

How to Use Your Coursework to Better Prepare for Law School



CENTER FOR
Pre-Law Advising
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Introduction

Unlike other pre-professional tracks in college, there is no prerequisite coursework that students must complete in order to either apply to or succeed in law school. There are, however, certain skills and broad areas of knowledge that could better prepare you for law school.



The American Bar Association offers an exceptional summary of these foundational areas and how they relate to law school (excerpted throughout the booklet).

The courses listed on the following pages are only a sample of the types of courses that may help you prepare for law school. **None of these courses are required.** You should independently evaluate these and other available courses to determine suitability.

Preparing for Law School

The American Bar Association is a national association of attorneys and law students. The ABA's Section of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar has offered the following advice on the types of coursework that might better prepare students for law school.

"The ABA does not recommend any undergraduate majors or group of courses to prepare for a legal education... Taking a broad range of difficult courses from demanding instructors is excellent preparation for legal education...

There are important skills and values, and significant bodies of knowledge that you can acquire prior to law school and that will provide a sound foundation for a legal education. These include **analytic and problem-solving skills, critical reading abilities, writing skills, oral communication and listening abilities, general research skills, task organization and management skills, and the values of serving faithfully the interests of others while also promoting justice**. If you wish to prepare adequately for a legal education..., you should seek educational, extra-curricular and life experiences that will assist you in developing those attributes...

It is not essential that you come to law school having fully developed all of the skills, values and knowledge suggested... Some of that foundation can be acquired during the initial years of law school. However, if you begin law school having already acquired many of the skills, values and knowledge listed..., you will have a significant advantage and will be well prepared to benefit fully from a challenging legal education."

http://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/pre_law.html

Core Skills and Values

1.

Analytical/Problem-Solving Skills

"You should seek courses and other experiences that will engage you in critical thinking about important issues, challenge your beliefs and improve your tolerance for uncertainty. Your legal education will demand that you structure and evaluate arguments for and against propositions that are susceptible to reasoned debate. Good legal education will teach you to "think like a lawyer", but the analytic and problem solving skills required of lawyers are not fundamentally different from those employed by other professionals. Your law school experience will develop and refine those crucial skills, but you must enter law school with a reasonably well developed set of analytic and problem solving abilities." — ABA

PHILOS 210 Reason in Communication

Course Description: Argument in familiar contexts; emphasis upon developing critical skills in comprehending, evaluating, and engaging in contemporary forms of reasoning, with special attention to the uses of argument in mass media.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

PHILOS 211 Elementary Logic

Course Description: The formal characteristics of logical truth and inference.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

PHILOS 341 Contemporary Moral Issues

Course Description: A philosophical study of some of the major moral issues in contemporary society, such as those concerning abortion, euthanasia, punishment, property, politics, sex, nuclear disarmament, and world hunger.

Pre-Reqs: So st or cons inst.

ECON 101 Principles of Microeconomics

Course Description: Economic problems of individuals, firms and industries with emphasis on value, price, and distribution of income. Must be taken before 102.

Pre-Reqs: Successful completion of or exemption from Quantitative Reasoning A requirement. Open to Fr. No honors available.

ECON 102 Principles of Macroeconomics

Course Description: Macroeconomic measurement and models of aggregate demand and supply; fiscal and monetary policy for unemployment, inflation, and growth.

Pre-Reqs: Econ 101 or AAE 215. Open to Fr. No honors available.

MATH 141 Quantitative Reasoning and Problem Solving

Course Description: Quantitative reasoning for students who need to satisfy part A of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement and prepare for QR-B courses, but do not want to continue in the calculus sequence.

Pre-Reqs: Min math competency & satisfactory placement scores. Open to Fr.

Core Skills and Values continued

2.

Critical Reading/Critical Thinking Abilities

"Preparation for legal education should include substantial experience at close reading and critical analysis of complex textual material, for much of what you will do as a law student and lawyer involves careful reading and comprehension of judicial opinions, statutes, documents, and other written materials. [Y]ou can develop your critical reading ability in a wide range of experiences, including the close reading of complex material in literature, political or economic theory, philosophy, or history...[W]hat is important is...[rigorous engagement] in the enterprise of carefully reading and understanding, and critically analyzing, complex written material of substantial length." — ABA

Note: There are numerous courses in the liberal arts curriculum (for example, courses in English, History, and Philosophy) that can improve your critical reading and thinking abilities. The following are merely a representative sample.

COUN PSY 125 A Wisconsin Experience Seminar

Course Description: Examine transition to UW–Madison through exploration of the research university and the Wisconsin Experience. A variety of texts, including a novel and textbook will provide a context for discussion, writing, and experiential assignments. Twelve students per section.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr or transfers only.

ILS 200 Critical Thinking and Expression

Course Description: The three modes of argument and expression: verbal, visual, numerical. Critical thinking about how these modes are structured and used...

Pre-Reqs: Prev or con reg in another ILS course. Open to Fr.

ILS 205/206 Western Culture: Political, Economic, and Social Thought I/II

Course Description: The development of Western political, economic and social thought, from its origins in classic Greece and the Judeo-Christian tradition, through Rome and the Medieval period, to the Renaissance and Reformation [in I] and from the Reformation to the present day [in II].

Pre-Reqs: Open to All Undergrads.

PHILOS 101 Introduction to Philosophy

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr & So who have had no previous philos course other than 210, 211, 253 or 254.

PHILOS 241 Introductory Ethics

Course Description: Nature of moral problems and of ethical theory, varieties of moral skepticism, practical ethics and the evaluation of social institutions.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

POLI SCI 209 Introduction to Political Theory

Course Description: Analytical examination of conceptions of politics and the purposes of government, the problems of political obligation deriving from these, with attention to the ideas of crime, punishment and responsibility, political crimes— treason, collaboration, war crimes—and the limits of obligation and forms of dissent.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr. Not open to stdts who have had Poli Sci 185.

3.

Writing Skills

"[Y]ou should develop a high degree of skill at written communication. Language is the most important tool of a lawyer, and lawyers must learn to express themselves clearly and concisely. Legal education will provide you with good training in writing, and particularly in the specific techniques and forms of written expression... common in the law. Fundamental writing skills, however, must be acquired and refined before you enter law school. [S]eek as many experiences as possible that will require rigorous and analytical writing, including preparing original pieces of substantial length and revising written work in response to constructive criticism." — ABA

ENGLISH 201 Intermediate Composition

Course Description: Provides practice in persuasive writing in various modes, styles, and genres; develops an understanding of the different contexts of writing, both scholarly and public; provides opportunities for exploring the relation between writing and speaking; and provides critical tools for the rhetorical analysis of expository prose.

Pre-Reqs: Com A. Not open to Fr or auditors.

ENGLISH 217 American Literature

Course Description: Introduction to American literature(s), spanning at least 200 years of literary and cultural history. Development of skills of literary analysis, including both close reading and the understanding of texts in their philosophical, cultural, and literary contexts.

Pre-Reqs: 6 cr of intro lit.

ENGLISH 236 Bascom Course (Topics Course)

Course Description: A low-enrollment course developing skills in critical reading, logical thinking, use of evidence, and use of library resources. Emphasis on writing in the conventions of specific fields.

Pre-Reqs: Successful completion of or exemption from Com A rqmt. Open to Fr.

HISTORY 201 The Historian's Craft (Topics Course)

Course Description: ...Through engagement with archival materials, undergraduates ...practice defining important historical questions, collecting and analyzing evidence, presenting original conclusions, and contributing to ongoing discussions. Students confer individually with and receive feedback from instructors to improve their skills of historical analysis and communication in both written and spoken formats. Requirements include at least 30 pages of writing - including drafts - and two or more formal oral presentations, each totaling at least five minutes...

Pre-Reqs: Com A or equivalent.

Note: Many majors have courses that are writing intensive, such as "Topics Courses." Most students with a liberal arts major will take such classes as a matter of routine. Pre-law students in non-liberal arts majors should deliberately seek out such course offerings. For example:

E P D (Engineering) 155 Basic Communication

Course Description: Emphasis on writing and critical reading. Planning, preparing, and revising informative and persuasive communication; adapting writing for intended audiences; grammar, usage and style; critical reading of prose models in the sciences and humanities; using information resources; videotaped oral presentations; collaborative writing using computers.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr. Stdts may receive degree cr for only one Com A crse taken in residence.

Core Skills and Values continued

4.

Oral Communication and Listening Abilities

"The ability to speak clearly and persuasively is another skill that is essential to your success in law school and the practice of law. You must also have excellent listening skills if you are to understand your clients and others with whom you will interact daily. As with writing skills, legal education provides excellent opportunities for refining oral communication skills, and particularly for practicing the forms and techniques of oral expression that are most common in the practice of law. Before coming to law school, however, you should seek to develop your basic speaking and listening skills, such as by engaging in debate, making formal presentations in class, or speaking before groups..." — ABA

COM ARTS 100 Introduction to Speech Composition

Course Description: Teaches students to give effective oral presentations in a variety of public speaking situations... Students will also learn basic composition and outlining skills as well as library research techniques.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

COM ARTS 105 Public Speaking

Course Description: Development of fundamental skills in the preparation, delivery, and evaluation of the common forms of public address.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

COM ARTS 262 Theory and Practice of Argumentation and Debate

Course Description: Practice in preparation and delivery of various types of argumentative speeches and debates.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

COM ARTS 368 Theory and Practice of Persuasion

Course Description: A theory-based examination of the role of communication in attitude formation and planned social change. Analysis and creation of persuasive messages.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

COUN PSY 650 Theory and Practice in Interviewing

Course Description: Theoretical bases for conducting interviews; types of interviewing; introduction to counseling and interviewing techniques. Limited opportunity to practice.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st.

L SC COM 100 Introduction to Communication: Inquiry and Exposition

Course Description: Fundamentals of effective written and spoken communication. Develops skills in gathering and evaluating information, writing research papers and other documents, and preparing and delivering oral presentations.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr only. Stdts may receive degree cr for only one Com A crse taken in residence.

THEATRE 140 Voice Training

Course Description: Correct use of breath, note, tone and word relating to actors' and speakers' function. Concentration on individual minor speech problems.

Pre-Reqs: So st or cons inst.

5.

General Knowledge

"[T]ypes of knowledge that would maximize your ability to benefit from a legal education include:

- *A broad understanding of history, including the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of our society in the United States.*
- *A fundamental understanding of political thought and of the contemporary American political system.*
- *Some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic pre-calculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data.*
- *A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction.*
- *An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, of world events, and of the increasing interdependence of...nations and communities..." — ABA*

ACCT I S 100 Introductory Financial Accounting

Course Description: Examines generally accepted accounting principles for measurement and reporting of financial information in a balance sheet, income statement, and statement of cash flows; introduction to analysis and interpretation of financial accounting data for decision-making purposes.

Pre-Reqs: A cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher. Not open to 1st sem Fr.

ENGLISH 162 Shakespeare

Course Description: Introduction to several of Shakespeare's most popular plays and their relation to other works of English and American literature.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

ENGLISH 167 Introduction to British and American Literature Before 1914

ENGLISH 168 Introduction to Modern Literature Since 1900

ENGLISH 169 Introduction to Modern American Literature

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

GEN BUS 310 Fundamentals of Accounting and Finance for Non-Business Majors

Course Description: Part of a two course sequence introducing non-business students to basic concepts, practices and analytical methods that are part of the market enterprise system. This course is a basic overview on: accounting, finance, and business law.

Pre-Reqs: Jr or higher st, not open to business students.

GEN BUS 311 Fundamentals of Management and Marketing for Non-Business Majors

Course Description: Introduces non-business students to basic concepts and practices in business. This course is a basic overview of: management, marketing, strategy, entrepreneurship, ethics, supply chain and international business.

Pre-Reqs: Jr or higher st, not open to business students.

General Knowledge continued

HISTORY 102 American History, Civil War Era to the Present

Course Description: American political, economic and social development from Civil War to present.

Pre-Reqs: Open to All Undergrads.

HISTORY 247 History of American Capitalism

Course Description: Survey of the history of American capitalism from the late colonial period to the near present.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

HISTORY 398 The United States Since 1945

Course Description: Political, social, economic, and cultural changes in the U.S. from WW II to present.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

HISTORY 434 American Foreign Relations, 1901 to the Present

Course Description: America's relations with the world, emphasizing the economic, political and ideological elements determining policy.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

HISTORY/LEGAL ST 459 Rule of Law: Philosophical and Historical Models

Course Description: From the perspectives of history and political theory, this course examines the multiple meanings of the idea of the rule of law, and its uses in American history...

Pre-Reqs: A prev law-related crse.



Undergraduate students in a class discussion with the backdrop of a student-painted mural featuring numerous literary quotes.

HISTORY/LEGAL ST 510 Legal Pluralism

Course Description: Historical and anthropological perspectives on non-state “law,” or systems of rules generated by normative orders that lay beyond the state...

Pre-Reqs: Previous law-related course

ILS 207 History of Western Culture I

Course Description: The historical development of Western civilization through the Renaissance. Emphasis on major institutions and the social context of ideas.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

ILS 208 History of Western Culture II

Course Description: The historical development of Western civilization and culture since the Renaissance. Emphasis on major institutions and the social context of ideas.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

INTL ST 101 Introduction to International Studies

Course Description: Familiarizes students with the field of int’l studies, and performs an interdisciplinary examination of cultural, political, economic, and social patterns that have defined the modern world.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

POLI SCI 103 Introduction to International Relations

Course Description: Explores...patterns of political, social and technological change in terms of their contemporary and future implications for international relations.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr. Not open to students who have taken 183, 275 or 375.

POLI SCI 104/184 Introduction to American Politics and Government

Course Description: Basic institutions and processes of U.S. government. The role of constitutional structures, parties, interest groups and elections in the system; policy formation and policy content.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

POLI SCI 205 Introduction to State Government

Course Description: Basic institutions and processes of state government in the United States; the role of parties, pressure groups, and elections in the system; the policy process, its outputs and outcomes; the role of states in the federal system, and the diversity of state politics and policy.

Pre-Reqs: Previous poli sci course recommended, or cons inst. Open to Fr.

POLI SCI 376 Analysis of International Relations

Course Description: Analysis of int’l political systems...and the major political processes sustaining those systems, such as threats and violence, bargaining, coalition-formation. The advanced introductory course in the international field.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st & Poli Sci 103, 275 or 375.

POLI SCI 417 The American Judicial System

Course Description: Structure, process, and personnel of American courts; emphasis on the...consequences of court decisions for public policy-making.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st & Poli Sci 104, 184 or 404.

General Knowledge continued

POLI SCI 414 The Supreme Court as a Political Institution

Course Description: This course uses a social science approach to analyze theories of judicial decision making and to learn how law is made in a political context. Students will understand how the Supreme Court and justices operate in an interdependent political environment.

Pre-Reqs: Junior standing; Poli Sci 104 or 217.

PSYCH 201 Introduction to Psychology

Course Description: Behavior, incl. its development, motivation, frustrations, emotion, intelligence, learning, forgetting, personality, language, thinking, & social behavior...

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr or So st only. May not receive credit for both Psych 201 & 202.

SOC 125 American Society: How It Really Works

Course Description: Explanation of US performance in realizing the values of freedom, fairness, and democracy. Topics include markets, capitalism, democracy...; class, race, and gender inequalities; militarism and US international role; and US electoral politics, media, and social mobilization.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

SOC 134 Problems of American Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Course Description: The nature of inter-group relations; emphasis on explanations of ethnic and racial prejudice and discrimination; historical background and characteristics of black Americans, Indian Americans, Mexican Americans, and other racial and ethnic minorities; a consideration of economic, housing, political, legal, educational, familial, health and psychological problems of minority groups.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

SOC 138 The Sociology of Gender

Course Description: A sociological examination of the status and roles of women and men in society, including the experiences of marriage, parenthood, employment and occupational attainment, socialization into sex roles and cultural reinforcement of these. Attention will be given to both existing patterns and change in those patterns.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

SOC 200 Introduction to LGBT Studies

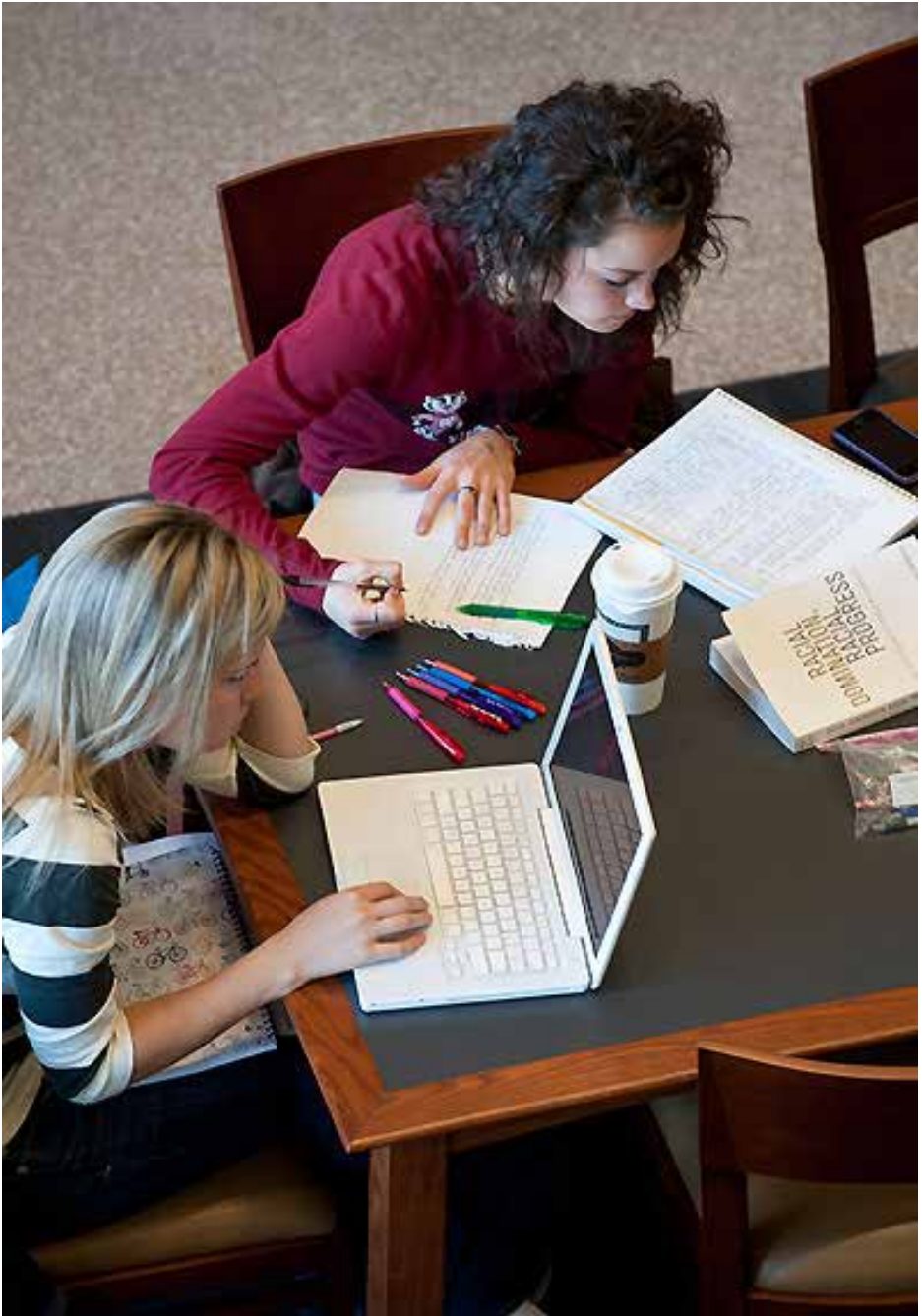
Course Description: A multi-disciplinary introduction to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) studies, including theories of identity formation, different societal interaction with LGBT communities, LGBT cultures in history, and contemporary legal and political issues.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr.

SOC 220 Ethnic Movements in the United States

Course Description: Sociological analysis of historical and recent ethnic/racial conflict and movements in the U.S.... with additional material on other groups and relations.

Pre-Reqs: So st.



Students gather and study in the spacious Morgridge Commons.

Classes for Gauging Interest in Law

In addition to developing some of the skills and broad areas of knowledge suggested by the American Bar Association, pre-law students may find coursework useful for confirming an interest in the field. Note, however, that law schools do not expect or require students to take law-related coursework prior to law school.

AN SCI/FOOD SCI 321 Food Laws and Regulations

Course Description: Food laws and regulations, regulatory and commercial grading standards used in the food industry.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st or cons inst.

ANTHRO 448 Anthropology of Law

Course Description: A comparative examination of the legal realm of tribal and peasant societies as seen in cross-cultural perspective. Describes the relationship of law to anthropology, presents theories of change of legal systems and provides ethnographic case studies.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st or cons inst.

ECON 522 Law and Economics

Course Description: Economic analysis of legal rules and institutions with emphases on how different areas of law influence individual incentives. Specific topics include: (1) property, (2) contracts, (3) torts, (4) legal procedure and (5) criminal law.

Pre-Reqs: Econ 301 or consent of instructor.



A law student at the Law School student lounge.

ENVIR ST 368 Environmental Law, Toxic Substances and Conservation

Course Description: Development of and need for “environmental law”; an introduction to the legal system; public and private rights in the environment; regulation of pesticides and toxic substances; environmental legislation and rulemaking; environmental impact statements; professionals as expert witnesses. No prior knowledge of law assumed. For scientists and others dealing with environmental issues in academia, industry and government.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

GEN BUS 301 Business Law

Course Description: History of legal development, contracts, agency, sale of goods, insurance.

Pre-Reqs: Junior or Senior standing.

JOURN 559 Law of Mass Communication

Course Description: Freedom of speech and press with particular emphasis on major legal issues confronting media practitioners; introduction to such areas of law as censorship, libel, invasion of privacy, access to information, regulation of electronic media and commercial speech.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st.

LEGAL ST/SOC 131 Criminal Justice in America

Course Description: Day-to-day functioning of the elements of the criminal justice system in the U.S. Nature of crime in the U.S., ideas about causes and solutions. Emphasis on the sociology of the components of criminal justice system.

Pre-Reqs: Open to Fr & So only, until end of Fr reg period.

LEGAL ST/POLI SCI 217 Law, Politics, and Society

Course Description: Intro to the legal process. Examination of the various concepts of law, the perennial problems of the law, legal reasoning, and the nature and function of law and the courts.

Pre-Reqs: Fr & So only.

LEGAL ST 400/450 Topics in Legal Studies and the Social Sciences/Humanities

Course Description: Topics courses will address a variety of issues linking various social sciences/humanities perspectives to the central themes of law and legal institutions. These courses can be repeated by students, but not with the same content.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st; prerequisite may vary with topic.

LEGAL ST 409 Human Rights in Law and Society

Course Description: Introduction to the theory, politics and sociology of human rights. Main themes: international human rights legal regime, questions of why human rights have become “legalized,” and what the consequences of this legalization are...

Pre-Reqs: Legal St/Soc 131 or Legal St/Poli Sci 217. Jr st or inst cons.

LEGAL ST 444 Law In Action

Course Description: A review of the interaction of law (judicial decisions, legislation, administrative actions) with public policy by studying the approaches used to resolve a number of significant issues by use of law and examining the actual impact of such efforts.

Pre-Reqs: So st.

POLI SCI 316 Principles of International Law

Pre-Reqs: Jr st and one course in pol sci or modern history.

Classes for Gauging Interest in Law continued

POLI SCI 411/412 Constitutional Law

Course Description: The politics, personalities, and procedures of decision-making by the U.S. Supreme Court. Important judicial decisions in the fields of criminal law, reapportionment, civil rights, the economy, federalism, and others.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st & Poli Sci 104, 184 or 404; or cons inst. Not open to Grad stdts.

POLI SCI 452 Criminal Law & Justice

Course Description: Substantive and procedural aspects of criminal law, including the purposes of criminal justice, specific crimes, criminal responsibility and punishment, legal concepts of proof, and 4th, 5th, and 6th Amendment issues.

Pre-Reqs: Jr st and prev crse in poli sci or soc.

POLI SCI 470 The First Amendment

Course Description: An examination of the basic principles, purposes, and assumptions of First Amendment cases and literature, with attention to both historical and contemporary controversies.

Pre-Reqs: Prev crse in Amer government, law, or related subject.

POLI SCI 617 Comparative Legal Institutions

Course Description: A comparison of the role of law and legal institutions in the U.S. and other countries, with a focus on the state's use of law to achieve its political goals.

Pre-Reqs: Poli Sci 106, 186 or 217 or cons inst.

REAL EST 312 Real Estate Law

Course Description: The basic principles of real estate law related to ownership rights, negotiations, brokering, transfers, condominium law, financing, income tax law, real estate property taxation, bankruptcy law, construction and development contracts, and residential and commercial leases, including both office and retail leases, and an overview of international legal systems.

Pre-Reqs: Real Est 306 or consent of instructor.

SOC 641 Sociology of Law

Course Description: Theory and research on the social origins, processes and effects of law; examination of law-related behavior, legal institutions, law and social structure, and law and social change; linkage to contemporary theoretical and political debates.

Pre-Reqs: Jr or Sr st. When crse is offered for 3–4 cr, law stdts register for 3 cr, undergrads for 4 cr.

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