

Torts I
University of North Dakota School of Law
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SYLLABUS

1. **GOALS:** My primary goals for the Torts I and Torts II courses are for you to become literate and conversant in the principal doctrines of tort law and to be able to thoroughly analyze torts problems, applying tort law to facts. In addition, you should gain an understanding how tort law works in practice and how rhetoric, strategy, and values affect the law and the outcomes of cases. Finally, you should gain an appreciation of the theory and philosophy behind the common law of torts and learn something of the historical and jurisdictional context of present-day tort law.
2. **COVERAGE:** This course, Torts I, will cover in-depth only the tort of negligence plus issues of liability arising in the health-care context. Torts II, in the Spring semester, will proceed at a faster pace, building on the foundations laid in the first semester, and will cover intentional torts, strict liability, products liability, economic torts, worker's compensation, defamation, remedies, theoretical perspectives on tort law, and more.
3. **CLASS WEBSITE:** Various materials and links are on the class website. Go to [ericjohnson.com](http://www.ericjohnson.com) and find the link on the upper left. The direct URL is: http://www.ericjohnson.com/courses/torts_1112/
4. **MATERIALS:** There are three required books and one required supply item for this course.

The following book is available for download, for free:

Torts Compendium, Volume One (version 1.0 or higher)
by Eric E. Johnson

Books and supply items to be purchased by you, either online or from the UND bookstore, are:

Understanding Torts, Fourth Edition by John L. Diamond, Lawrence C. Levine, M. Stuart Madden. Published: 2010, Matthew Bender
ISBN-10: 1422476456
ISBN-13: 978-1422476451

Four Trials by John Edwards, with John Auchard.
Published: 2004, Simon & Schuster
ISBN-10: 0743272048
ISBN-13: 978-0743272049

TurningPoint ResponseCard RF
Model name: ResponseCard RF
Manufacturer: Response Innovations
Distributor: Turning Technologies
Item model number: RCRF-01

In lieu of the TurningPoint ResponseCard RF, you may, at your option, purchase the following:

TurningPoint ResponseCard XR
Model name: ResponseCard XR
Manufacturer: Response Innovations
Distributor: Turning Technologies
Item model number: RCXR-01

4-1. Other: Additional materials that will be part of the required reading may be made available via links from the course website, handed out in class, or placed on reserve in the library. In addition, I may assign lessons from the CALI website (the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction) at <http://www.cali.org>, so you should be able to log on to that site.

4-2. Study Aids and Unassigned, Additional Reading: Beyond the required materials, you are encouraged to use any other materials you find helpful or interesting, including, for instance, commercial outlines. CALI exercises that you undertake on your own can often be very rewarding as well. The more you learn about torts, the better. Commercial outlines and other study aids are a great way of gaining a basic understanding of the blackletter law in a subject. That being said, the best time to read such a secondary source is right at the beginning of the semester. That way, you may give yourself a better foundation of knowledge for learning the material presented in the cases and in class. On the other hand, reading a commercial outline *as exam preparation* for this class could be a waste of your time and mental energy. But it's up to you, of course, to judge for yourself. If you do use study aids, I would appreciate your letting me know your experience with them – whether good or bad.

5. ASSIGNED READING: In each class I will announce the reading assignment for the next class meeting. I take care to craft reading assignments so that they are not unduly burdensome. In return, I ask that you do the reading conscientiously. How should you tackle the reading? You could, of course, brief the cases, use a highlighter, make margin notes, or do any of a number of other things. And, of course, you should do what works for you. But the most important thing is to read the material with interest. “With interest” means you should be having thoughts going through your head such as, “Mmmm, interesting!” “Ah ha! That makes sense!” or “What is wrong with this judge?!?!?”

One way to approach the reading, suggested by Professor Scott Brewer, is to be aware of “the literary drama of the law,” that is, “be alert to the narratives of the hopes, aims, fears, aspirations and frustrations of the litigants ...” Behind every case there is a real story. The more you allow yourself to be absorbed into that story, the more you will get out of the case.

Also, you should attempt to put yourself in the position of the judge. Force yourself to confront the challenge of trying to interpret the law in a way that is fair,

unbiased, beneficial for society, and true to statute and precedent. Using this kind of viewpoint, you are bound to get something extra out of every case you read.

6. CLICKERS: You will be expected to bring to each class your radio-frequency audience-response peripheral, the ResponseCard or “clicker.” The clicker will be used for taking attendance and for in-class participation. Have it out and ready at the beginning of class.

6-1. You must register your clicker using an online software interface called Blackboard. It is only by registering your clicker that you can be counted as attending class and participating via your clicker. To register your clicker, follow these steps: (1) Logon to Blackboard. (2) Follow the link to course (LAW 110 Torts I). (3) Click on “Course Tools,” which is in the tool box on the left-hand side of the page. (4) Click on “TurningPoint Registration Tool.” (5) Input your response device ID, found on the clicker. (6) Press “submit.”

6-2. Technical support questions regarding the clickers, including registration of them, should be directed to information-technology staff.

6-3. Please take special note: Only the student registered to a clicker may use that clicker. Bringing a clicker to class belonging to an absent student and using it for that student would constitute academic dishonesty. As such, it is punishable by the School of Law and University administrations, and reportable to state bar committees making moral-character determinations of fitness to practice law.

7. GRADING:

7-1. Your grade will primarily be based on your exam performance. The exam is discussed later in this syllabus.

7-2. Each exam will be “blind graded” so that I will not know the identity of the student as I am grading his or her exam. Take note: You may not waive anonymity. Self-identification on the exam or otherwise acting to destroy anonymity during the exam or afterwards will, at a minimum, result in a lower grade, and may result in disciplinary action.

7-3. Class participation will also count in calculating your grade. I may do this in one of a couple of ways. I may add or subtract from some students’ exam grades on a non-blind, discretionary basis, with the result forming your grade for the course. Alternatively, I may create a class-participation grading component on a non-blind discretionary basis, and then have that component form a small portion, not exceeding approximately 10 percent, of the total grade for the course. Regardless of the method I use for factoring in class participation, I anticipate that some students’ grades will be increased upward and others’ may end up being adjusted downward, with most students’ grades probably remaining unchanged.

7-4. Reasons for a positive effect of class participation on the overall course grade may include habitual preparedness and engagement, volunteering in discussions, advance volunteering for questions, and excellence in contributions.

7-5. Reasons for a negative effect of class participation on the overall course grade may include exhibiting poor performance in the classroom, excessive absence, tardiness, and being unprepared for class.

7-6. Please keep in mind that, despite the fact that class participation is graded, you should not worry unduly about the quality of your verbal responses in class discussion. As long as you do the reading and give it honest effort when speaking in class, you will not be marked down. Law school, like all other educational environments, is a place to learn, and that necessarily implies that it is a place to fumble and make mistakes. I do not ask questions or conduct discussion as a way of judging you; I do it as a way of challenging you and helping everyone to learn. So put aside your fears and engage in the conversation. Once you are a full-fledged lawyer, having a confident voice under pressure will be indispensable. Now is the time to find that voice. Be bold.

7-7. Note that I plan to do at least one quiz, using fill-in-the-bubble sheets, near the beginning of the semester, after we have done the blackletter review. Students' quiz performance will figure into class-participation grading and will, therefore, be only a very minor factor in any student's overall grade.

8. COMMUNICATIONS AND OFFICE HOURS:

8-1. My e-mail address is ejohnson@law.und.edu. Please note that I do not answer or discuss substantive questions through e-mail. Moreover, perhaps unlike many students, I do not read e-mail on an hour-by-hour or even day-by-day basis. I may not respond at all to certain e-mailed questions, including those which ask for information that is clearly answered in this syllabus. If you miss class, please ask other students for information you may have missed, such as reading assignments. Any e-mail communications you do have with me should be prepared in a professional manner, including the use of a meaningful subject line.

8-2. If you have any questions about the exam, please ask them in open class. In the aims of fairness, I do not discuss the exam on an *ex parte* basis.

8-3. My office is No. 304. Open office hours are posted on ericejohnson.com. If you would like to speak with me and you cannot come by office hours, I am very happy to arrange for another time to talk with you. Please make an appointment by sending me an e-mail with some suggested times.

8-4. At least once during the year, I hope you will come by office hours and introduce yourself, even if you have no questions and nothing to discuss. That's not a requirement, just a request. But it would be nice to be able to chat informally with everyone at least once.

9. IN THE CLASSROOM:

9-1. Do not eat in class. Do not chew gum audibly or with your mouth open. Refrain from inappropriate use of laptops. Do nothing that might disrupt class or distract your fellow students.

9-2. Your participation in classroom discussion should be meaningful and appropriate. Raise your hand to have a say in discussion when you have a comment that will contribute to the experience of the class as a whole, or when you have a question, the clarification of which will benefit the entire class. Your classroom participation should be appropriate – not too little, not too much. Everybody knows there are students who raise their hand too often and take up too much of the class's time. All of

us also know that there are people who sit passively and rarely, if ever, contribute to classroom discussion. Take care that you do not fall into either extreme.

9-3. I am grateful for students to volunteer in advance for class discussion. If you volunteer in advance, I'll assume that you are game for particularly challenging questions. If you would like to volunteer in advance for a particular class, e-mail me at least a half-hour before class begins with the subject line "Torts Volunteer for [MM]-[DD]". I can't guarantee that I will call on you in such an event, but I will appreciate your offer nonetheless. If you would like to volunteer in advance for the entire semester, please send me an e-mail with the subject line "Torts Volunteer for Semester". If you do that, you can then opt-out on a day-by-day basis if needed.

9-4. Even if you don't volunteer in advance, I'll expect you to be ready to participate meaningfully if called on. If you cannot participate fully for a particular class, for whatever reason (and there's no need to tell me why), please tell me before class, in person, so that I can avoid calling on you. Reasonable requests of this sort are entirely understandable and will not adversely affect your grade.

9-5. Be aware that I plan to make an audio recording of each class meeting. These recordings are for my use, and, unfortunately, I will not be making them available during the semester for absent students. No one is permitted to make an audio or video recording of class without my express, written permission.

10. ABSENCES AND TARDINESS:

10-1. I view attendance in class as an essential component of the educational experience, and, therefore, superior performance on an examination cannot make up for insufficient attendance. Deficient attendance may result in a lower class-participation grade. Further, I reserve the right to not award a passing grade for a student with a seriously deficient record of timely attendance.

10-2. That being said, an occasional absence or late arrival will not adversely affect your grade at all. But I do appreciate it if you e-mail me beforehand. If you will be late or absent, please let me know by e-mailing me before class, and please make sure you use this special e-mail address: attendance@eejlaw.com. Please make sure the subject line of your e-mail is "Torts". Note that I will likely not read any such attendance e-mails until after all classes conclude. My practice is to review attendance e-mails at the end of the semester when reviewing attendance records and evaluating class-participation for grading. Please note that there is no need to tell me why you will be absent or late.

10-3. Also, if you are late, make sure you come up to me after class so that I can note your attendance. Otherwise, you may be counted as absent.

10-4. If you are concerned about your attendance record, please talk to me. Of course, none of the foregoing supersedes the School of Law's or the University's policies.

11. WYPADKI: The traditional method of exam preparation for students involves making an outline of the course. Because traditional legal pedagogy eschews using a textbook in lieu of a casebook, the outline fulfills the place of a textbook – providing a written explanation of the subject matter.

11-1. With the goal of saving time by reducing duplicative labor, I am providing the class with a chance to create an outline as a community, which we'll call a "wypadki."

11-2. The wypadki will be accessible through the UND Blackboard system. Software-wise, the wypadki consists of a wiki, similar to Wikipedia. Only members of the class will be able to contribute to the wypadki, and each addition, edit, and deletion will be tagged with the name of the contributing class member. I intend to allow students broad latitude in creating the wypadki, though I will step in and provide guidance and restrictions if necessary. On or after a certain announced date at the end of the semester, before the exam, I will lock the wypadki. I will then have a chance to review and alter it before leaving it in a final version. Please note that I reserve the right to make any changes, deletions, and additions I deem appropriate, in my sole discretion, before or after locking the wypadki. The final version will be made available for download sometime before the exam, and copies will be printed and distributed to all students during the exam for use as a reference in drafting an examination answer.

11-3. In making a contribution to the wypadki, you are certifying that the material you add is original and does not include the copyrighted content of others, or otherwise is somehow legally permitted to be contributed. Also, by contributing, you are agreeing that the wypadki and any of your contributions to it may be used, copied, or changed by your fellow students for this course and by others for any education- or learning-related endeavor approved by me or my designee. Although the Blackboard site is not accessible to persons not enrolled in the class, the resulting wypadki document will be made publicly available online.

11-4. Your contributions to the wypadki must respect intellectual property law. Do not add copyrighted material (regardless of licensing); limit your contributions to your own originally authored material and material in the public domain, which includes court-issued opinions. Notwithstanding the foregoing, you may incorporate material from other wypadkis constructed by prior classes of mine as well as any handouts and slides from class, unless I specify otherwise.

11-5. In the past, some users have had technical problems with regard to the wypadki. Thus, you are well advised to attempt access early in the semester, so that you have time to work out any problems you may encounter. If you wait until too late in the semester to try logging on, you may find yourself in a situation where you cannot make any contributions. For technical problems, please contact the law school's or university's information technology staff.

12. EXAMINATION:

12-1. I will give a final exam requiring written answers. You will have the choice of typing or handwriting your response.

12-2. The exam will consist of one or more open-ended questions calling for written essay responses to one or more hypothetical fact patterns. I reserve the right, as well, to include directed response or "short answer" questions. Be assured that I will not use any essay questions that have been used on any other prior exam. As noted above, I will not discuss the exam on an *ex parte* basis; any questions about the exam must be asked in open class.

12-3. You will be allowed to bring with you, into the exam, and to reference during the exam, a “reference sheet,” consisting of a single 8.5-inch-by-11-inch sheet of paper, upon which you may write or print any information you wish, including on both sides. If you have concerns about receiving a disability accommodation with regard to the reference sheet, please contact the Dean of Students office. In addition to the reference sheet, you will be given a paper printout of the Torts Wypadki to reference during the exam. Other than the wypadki and the reference sheet, no other informational or reference materials will be permitted, except as otherwise permitted by the Dean of Students office as an accommodation.

12-4. My old exams in Torts should be quite useful to you in studying for and thinking about the exam. You will find them in my Exam Archive, which is publicly accessible online. You will find a link on [ericejohnson.com](http://www.eejlaw.com/exam_archive.html) (or use the direct URL: http://www.eejlaw.com/exam_archive.html). Later in the semester I will have more to say about the exam and how I recommend preparing.

13. COURSE ORGANIZATION: The planned organization of the Torts I course is below. The structure is subject to minor adjustment.

PART I: Preliminaries

- Module 1:** Models of Tort Law and the Context of Torts
- Module 2:** Overview of Negligence, Health Care Liability and other Torts
- Module 3:** Procedural Context for Torts
- Module 4:** Example of a Tort Lawsuit: *Walter v. Wal-Mart*

PART II: The Prima Facie Case for Negligence

SUBPART A: The Duty Element

- Module 5:** Foreseeability
- Module 6:** Failure to Act
- Module 7:** Land Owners & Occupiers

SUBPART B: The Breach Element

- Module 8:** Determining Breach, in General
- Module 9:** Res Ipsa Loquitor
- Module 10:** The Reasonable-Person Standard of Care
- Module 11:** Negligence Per Se
- Module 12:** Custom and the Negligence Calculus

SUBPART C: The Actual-Causation Element

- Module 13:** Proof and Preponderance
- Module 14:** Multiplicity

SUBPART D: The Proximate-Causation Element

- Module 15:** The Place of Proximate Causation
- Module 16:** Various Tests for Proximate Causation

SUBPART E: The Damages Element

- Module 17:** Existence of Damages

PART III: Defenses to Negligence

Module 18: Contributory and Comparative Negligence

Module 19: Implied Assumption of Risk

Module 20: Waiver and Express Assumption of Risk

PART IV: Liability Relating to Medical Care

Module 21: Medical Malpractice / Professional Negligence

Module 22: Informed Consent

Module 23: Medical Battery

Module 24: ERISA Pre-Emption

14. FEEDBACK: If you have feedback for me – suggestions, ideas, commendations, or criticisms – please do not hesitate to tell me in person or by e-mail. If sending something to me anonymously would make you feel more comfortable, then I invite you to do just that.

I hope you enjoy the course!

– EEJ