BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS
SPRING 2017
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SUBJECT INTRODUCTION / COURSE OVERVIEW

The subject of many law school courses is self-evident. Criminal law is obviously needed to impose some sort of order on society. Similarly, tax laws exist to raise revenue for the government. One might observe that business law regulates business, but that only leads one to ask, “Why do we have businesses?” The answer to that question is not as obvious as it might first appear.

Nearly seventy years ago, Nobel laureate Ronald Coase asked the same question. Almost any economic activity organized within a firm alternatively could occur through market transactions. Given that markets efficiently allocate scarce resources, why is some economic activity instead directed by managerial discretion?

At the time Coase posed this question, it was a stark one. The Russian Revolution was not yet twenty years into the past, and communism presented itself as an alternative to the capitalist systems of the western countries. One of communism’s most distinguishing characteristics remains the government’s central planning of economic activity. Paradoxically, much central planning happens within a capitalist system. Managers dictate which projects within a firm get funded, which products to make, how much to pay workers, and so forth. If markets are so superior, why does so much central planning happen within a capitalist system?

Coase hypothesized that, although managerial discretion can be inefficient and costly, the transaction costs of the marketplace often are even costlier. This fundamental insight changed the way we think about the role of business firms within an economic system. The Business Organizations course examines the organization of economic activity within a business firm, and Coase teaches us that the whole point of business firms is to economize on the transaction (and other) costs that otherwise would accompany economic activity. To borrow Professor Ronald Gilson’s phrase, the role of the attorney is to be a “transaction cost engineer,” structuring economic activity to minimize the transaction costs to the parties.

Yeah, But What Exactly Do We Study? Doctrinally, the Business Organizations course covers the basic principles of law applicable to agency relationships, partnerships, corporations, and limited liability companies. The bulk of the semester is spent on the law governing relationships among the various constituents of corporations (directors,
shareholders, management, labor, lenders, etc.). Business Organizations serves as the law school’s introduction not only to business law but also to business generally. Some attention will be given to introducing basic business concepts and financial theory.

ASSIGNMENTS & TEXTS

I will give specific reading assignments every day. For the most part, they will come from the following required texts:

**Casebook:** WILLIAM A. KLEIN, J. MARK RAMSEYER, & STEPHEN M. BAINBRIDGE, BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS: AGENCY, PARTNERSHIPS, AND CORPORATIONS (9th ed. 2015).

**Statute Book:** BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS: AGENCY, PARTNERSHIPS, AND CORPORATIONS—STATUTES AND RULES (2016 ed.)

In addition to the assigned reading, which I expect everyone to read prior to class, I recommend that you consult the following supplemental sources:

For agency and partnership topics:


For corporations topics:

STEPHEN M. BAINBRIDGE, CORPORATE LAW (2d ed. 2008).

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We will endeavor to cover the following (ambitious!) list of topics:¹

I. Introduction – The Nature of the Firm; the Corporate Lawyer as “Transaction Cost Engineer” (Handout – excerpts from F.A. Hayek and R.H. Coase)

II. Agency

A. **Who is an agent?:** pp. 1-13

B. **Principal liability for agent’s torts (respondeat superior):** pp. 31-38, 48-55, 59-63

¹ Note that, with the exception of provisions of the Uniform Partnership Acts, I have not included specific provisions from the Statutory Supplement (i.e., Restatement sections, provisions from corporate codes and the securities laws). I will assign those provisions in class
C. Principal liability on contracts executed by agent: pp. 12-14, 18-28

D. Agent’s liability on principal’s contracts: pp. 28-31


III. Partnerships

A. Fundamentals of partnership: handout; UPA (1914) §§ 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 18
   1. Who is a partner?
   2. Partners’ rights and duties vis-à-vis each other
   3. Partners’ rights and duties vis-à-vis third parties

B. Partnership by estoppel: pp. 87-89, UPA § 16

C. Fiduciary duties of partners: pp. 89-96, 101-07

D. Expulsion of a partner: pp. 108-13; UPA §§ 31, 38

E. Partnership property: pp. 113-16; UPA §§ 8, 24-28

F. Management rights of partners: handout; UPA §§ 9, 18; pp. 121-25

G. Partnership dissolution: UPA §§ 29, 30-42; pp. 152-57

H. Limited partnerships, LLPs, LLLPs: pp. 157-59

IV. Corporations

A. Promoters and the corporate entity: pp. 169-78

B. The corporate entity and limited liability: pp. 178-96

C. The role and purpose of corporations: pp. 242-58

D. Corporate governance
   1. Fiduciary duty of care / business judgment rule
a. **Affirmative decision-making**: pp. 299-316

b. **Oversight**: pp. 316-22; handout (*Caremark*)

2. **Fiduciary duty of loyalty**
   
a. **Affirmative decision-making**:
      
      (i) **Basic principle**: pp. 322-27
      
      (ii) **Procedural sanitation**: pp. 351-54
      
      (iii) **Corporate opportunities**: pp. 332-37; handout on ALI Principals of Corporate Governance
      
      (iv) **Loyalty duties of controlling shareholders**: pp. 342-51

b. **Oversight & “Good Faith”**: pp. 358-81

E. **Shareholder lawsuits (derivative and direct)**:
   
   1. **Derivative suits and the demand requirement**: pp. 208-15
   
   2. **Board control over lawsuits when demand is excused (special litigation committees)**: pp. 226-42
   
   3. **Director and officer indemnification and insurance**: pp. 207-07, 489-501

F. **Problems of control**:

   1. **Proxy fights and shareholder voting**: pp. 503-13
   
   2. **Control in closely held corporations**: pp. 563-91

V. **Limited Liability Companies**: pages TBA
ATTENDANCE AND CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

Attendance – I will send around an attendance sheet at the beginning of every regularly scheduled class. (Attendance will not be taken at makeup classes.) If you miss class more than seven times during the semester, you will be dropped from the course. This is a strict liability policy; there will be no excused absences. In essence, you may miss class seven times for any reason whatsoever. If you miss class eight times, you will be dropped even if the eighth absence was for a good reason.

I may adjust a student’s grade downward if he or she misses more than five classes.

Class participation – I expect that you will do the reading assignment each day and be prepared to discuss it in class. I will “cold call” on students to discuss the reading. When a student is called on and is unprepared, the entire class suffers. Accordingly, if you have not done the reading, please let me know in advance of class that you would like to take a “pass” for the day. You may avail yourself of this option twice without it affecting your grade. Thereafter, or if you are unprepared when called upon, you risk being penalized for deficient classroom performance. In general, I reserve the right to reward exceptional class participation or penalize poor or inappropriate class participation in determining the final grade.

OFFICE HOURS

I maintain an “open door” office policy, which means that you may come by my office (Room 316) any time to discuss questions concerning the course material. I trust you’ll be understanding if I’m busy at the moment and suggest that we get together later.

I am frequently out of the office, so feel free to call or email me to set up a pre-arranged meeting time. You’re always welcome to call or text my mobile number, 773.580.7123. I turn the phone off when I don’t want to be disturbed.

GRADING

The grade for this class will be based on a student’s examination grade, potentially adjusted for attendance and class participation, as noted. The examination will be a mix of multiple choice questions and “issue spotter” essay questions. It will be administered on a “limited open book” basis, meaning that you may bring with you your casebook and statute book, your class notes, any handouts I have given you, and any outline that you

2 Please note that I will not penalize you for getting an answer wrong, provided that you made a mistake despite having done the reading. All of us make occasional mistakes when asked to think on our feet. I have found that one of the toughest parts of being a lawyer is learning to give an answer (oral or written) in the face of uncertainty. One of the goals of Socratic method is to help you overcome the fear of speaking when you’re uncertain, so I will not penalize good faith efforts that prove unsuccessful. That said, you may be penalized if it is apparent that your wrong answer is the result of poor preparation.
have prepared in whole or in part. You may not bring with you commercial materials or an outline prepared entirely by someone else.

**INFORMATION REGARDING DISABILITIES**

If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me immediately. Please see me privately after class, contact me via email (lambertt@missouri.edu) or telephone (773.580.7123), or come by my office (Room 316). Alternatively, you may contact Associate Dean S. David Mitchell to discuss appropriate accommodations.