

Course Syllabus – Political Science 250 – Spring Semester 2008
Instructor – Attorney Amy Wochos
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Office Hours: By appointment only

Law and Society

Purpose of the Course:

Political Science 250 discusses the interrelationship between law and society and what the concept of “law” actually means to modern society. The semester will be divided into two parts. In the first few weeks, we will look at the organization of the American legal system and how it creates law. We will also look at how, procedurally, that law serves its three main functions: as a means of social control, as a means of dispute resolution, and as a mechanism for social change. In the second part of the semester, we will look more closely at the three functions of law as used with regard to specific issues, through examining case law and related writings.

Readings for the Course:

We will use the texts *Law and Society* by Steven Vago (Eighth Edition) and *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Legal Issues* by M. Ethan Katsh and William Rose (Twelfth Edition). Both should be available from the bookstore. Although some students have found that earlier versions of the Vago book have substantially the same material, it is **IMPERATIVE** that you have the most recent edition of *Taking Sides* as it has brand new chapters not contained in previous editions. There will also be supplemental readings and cases which will either be handed out in class or are available on the internet (information to be provided).

Grading:

Your grade for the class will be composed of four elements:

Test 1	20%
Test 2	20%
Research Paper	25%
Final Exam	35%

The first test will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false and or short answer questions, the second will be all essay questions, and the final will be a combination of both. The 5-7 page research paper will require you to pick a case that the US Supreme Court is scheduled to hear this year, discuss its background and the impact it will have on society depending on how it is decided.

The grade scale for exams is: A 93-100; A- 90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; F+ 57-59; F 56 and below. I do reserve the right to curve the grade, if necessary. In that event, the curved scale will be provided during class at the time the exam is handed back.

There is no class participation requirement, in that your grade will not be reduced for lack of participation. However, regular and relevant class participation can result in the increase of a grade by one grade level (for example, a B to a B+) at the discretion of the instructor. It can, therefore, be considered “extra credit.” More importantly, class participation will make the class much more interesting and may increase understanding of the materials.

We will be discussing some topics on which individuals have strong and possibly opposing viewpoints. In the spirit of the free exchange of ideas, the expression of all viewpoints will be welcomed and encouraged. Similarly, while there may certainly be disagreements, it is essential that you be respectful of others opinions, as well as open minded as to the certainty of your own.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING EXAMINATIONS OR LATE PAPERS

I am very strict about exams and late papers. You are taking a night class, which means that you are expected to be available on the nights class is scheduled. Things like work commitments, lack of child care, or vacations are not acceptable reasons for missing an exam. Make-up exams will only be given, or late papers accepted, due to illness if you have some type of written medical documentation/excuse. If you are not sick enough to go to the doctor, you are well enough to take the exam or hand in your paper on time. Exceptions may be made for other emergencies in exceptional circumstances, but be prepared to provide some type of documentation. If your car breaks down on the way to the exam, bring me a tow receipt. If someone steals your computer the night the paper is due, bring me a police report. You get my drift.

Class Schedule:

1/23 Introduction to Course
No Readings

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The Legal System as an Organization

1/28 Vago, Chapter 1 and begin Chapter 3 through pg. 116(skip Chapter 2)

1/30 Court System – continued

2/4 No Class

2/6 Court System continued

2/11 Judicial Selection - – handout “A Tournament of Judges”

How the Legal System Creates Law

2/13 Legislative/Administrative process – Vago pp. 116-130

2/18 Legislative/Administrative continued; Theories of Law/Law Creation – Vago, pp. 157-190

2/20 Law Creation continued

2/25 **TEST ONE**

THREE CONCEPTIONS OF LAW – A PROCEDURAL VIEW

2/27 Law as Social Control – Vago, Chap 5

3/3 Law as Social Control continued

3/5 Law as Dispute Resolution – Vago, Chap 6 through 273

3/10 Continue Law as Dispute Resolution; begin Law as Social Change – Vago, Chapter 7

3/12 Finish Law as Social Change - **TEST TWO**

3/17 and 19 – Spring Break

THREE CONCEPTIONS OF LAW – AN ISSUE-DRIVEN OVERVIEW

Law as Social Control

Culpability

3/24 Abolishing the Insanity Defense – Katsch and Rose, Issue 6

Three Strikes Laws

3/26 Lockyer v. Andrade, Katsch and Rose, Issue 12

3/31 Finish Three Strikes Laws. **Papers due in class or by midnight via email.**

Death Penalty

4/2 Roper v. Simmons, Katsch and Rose, Issue 11

4/7 Finish Death Penalty

Law as Dispute Resolution

Who Is Responsible?

4/9 Pelman v. McDonald's Corp,

<http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/mcdonalds/plmnmed12203opn.pdf>

4/14 Finish Pelman

Law and Social Change

Race

4/16 Brown v. Board of Education, <http://laws.findlaw.com/us/347/483.html>

4/21 Brown v. Board, continued; begin Grutter v. Bollinger, Katsch and Rose, Issue 19 and Gratz v. Bollinger,
<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=000&invol=02-516>

4/23 Finish Gratz and Grutter

Sexuality

4/28 Bowers v. Hardwick, <http://laws.findlaw.com/us/478/186.html> and Lawrence v. Texas,
<http://laws.findlaw.com/us/000/02-102.html>

4/30 Continue Lawrence and begin Lockyer v. San Francisco, Katsch and Rose, Issue 16

5/5 Finish Lockyer and Goodridge

5/7 Catch up and review

Final Exam - Monday May 12, 2008 5:30-7:00 pm