are the pros and cons and some things you need to do when deciding to use your own materials vs. a book?

Factors weighing in favor of casebooks and similar course materials: Casebooks are edited to remove extraneous material from cases, which reduces the reading load for students and increases the number of cases you can assign. Good casebooks also have useful notes, questions, and hypotheticals. Those materials can make it much easier to structure class discussion. If most of your readings come from a casebook, you will not have to worry as much about putting together a packet of readings and getting it to students.

Factors weighing against casebooks: They are expensive and often devote considerable space to topics you will not cover. Some casebooks do not receive regular updates or new editions, and that can make a difference if the class deals with cutting edge issues.

Factors weighing in favor of using one's own materials: Custom materials allow you to select exactly what you think students should read. If you use complete, unedited cases and statutes, then students will have to grapple with the kinds of material they will encounter in practice.

Factors weighing against using one's own materials: You will have to do a lot of work editing and organizing the material, on your own. You will need to come up with your own hypotheticals, and do more in class to provide context for the readings and structure for discussion. You may also face copyright issues for some of the materials that you use (although but we can help with copyright permissions, getting them time and sometimes creates an expense for the law school).

If you rely primarily on a casebook, it is also much easier to distribute the materials.

3. *Should I hand out a fully-developed syllabus at the beginning of the class if this is my first time teaching the class?*

It is best to hand out a fully developed syllabus, but it is not necessary. If you are teaching for a class for the first or even second time, it may not make sense to list every assignment, because you may end up falling behind.

At a minimum, you should provide the basic information on the class, which includes how you will evaluate them (see the syllabus template that we've provided for you) as well as the first 3 weeks of assignments. Then, after a week or two, you can provide the next set of assignments. Note, however, that students should get assignments at least a week before class. It is not good for student to receive assignments the day before class. They may have other commitments (such as jobs) that will make it hard for them to complete the assignment that quickly.

4. *How far in advance should I provide materials (if not using a book) to students?*

You should do so as early as possible once you know what those materials will be (see the answer to the previous question, on when to hand out assignments).

It is best to assemble the course materials by the beginning of the semester. Once you have it, you should make it available, unless there is a specific reason for not distributing it (such as it is part of a timed assignment)

You can distribute materials on paper, by email from you or from your faculty legal assistant, or by posting at the class TWEN site (which your faculty legal assistant can help you create). You can also provide students with hyperlinks for some of the materials and ask them to access materials (such as reported court decisions) on their own.

5. *What kinds of policies should I include in my syllabus?*

The sample syllabus, available on the adjunct portion of the faculty web pages, provides a good summary of the topics that you should address on your syllabus.

Important topics include: attendance, availability of podcasts, rules about class participation, computer use in class, and method(s) of evaluation.

The sample syllabus also refers to learning outcomes and expectations. There is a great deal of available material, some of it on the faculty webpage, about learning outcomes. The ABA requires learning outcomes for each class, and it makes sense to include them on the syllabus so that students will know what doctrines and skills they will be learning about over the course of the semester.

Another important topic for a syllabus is your availability outside of class. It is certainly fine for students to understand that you have an actual legal practice located off campus, and that you are not able to respond immediately to emails. At the same time, however,

they may need to contact you (particularly as exams get closer or if you have assigned a project). You should come up with a plan for responding to students – within 24 hours, for example. See also the answer to Question 17.

6. How should I evaluate students? Should I use an exam, or a paper? Is it OK to give quizzes or short assignments during the semester? What about simulations and class participation?

You have a great deal of latitude in choosing how to evaluate students. But, whatever method you choose, you should be able to compare students in a manner that is fair. Thus, each student should take the same exam, or each student should write a paper on topics that allow you to compare performance, or each student should take part in a simulation. It is much more difficult to grade students fairly when they have participated in different methods of evaluation.

You can use final exams, final papers, papers plus exams, and you are free to give quizzes or short papers or assignments during the semester.

If you use quizzes or short papers during the semester, you can obtain information about how students are doing and where they might need more guidance.

With respect to class participation, we strongly recommend that you not make it too large a part of the grade. If you do take it into account, make sure you know what you are looking for. Generic points for volunteering in class are not ideal, but points for an in-class presentation or simulation, or for written responses to discussion questions, make a great deal of sense. Some faculty use class participation as a plus or minus factor rather than as a fixed percentage of the total score for the class.

7. How do exams work?

We use anonymous grading for exams. You will receive exam answers that have a number, not a name. If you assign papers, we encourage you to have students submit papers with their exam number, not name, on the paper. (Sometimes you will know who wrote a paper anyway, because of the topic, or because you reviewed a draft – but it's still best to make it as close to anonymous as possible. You can have students submit papers to your faculty legal assistant or to the registrar's exam email so that you are not tempted to match names with exam numbers.)

The default for exams is for students to take them with Examsoft, which is a program that locks down their laptops and essentially turns them into typewriters. We have preset defaults for how Examsoft will work, but when you prepare and turn in your exam, you will have the opportunity to depart from the defaults. One benefit of Examsoft is that we always have a copy of the exam answer, in case your hard copy goes missing.

You can choose to schedule your exam on a specific date or date range, but most faculty allow students to take exams at the most convenient time for them during the exam period.

You can choose open book versus closed book, but we believe there is some value in requiring students to take closed book or partially closed book exams (you may wish to let them use pertinent statutes or court rules).

Think about complexity and length when you write an exam. Most exams cover too many topics in too much detail. Time pressure is OK, but you don't want an exam that few students are able to finish. You should examine students on topics that cut across the various parts of the class, and you should focus on the most significant aspects of the class. Also, please inform students of your expectations for the exam.

Remember that you are free to use multiple choice or short answer questions in addition to traditional essays.

One of us will be happy to read your draft exam if you have any questions.

8. *What are the WIE and Capstone requirements? If I want to use written products as my evaluation method (instead of exam), which kind of writings could satisfy the WIE or Capstone? Are there guidelines for adjuncts who are supervising papers? Do I have to supervise a Capstone paper if asked or can I decide not to oversee Capstone papers?*

These are the law school's writing requirements for upper division students. The WIE is a writing intensive experience that requires instruction in writing and feedback from the instructor. The capstone typically takes the form of a traditional long research paper, although appellate briefs and other significant writing projects can also qualify.

Some adjunct classes – for example, contract drafting – can satisfy the WIE requirement, but it can be a lot of work for a busy adjunct professor to instruct students on writing skills and also provide significant feedback.

Students may not do a capstone paper with an adjunct professor without prior approval from the Associate Dean of Faculty. Note that supervising a capstone is a great deal of work – and adjunct professors do not receive additional compensation for it.

If a student asks you to supervise a capstone, you should feel free to inform them of the school's policy and offer instead to be a resource rather than a supervisor.

9. *What if I change my mind about the method of evaluation part-way through the term?*

You can change an exam from scheduled to unscheduled exam, but not the other way around.

You should not change evaluation method from what is in the course description unless it is truly necessary AND you have clearly informed the class of the change and the reasons for it. Students look at the evaluation method(s) used in classes when they pick their courses. They also plan their lives, including work commitments, around their reliance on the representations we make in a syllabus.

10. How does the mandatory grading curve work?

The curve is basically a requirement that the grades for the students in a class average somewhere in the B to B+ range (depending on the class). There is no further requirement for distributing grades (e.g., no requirement that 10% be Cs).

Give yourself time to calculate raw scores and convert them to letter grades, particularly if you use multiple sources of evaluations. Note, however, that it is pretty easy to use a spreadsheet to calculate a total raw score and then to curve it. Your legal assistant should be able to help with this.

For classes of fewer than 20 students, however, you probably can figure out a grade distribution fairly easily whether or not you use a spreadsheet.

11. What are class evaluations? When do they happen? How?

The registrar's office administers class evaluations near the end of the semester. Students complete the evaluations in class, online. You do not have to distribute anything to them

We distribute the results of the evaluations, including comments, after grades are turned in.

We encourage you to pay attention to student comments; they can be very useful.

12. What if I have to miss a class?

Making up a class can be very difficult because your students will have widely varying schedules of classes and work.

You can use a webcast, schedule a weekend session, go late on a few subsequent sessions if there is not later class, or assign a project that requires roughly the same amount of work as preparing for and attending a class.

Guest lectures are also a possibility, but they can be hard to arrange and oversee if you are not able to be on campus.

If you know reasonably in advance that you will need to miss a class, you can work with registrar and your faculty legal assistant to manage your absence. If the absence is more sudden, then please do your best to communicate clearly with the class about the absence, the reasons for it, and what they should be doing during that period of time.

13. What are some techniques for stimulating class discussion (and in a large vs. a small class)?

The materials on teaching that appear on the faculty web page provides numerous strategies for enhancing student engagement. Useful methods include: putting students on pre-assigned panels for the semester; making them be "on" for certain classes; giving them

roles to play; breaking them into groups during class to discuss a topic or problem and report back to the rest of the class; and assigning them to be discussion leaders for specific class sessions;

14. Can I provide for student discussion, feedback and assignments via the web? How do we arrange for this?

Yes, you can do this. The TWEN site provides the best platform (and certainly the one that is most familiar to students). We can also assist you in setting up a separate email discussion list.

15. If I want to use guest speakers, what are some effective ways of doing so?

Guest speakers can add a great deal to a class, because they can provide deep expertise and perspective in specific areas. Note that guest speakers do not have to be payers – and some of the best guests are the ones that can introduce students to perspectives developed in entirely different professions.

But you should not overdo the use of guest speakers, and you need to be careful that they do not simply tell war stories. You should present during the session, and you should also assign readings or other materials that will prepare students for the guest's presentation.

So long as you provide enough notice, your faculty legal assistant can arrange parking and handle speaker release form (which is required if the class is being taped).

16. How can I make sure students are getting what they need from class – and effectively plan for feedback during my course?

There are many methods, and once again, the teaching materials on the faculty web pages provide many suggestions. Consider asking students for informal evaluations part way through the semester. Or, have them fill out “exit cards” that allow them to reveal what they “got” from the class that day. You can also use quizzes (graded or ungraded), as well as “clickers” or low-tech equivalents (hands in the air).

17. Do you have any suggestions for making myself available to students outside of class since I am not regularly on campus?

Among the most obvious are email, Skype, open office hours, appointments, and TWEN discussion forums.

We can arrange for you to have space in an office or classroom to meet with students before or after class.

Avoid giving out your phone number, unless you want students to call you.

18. What do I do if a student misses more than one class, particularly in a row, without communicating with me about the absences?

Please notify the Registrar's Office if a student misses classes without communicating with you about the reasons for the absences. The Registrar's Office will check on the student to ascertain the student's health and status. If the Registrar's Office deems it necessary, they will notify the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, who will follow up with you and the student.

19. What do I do if I am concerned about a student and/or a student's behavior seems to change, for the worse, during a semester?

Please email the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and share your concerns. Student well-being is a priority and we will follow up with a student to be sure the student is aware of the available resources and has as much support as possible.