Introduction to Law and Courts

Course Description

What is law? What is the rule of law? What do lawyers, judges, and courts do? How does a person become a lawyer or judge? How often and under what conditions can and do US lawyers, judges, and courts change public policy and/or political and/or social practices? These are some of the major questions to which we will seek answers in this course.

Course Requirements including Class Participation

Your grade in this course will be based on class participation (including, for some of you, a PowerPoint presentation of your research), two short research papers (5 pages each), and a longer research paper (at least 10 pages added to a revised version of your second short research paper). These research papers together will determine 60% of your course grade. Paper due dates and grade values are provided below. Further description of what is required for the papers will be provided in class and on the course webpages.

Class participation will determine the rest of your course grade (40%). Most days that we meet we will be discussing our readings. So, you will be expected to have done the readings and be able to answer my questions about what was in the readings – what concepts the author used, and what they mean; what claims or arguments the author made; and what evidence the author used to support his or her claims. You should also be able to answer my questions about how the readings relate to other readings and topics we have covered. If you engage in these discussions and make a good attempt to answer my questions, you will receive credit for participating in class discussion that day. If you do not participate and do not make a good attempt to answer my questions, you will receive no credit that day. For those of you who choose to do a PowerPoint presentation on your research, 25% of your participation grade will be determined by that presentation (which translates to 10% of your course grade).

Extra Credit. At various points during the semester, I will announce opportunities to earn extra credit. These opportunities may include attending and writing about law-related activities organized by the Pre-law Honor’s Society and/or law school.
Required Readings

Required readings for the course are in three books available at the Holmes Student Center bookstore. We will read and discuss some chapters from each of these books:

*American Courts* by Lawrence Baum (2013, 7th Ed.).


Due Dates and Grade Values for Research Papers

- **October 8** Short Research Paper #1: Observing and Interviewing a NIU Judge (5 pages; 15% of grade), due at beginning of class, Monday
- **November 12** Short Research Paper #2: A Federal Court Case that Changed Policy (5 pages; 20% of grade), due at beginning of class, Monday
- **December 10** Final Research Paper: A Federal Court Case that Changed Policy (at least 10 pages added to a revised version of your second short research paper; 25% of grade), due at beginning of finals period, Mon., 4:00-5:50 p.m.

Serving as a Juror in NIU Law School Mock Trials

There may be an opportunity for you to serve as a juror in mock trials that function as final exams for students of NIU law school’s courses in trial advocacy. The availability of this opportunity will depend on the needs of the law school faculty who teach these courses and on how many public law students wish to serve as jurors.

I encourage all of you to serve as jurors and will give you extra credit for serving and even for observing these mock trials – an opportunity that should be available to everyone.

Other Course Requirements

**Please do not**...
- ask for extensions on turning in your research papers. Research papers will be graded down one third of a grade per day that they are late.
- ask to take an incomplete in the course unless you have a very, very compelling reason to do so.
Definitely do not…

- engage in “academic misconduct,” defined by the NIU Student Judicial Code as the “receipt or transmission of unauthorized aid on assignments or examinations, plagiarism, unauthorized use of examination materials, or other forms of dishonesty in academic matters.”

Department of Political Science Announcements

Students with Disabilities

If you need an accommodation for this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible. The DRC coordinates accommodations for students with disabilities. It is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu.

Also, please contact me privately as soon as possible so we can discuss your accommodations. Please note that you will not be required to disclose your disability, only your accommodations. The sooner you let me know your needs, the sooner I can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Undergraduate Writing Awards

The Department of Political Science recognizes, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies, such as independent studies or honors theses. Winners are expected to attend the Department’s spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and a check for $100.00. No more than two papers may be submitted by a student. There is no requirement as to the length of papers submitted for the award. Often the Department awards prizes for both an outstanding short paper and an outstanding long paper. The number and types of award is dependent upon the papers submitted for consideration in any given year. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Only papers written in the previous calendar year are considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year’s competition even if the student has graduated. Papers can be submitted by students or faculty and must be supplied in triplicate to the undergraduate secretary. All copies must have two cover pages – one with the student’s name and one without the student’s name. Papers are not to be stapled or bound. Instead, please use paper clips. Papers are generally due in March and notice of call for papers and submission deadlines will be published on the Department’s Facebook page. You may also contact the department for information at 753-1015.
Department of Political Science Web Site

Undergraduates are encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to http://polisci.niu.edu. For the most up-to-date information on scholarships, internships, and other department news, I encourage you to “like” the department on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/NIU.PoliticalScience) or follow us on Twitter (@niupols).

Plus/Minus Grading System

Grading symbols that may be used from Fall 2013 onwards for undergraduates are these: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, D, and F. No other grade options were endorsed by the University Council.

Frequently Asked Questions information from the NIU Registration and Records website is available at: http://www.niu.edu/regrec/grading/gradingfaqs.shtml

Departmental Classroom Decorum Statement Adapted for this Course

Students are to arrive at class on time. Students are to remain for the entire session unless excused by the professor beforehand or confronted with a serious personal emergency. For instance, it is not acceptable for students to walk in and out of class to answer cell phones, take casual bathroom and smoking breaks, or attend to other personal matters. Cell phones, pagers, or any electronic devices that make noise must be turned off during class unless the instructor has been notified beforehand of a special circumstance (e.g., sick family member, pregnant wife, special childcare situation, etc.). No one should talk while someone else is talking; this includes comments meant for a classmate rather than the entire group. What may seem like a whisper or a harmless remark to one person can be a distraction to someone else, particularly in a small room. Overall, classroom dialogue and behavior should always be courteous, respectful of others, and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university.

Reading Assignments and Discussion Topics

LAW, LAWYERS, JUDGES, AND COURTS

WEEK 1  COURSE INTRODUCTION AND THE RULE OF LAW

The Dynamics of Law, Chapter 1
WEEK 2        LAWYERS, JUDGES, AND THE RULE OF LAW
NOTE:           NO CLASS MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 3RD, LABOR DAY
American Courts, Chapter 3

WEEK 3        HOW TO BECOME A LAWYER AND A JUDGE
American Courts, Chapters 4 and 5

WEEK 4        COURTS, ADJUDICATION, AND TRIALS
The Dynamics of Law, Chapters 2 and 3

WEEK 5        JUDICIAL LAWMAKING I: LAW BUILT ON PRECEDENTS
The Dynamics of Law, Chapter 4

WEEK 6        JUDICIAL LAWMAKING II: INTERPRETATION OF STATUTES
The Dynamics of Law, Chapter 6

WEEK 7        JUDICIAL LAWMAKING III: INTERPRETING THE CONSTITUTION
NOTE:           SHORT RESEARCH PAPER #1 DUE MONDAY, OCTOBER 8th
The Dynamics of Law, Chapter 7

WEEK 8        ADMINISTRATIVE LAWMAKING AND ADJUDICATION
The Dynamics of Law, Chapter 8

LAW, LAWYERS, JUDGES, AND COURTS AS CAUSES OF POLICY, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

WEEK 9        INTRODUCTION: JUDGES, LAW, AND POLICY
Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 1

WEEK 10       DISCRIMINATION & EDUCATIONAL AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 6
WEEK 11 THE STATUS OF WOMEN

NOTE: SHORT RESEARCH PAPER #2 DUE, MONDAY, NOV. 12TH

Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 4

WEEK 12 REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 5

WEEK 13 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

NOTE: NO CLASS WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST, THANKSGIVING

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 3

WEEK 14 SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 7

WEEK 15 SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Judging Law and Policy, Chapter 8

WEEK 16 FINALS

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

NOTE: FINAL RESEARCH PAPER DUE AT BEGINNING OF EXAM PERIOD, MONDAY, DECEMBER 10TH, 4:00-5:50 P.M.