In Wills, Trusts, and Estates: The Essentials (“Essentials”), we present a “sleek and slender” treatment of the law for an introductory law school course that emphasizes problem-solving and interactive classroom discussion. Essentials provides a comprehensive yet concise coverage of key topics in an innovative pedagogical format designed to facilitate efficient learning and maximum comprehension of core legal principles. Essentials is flexible enough to accommodate a range of teaching styles and is easily adaptable for two, three, and four academic credit survey courses.

The format is straightforward and incorporates the following features:

1. We introduce each legal doctrine with a plain-English summary of the law. Whereas the traditional casebook format relies primarily on judicial opinions to explain legal doctrine, this book lays out the basics of each topic with an introductory précis to establish baseline knowledge. These succinct explanations of the law emphasize the prevailing rule adopted in a majority of states and, where applicable, call attention to rule variations followed in a minority of jurisdictions.

2. We illustrate each legal doctrine with a recent, clearly written, and well-reasoned judicial opinion and, for most cases, we provide a block diagram visually depicting the relationships between and among relevant parties. To facilitate student comprehension, we provide a series of analytical questions accompanied by narrative answers following each case. We believe that this Q&A case analysis format, replacing string citations to external references in traditional casebooks, allows students to grapple with doctrinal material more effectively prior to class without leaving the four corners of the textbook.

3. We apply each legal doctrine in problem sets throughout each chapter. We designed the problems to stimulate creative legal analysis by inviting students to apply newly-learned doctrines to realistic fact patterns that expand upon examples presented in the cases. To simulate problems encountered by trusts and estates practitioners, a majority of the problems are based on actual cases.

As authors, we are excited to publish a textbook that reflects our shared pedagogical philosophy and strong enthusiasm for classroom teaching. We hope to learn from the
insight of others and therefore gladly welcome feedback from students and professors willing to share their experiences in learning and teaching with these materials.

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