

Contracts I: Fall 2023

Thursdays 950-1150 am

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First Assignment

The assignment for the first class is the readings for Class 1 below.

The Course

Contracts I is the first part of a two-part course, with Contracts II to follow in the Spring Term. The two courses are separate, with different exams and different subject matters. Contracts I examines introductory problems of contract law. What is the reason for enforcing contracts? How are contracts formed? Contracts II asks when contracts properly formed should not be enforced, what their content is if they're enforceable and what remedies are available on breach.

Contracts is a foundational common law course, in which you'll study the principles that inform many or most of the courses you'll take during your three years of law school. To what extent should the law mimic the bargains to which the parties have agreed, or to which they would have agreed had they thought about it? To what extent should the law refuse to do so, and what is the justification for abandoning the parties' choices, real or implicit?

Your course materials are Robert E. Scott and Jody S. Kraus, *Contract Law and Theory* (6th ed., 2023) ("Scott"); and the statutory supplement, Tracey E. George and Russell Korobkin, *Selections from the Restatement (Second) Contracts and Uniform Commercial Code for First Year Contracts*. They've been ordered to the bookstore.

The first 145 pages of the Scott & Kraus casebook offer an overview of all of contract law, with the same issues repeated in the remainder of the book. As students find this more than a little confusing, we'll depart from the casebook's approach and integrate material from the first 145 pages into the body of the syllabus, like a normal casebook. We'll also depart from the casebook's idiosyncratic placement of the consideration

doctrine before offer and acceptance. In both of these ways, we *will* be following the structure of a traditional contracts law course.

In one respect we'll adopt the casebook's approach, however, for we'll begin the course with a class on a well-known case (*Williams v. Walker-Thomas*) at the beginning of the casebook. It asks what justice means, in the context of contract law.

We'll follow this up with a class on why contracts should be enforced, in the absence of vitiating factors such as fraud or duress. This will serve as an introduction to the economic way of thinking about contracts and will integrate material you'll see in other courses in the law school. I won't assume any prior knowledge of economics.

After class 2, we'll turn to standard questions of contract law, beginning with the requirements for formation of a contract: Offer and Acceptance, Consideration and the Statute of Frauds. The first seven classes should be seen as a unit, and a mid-term exam will follow. The remaining classes deal with special problems that arise in long-term contracts.

Administrative Matters

The class will be an extended conversation about a fundamental institution of private ordering. For the most part, the problems we'll encounter can be answered by the application of common sense—a proposition I'll test by asking you to think about the contours of contract law before and during class. Each student is expected to be prepared for every class, and to be ready, willing and able to answer any questions regarding the assigned reading material.

When you speak in class, address yourself to the entire class. If you're in the front row and whisper, people at the back won't hear you. Neither will I, for that matter. You are aspiring members of a profession whose members must speak out, if they are to be successful. We aren't meant to be potted plants.

Once each year a student tells me he's erased a file—which is why I recommend saving files on the cloud, through programs such as Dropbox.

I use PowerPoint and will post my slides on my web site after each class. You'll find them at <http://buckleymix.com> (“blog”), under “Contracts I.” These may be downloaded and saved by you, but not shared with anyone outside of this class.

PowerPoint has its pluses and minuses. It's useful to highlight a point, and invaluable when illustrating a technical issue in economics. That said, it can lull students into a state of passivity. Don't let that happen. For my part I'll try to avoid that by calling on you to answer questions. For your part, you should want to discuss ideas and cases in class. It's the only way to learn.

You are not permitted to tape our classes or record them by any electronic means.

My office is on the 4th Floor, and my phone number is 703-993-8028. I encourage you to contact me at fbuckley@gmu.edu. If you anticipate that you will be stopping by my office, please drop me an email or see me after class. On most Thursdays I'll be in my office till 400 pm, apart from lunch, and you can drop by any time.

My experience is that, if you want to reach me, you'll want to do so pronto without waiting for the next scheduled office hour. In that case, you'll find it more convenient to email me any time with a question or to schedule the meeting yourself.

Grading and Exam

There will be a one-hour mid-term exam during class time on the eighth week.

The mid-term and final exams will be Open Code, which means that you can bring your statutory supplement into the exam room. You will be permitted to annotate it with any notes that you make in it yourself and also add post-it notes, but you may not add any pages to it. You will not be permitted to bring in any other materials, such as the casebook.

For the final grade I reserve the right to increase a student's grade *upward* by one mark (e.g., B+ to A-) on the basis of exemplary class participation.

Syllabus

Contracts I (Fall 2021)

Class	Questions	Assignments
Aug. 24	<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Why do we study law from a casebook, and not a rule book?</p> <p>What remedy did Walker-Thomas seek? What is a meeting of the minds? Did Mrs. Williams have meaningful choices? Is secured lending per se troubling? If not, what's the problem here? What's the difference between procedural and substantive unconscionability?</p> <p>Should Aristotle's idea of distributive justice inform the contours of contract law? What did he mean by corrective justice, and how would it apply in contract law? What body of law should deal with distributive concerns? How does the ex ante perspective differ from the ex post one, and what does each have to say about <i>Walker-Thomas</i>?</p>	<p>Scott 3-7</p> <p>Watch some "Caught in Providence" videos on YouTube.</p> <p>Scott, 61-75</p> <p>UCC §§ 2-302</p> <p>Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, at blog</p>
Aug. 31	<p><i>Why Enforce Contracts?</i></p>	

	<p>How does the Prisoner’s Dilemma Game explain the trust problem in promising?</p> <p>What is a “bare promise” and why did Hobbes think it isn’t credible? In what sense was his “Leviathan” a solution to the credible commitment problem? Entering into an enforceable contract can be seen as a method of tying one’s hands and binding oneself to perform.</p> <p>What are bargaining gains, from an economic perspective? What costs are associated with the non-enforcement of contracts? How do you understand detrimental and beneficial reliance?</p>	<p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAcVrcrqhn8&feature=fvwrel</p> <p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED9gaAb2BEw&feature=related</p> <p>Garrett Hardin, The Tragedy of the Commons, at blog</p> <p>Hobbes, at blog</p> <p>Printing and Numerical Registering Co. v. Sampson, at blog</p> <p>Buckley, Just Exchange 38-41, at blog</p> <p>Buckley, Just Exchange, at 138-41 (at top), at blog</p> <p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFQ5LC5LK4w&feature=related</p> <p>Scott 27-34.</p> <p>While the Casebook describes a possible autonomy (i.e., non-economic) explanation for the enforcement of promises, I don’t buy it. I don’t propose to discuss this in class, however, unless someone raises it. If you do so, please first read Hume, Treatise (Of the Obligation of Promises), at blog</p>
Sept. 7	<p><i>Quasi-Contract</i></p> <p>How doe quasi-contract differ from contract law? Why was quasi-contractual recovery denied in Bailey v. West? What is an “officious volunteer”? Quasi-</p>	<p>Scott 7-16</p> <p>Restatement §§ 19, 86</p>

	<p>contract is also known as restitution or unjust enrichment.</p> <p>Offers</p> <p>What is privity of contract? What are third party beneficiaries? When is a statement that one proposes to do x in the future not a promise to do x? What is the objective standard of promising? Suppose that Lucy knew that Zehmer had acted in jest?</p>	<p>Restatement §§ 1-5, 302, 16, 20</p> <p>Scott 16-27</p>
Sept. 14	<p>Offer and Acceptance</p> <p>What is a coordination game? What are false positives and false negatives?</p> <p>What constitutes an offer and acceptance? In what sense are the rules of offer and acceptance like a coordination game? What is the difference between an offer and an “invitation to treat”? What’s the difference between an offer and a “mere puff”? What does “simplex commendatio non obligat” mean? What is an offer to the public?</p> <p>What constitutes an acceptance? What is a “merger clause”? What is an “agreement to agree”? What is the Leval test? Must an acceptance be communicated?</p>	<p>Coordination Games, at blog</p> <p>Scott 225-39</p> <p>Carlill v. Carbolic Smoke Ball, at blog</p> <p>Scott 239-57</p> <p>Restatement §§ 21-24, 50, 30, 35-36, 41-42, 56, 63-65, 67</p>
Sept 21	<p>Revocation, Counter-offer and Formation under the UCC</p> <p>Why is there a legal difference between contracts <i>inter praesentes</i> and contracts <i>inter absentes</i>? Just how would you express the</p>	<p>Scott 257-59, 271-74</p> <p>Restatement §§ 40, 69, 45, 39, 59, 38, 61</p>

	<p>“mailbox rule”? When should an offeror be permitted to withdraw an offer? When should an offeree be permitted to withdraw an acceptance? When might silence constitute acceptance? Is there a special problem when unilateral contracts are revoked? What is a counter-offer and what are the “mirror image rule” and the “last shot” doctrines? What’s the difference between a counter-offer and simple dickering?</p> <p>What is the “Battle of the Forms” and how do common law principles and the UCC deal with it? How does UCC § 2-207 change the common law of offer and acceptance?</p>	<p>UCC § 2-207</p> <p>Scott 274-306</p>
<p>Sept. 28</p>	<p><i>Consideration</i></p> <p>What is the consideration doctrine and what purpose does it serve? Should the parties be permitted to bargain around the doctrine? What is the past consideration doctrine?</p> <p>Suppose I want to give you my junk heap of a car—how might I do so?</p> <p>Does the promisor’s motive matter? What does mutuality of obligations mean?</p> <p>Market economies are a creature of contract law enforcement. Is there such a thing as a “gift economy,” which is excluded by the doctrine of consideration?</p>	<p>Scott 50-61, 147-70</p> <p>Restatement § 17, 21, 71-74, 79, 81-87</p> <p>UCC §§ 2-203, 2-206, 2-102, 2-104(1), 2-105(1),</p> <p>Gifts at law</p> <p>Williams v. Carwardine, at https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff73660d03e7f57ea9b71</p> <p>The Gift</p>

Oct. 5	<p><i>Statute of Frauds</i></p> <p>What purpose does the Statute serve? What constitutes a note or memorandum in writing? What is part performance?</p>	<p>Scott 563-84</p> <p>Rest. §§ 110-12, 124, 125, 129-132, 134, 136, 139, 90, 145</p>
Oct. 12	Mid-term exam in class	
Oct. 19	<p><i>Coase and Contractarianism</i></p> <p>To what extent should other bodies of the law be dealt with by private contracting? Should the parties be permitted to bargain for the tort, corporate, securities regulation and bankruptcy regime they want?</p> <p><i>Promissory Estoppel</i></p> <p>What is promissory estoppel? Does it represent a challenge to contract law? Can you explain why promissory estoppel should ground liability? Does liability sound in promising or in tort?</p> <p>Should charitable subscriptions be treated differently? What about family promises, employment contracts and promises to insure? What makes each different?</p>	<p>Coase Theorem, at blog</p> <p>Paul Johnson, "Transaction Costs,"</p> <p>Scott 170-213</p> <p>Restatement §§ 90</p>
Oct. 26	<p><i>The Material Benefits Rule</i></p> <p>Explain why the material benefits rule can be seen as an application of quasi-contract liability. What does the promise add? Why is it a "material" benefits rule? How does the "double trust" problem arise?</p>	<p>Scott 214-21</p> <p>Restatement § 86</p>

	<p><i>Irrevocable Offers</i></p> <p>What purposes might option contracts serve when supported by consideration? In what circumstances should a promise unsupported by consideration be found irrevocable? What's so special about construction contracts? Might similar problems arise in a non-construction context?</p> <p>What's the rationale for the UCC firm offer rule?</p> <p><i>Relational Contracts and Preliminary Agreements</i></p> <p>How are credible commitment problems lessened when the prisoners dilemma game is iterated (i.e., repeated) by the parties? What are relational contracts and why, if at all, should they be treated differently from other contracts? When should preliminary agreements be enforced? When should an agreement not be enforced because it is indefinite?</p>	<p>Scott 259-71</p> <p>Restatement §§ 25, 45, 54, 62, 87</p> <p>UCC § 2-205</p> <p>Scott 309-17</p> <p>Restatement §§ 33, 21, 26-27, 90</p> <p><i>Suggested:</i> Robert Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation, at http://www-ee.stanford.edu/~hellman/Breakthrough/book/pdfs/axelrod.pdf</p>
Nov. 2	<p><i>Post-contractual Opportunism</i></p> <p>What is asset specificity? Bilateral monopoly? Post-contractual opportunism? How might you expect to find these issues in franchise contracts? How does Article II of the UCC deal with the problem?</p> <p><i>Risk, Uncertainty, Indefiniteness</i></p>	<p>Scott 317-30</p> <p><i>Suggested:</i> Timothy J. Muris, Opportunistic Behavior in the Law of Contracts, 65 Minn. L. Rev. 521 (1980-81)</p>

	<p>What is a complete contingent contract? What's the difference between risk and uncertainty? How might contract draftsmen react to uncertainty? How should a court handle "agreements to agree" and memorandums of understanding?</p> <p><i>Good Faith Norms</i></p> <p>Why did Cara want out in Brown v. Cara? Where is 100 Jay St.?</p>	<p>Risk vs. Uncertainty, at http://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2010/06/risk-versus-uncertainty.html</p> <p>Scott 34-50, 330-36</p> <p>Restatement §§ 21, 27, 33-34, 204</p> <p>UCC §§ 1-102, 1-201(20), 1-304, 2-103(1)(b), 2-204, 2-208, 2-305, 2-308, 2-309</p> <p>Scott 337-47</p>
Nov. 9	<p><i>Requirements and Output Contracts</i></p> <p>What are output and requirement contracts? Why are courts concerned about the quantity of goods to be provided? What does good faith mean here? Is there a good faith issue when prices go down as well as up? How is Feld v. Levy like Empire Gas?</p> <p><i>Distributorships</i></p> <p>What was the economic rationale for finding a binding contract in Wood v. Duff-Gordon?</p>	<p>Scott 347-73</p> <p>UCC § 2-306</p> <p>Scott 373-88</p> <p>UCC § 2-306(2)</p> <p>Agency Costs, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agency_cost</p>
Nov. 16	<p><i>Termination Clauses and Non-competes</i></p>	

	<p>What duties should be implied in distributorship agreements? What are agency costs and how might they arise in a distributorship or franchise agreement? Can you explain why non-competes should sometimes (or possibly always) be struck down?</p> <p><i>Contract Modification</i></p> <p>Why might the parties agree to a “no-modification” clause?</p>	<p>Scott 388-416</p> <p>Scott 416-34</p> <p>Restatement §§ 72, 73, 86, 89, 175, 176</p> <p>UCC §§ 2-209, 1-304</p>
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