

Socio-Legal Course Descriptions

Updated 12/19/2013

Required Courses for Socio-Legal Studies Major:

• PLSC 1810: Introduction to Law and Society

This course addresses justifications and explanations for regulation comparatively across common law countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Debates concerning these issues are debates concerning regulation or the shaping (and constituting) of behavior by law. In this course we attend to the historical emergence of different strategies of regulation as well as the different targets of regulation, from licensing of products to the "new social regulation," the regulation of the environment and the processes of business, to the regulation of sexuality. This course fulfills the common curriculum requirement for Scientific Inquiry: Society.

• SOCI 2120: Methods of Socio-Legal Inquiry

This course provides a broad overview of socio-legal research methods. Specifically, the course examines how qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to answer socio-legal research questions. Students participate in research in order to understand the process of designing a project, collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting findings. sophomore standing required.

• SOCI 2755: Legal Actors and Institutions

This course examines the legal system from the points of view of those who work within it. It considers the social characteristics of lawyers, judges, regulators, and even non-state actors and how they matter to the social construction of law. The emphasis is on the social organization of law and the everyday interactions that bring meaning to the legal system. It will consider both local and global perspectives and seek to understand how the changing locations of law influence its practice. Throughout the course, students will be required to think critically about how the social relationships of law influence law's outcomes.

Elective Courses:

Environmental Science

ENVI 3000: Environmental Law

This course covers the basic principles of environmental law and regulation. Students will examine how major environmental laws attempt to achieve a balance between environmental and

health objectives and economics, and how citizens can take an active role in influencing environmental policy.

Media, Film and Journalism Studies

MFJS 3040: Media Law

Law and regulation systems governing the mass media.

Prerequisite: junior standing.

MFJS 3700: New Media Law & Regulation

An examination of recent conflicts in mass communication law; topics vary with current developments. Particular emphasis is given to the legal problems of broadcasting, cable and the new communications technologies.

Philosophy

PHIL 2040: Practical Logic

In this course students will learn how to identify and understand real arguments, the kinds of arguments that they confront everyday in the media, textbooks and periodicals, in addition to those made in philosophical writings.

PHIL 2150: Philosophy of Law

Principles, aims and methods of legal reasoning (judicial decision making); relationship between legal and moral reasoning.

PHIL 2180: Ethics

Alternative theories of morals and values, ethical problems and solutions offered by classical and contemporary thinkers.

PHIL 2184: Ethics, Individuals and the Law

Furnish students with a detailed and lasting understanding of a range of philosophical and ethical problems that arise in the law.

PHIL 2700: Biomedical Ethics

Discussion of some of the most pressing ethical issues engaged by contemporary developments in biology and medicine.

PHIL 3061: Kant's Ethical, Aesthetics, and Political Philosophy

Immanuel Kant was a watershed (and arguably the most important) figure in the history of modern philosophy. Not only did his philosophy represent the “last best defense” of the Liberal Humanism of the preceding modern period but it laid the foundations for virtually all subsequent philosophical movements. In response to the philosophies of the Enlightenment, Kant insisted in his theoretical philosophy that human knowledge must be regarded as both strictly limited and yet as unchallengeable within those limits; anticipating the future, he was the first to articulate a practical philosophy based upon a radically new conception of human freedom as autonomous self-determination. Had Kant ceased writing at this point, his place in the history of philosophy would still have been assured. However, Kant was also a systematic thinker who realized that his epistemological and ethical theories required further unification within a broader viewpoint. For this, Kant looked principally to our “subjective” encounters with art and nature, on the one hand, and to the “objective” spheres of politics and history, on the other. Kant’s attempts to systematically extend his fundamental epistemological and moral insights into these spheres not only served as the basis for the philosophical movement known as German Idealism (and its cultural counterpart, Romanticism) but continue to serve as rich sources for contemporary analyses and critiques of “postmodern culture.”

Prerequisite: junior standing or instructor's permission.

PHIL 3175: Morality and the Law

A systematic study of various elements of the relation between law and morality. Are we obligated to obey every law the government enacts? Why? If we do have an obligation to obey the law, are civil disobedients like Martin Luther King, Jr. justified in disobeying the law? Are immoral laws, laws at all, or must a law connect up with some higher moral truth to have any authority? To what extent is it morally permissible for the law to restrict our personal freedoms? To what extent is it morally permissible for the law to enforce morality in general? If it is not permissible for the law to enforce morality, do we incur any obligation to obey the law?

Prerequisite: junior standing or instructor's permission.

PHIL 3176: Rights, Legal Institutions, and Justice

A critical examination of rights claims and an exploration of how those rights claims ought to affect legal institutions. What are rights? How are they justified? How do various different rights claims conflict with each other? Does a theory of rights help provide a justified theory of criminalization? Are there any rights we have just in virtue of being human? How does the concept of human rights apply to issues such as international law, the right to life and whether human rights require a right to democracy?

Prerequisite: junior standing or instructor's permission.

PHIL 3178: Metaethics

This course systematically and critically examines the metaphysical, semantic, and epistemic issues central to the study of metaethics. Do moral properties exist? If so, how are they related to natural properties? Do moral properties exist independent of human agency, or do we construct morality? If moral properties exist, how can we come to have justified belief about them? Is it possible to know that a moral belief is true? Doesn't the phenomenon of widespread, intractable disagreement about moral matters establish that there are no objective moral truths? Is the process of gaining scientific knowledge really that different from the process of gaining moral knowledge? Prerequisite: junior standing or instructor's permission.

Prerequisite: junior standing or instructor's permission.

*PHIL 3701: Disability, Ability, and Justice

Prerequisite: junior standing or instructor's permission.

Political Science

PLSC 2001: Law and Politics

Introduces the relationship between law and politics, describing the basic principles of legal conduct in political contexts and explaining how social scientific methods are used to understand these underlying principles. Questions explored include: where does law come from? Whose interests does it reflect? Does formal legal change lead to practical political and social change? Why do we comply with the law? What are the limits of enforcement?

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

*PLSC 2700: Topics: American Legal System

This course looks at the basic features of the American Legal system – including laws, courts, judges, and other participants in legal procedures – and critically examines the nature of judicial decision making and the impacts of court activity.

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

*PLSC 2700: Topics: Environmental Law

Examines legal and policy frameworks addressing environmental problems in the U.S.. Environmental laws establish principles of environmental protection, rules for achieving specified goals, measures for preventing environmental damage, and rights for citizens to bring legal action when laws are not in full compliance. Our analysis will illustrate how politics often dictates acceptance of tradeoffs and compromise among divergent values and interests.

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

*PLSC 2700: Topics: Courts and Judicial Processes

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the American legal system with a focus on judicial-decision making and procedures in federal and state systems. The political nature of many legal disputes will be explored as will the legal aspects of many political disputes. We will also examine the impact of citizen participation on the legal system. It has been said that we are what we eat. It's also true that we get the legal system that we create - for better or worse.

*PLSC 2700: Topics: Conservative Movements and the Courts

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

*PLSC 2701: Topics: The Politics of Rights

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

PLSC 2820: Civil Rights and Liberties

Civil rights have emerged as central to contests over governance. How have civil rights laws and movements emerged, particularly in the United States? This course addresses both how courts address questions and social movements around rights. Substantive areas include freedom of speech and religion, the prohibition on establishing a religion in the United States, and claims to equality.

PLSC 2830: Law and Social Policy

Role of courts in development of American administrative state, modern battle over deregulation, and control of bureaucracy.

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

PLSC 2840: International Law and Human Rights

Legal and philosophical status of human rights worldwide; socioeconomic barriers to achieving global human rights.

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

PLSC 2860: Constitutional Law and Politics

What are the fundamentals of constitutional governance? How have they been debated? How have institutions of the state understood constitutional requirements? Focus is on the United States, but not exclusively. Topics include judicial review; federalism; racial, sexual, political and economic equality; rights of the accused.

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

PLSC 2880: Taming Tyranny: How Constitutions Frame Freedom

Comparative analysis of legal systems including constitution making, distribution of government powers, and the nature of individual rights.

Prerequisite: sophomore standing.

Sociology

SOCI 2250: Criminology

Social meaning of criminal behavior; relationship between crime and society in particular, how production and distribution of economic, political and cultural resources shape construction of law, order and crime; different types of crime, criminals and victims, and efforts to understand and control them.

SOCI 2260: Deviance and Society

This course examines some behaviors often called deviant, such as mental illness, substance abuse, governmental crime and unconventional lifestyles, and asks what groups call them deviant, why, and how behavior affects community.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2701: State Violence in a Socio-Legal Context

This course applies a socio-legal approach to the study of diverse forms of state violence, such as the death penalty, genocide, and torture. We will explore the ways that social institutions, culture, and law shape states' uses of violence both internationally and domestically. We will also examine the socio-legal foundations of efforts to control and collectively respond to state violence.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2750: Sociology of Law

Social meaning of criminal behavior; relationship between crime and society in particular, how production and distribution of economic, political and cultural resources shape construction of law, order and crime; different types of crime, criminals and victims, and efforts to understand and control them.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2755: Legal Actors and Institutions

This course examines the legal system from the points of view of those who work within it. It considers the social characteristics of lawyers, judges, regulators, and even non-state actors and

how they matter to the social construction of law. The emphasis is on the social organization of law and the everyday interactions that bring meaning to the legal system. It considers both local and global perspectives and seeks to understand how the changing locations of law influence its practice. Through the course, students are required to think critically about how the social relationships of law influence law's outcomes.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2760: Discipline and Punishment

Institutional mechanisms for imposing discipline and for punishing wayward individuals and groups; contradictory social objectives of punishment and corrections; organizational settings for administering punishment and identifying predominant institutional routines in coercive environments.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2765: Female Offender

Female offenders are one of the fastest growing segments in both the juvenile and adult justice systems. This course introduces students to debates and issues surrounding girls, women, and crime, explores different theoretical perspectives of gender and crime, and examines the impact of gender on the construction and treatment of female offenders by the justice system. In addition, this course will specifically look at girls' and women's pathways to offending and incarceration; understand girls' violence in the inner city; explore the reality of prison life for women, with a particular focus on the gender-sensitive programming for incarcerated mothers; and end with an examination of how capital punishment has affected women offenders historically and contemporarily.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2770: Kids and Courts

This course examines how American society has responded to the problem of at-risk and delinquent youth in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The primary focus will be on the juvenile court's and the encompassing juvenile justice system's efforts to address this problem. The court's and the system's ameliorative attempts to help at-risk children/adolescents as well as their more punitive policies directed at serious and violent young offenders will be investigated. Differences in juvenile court policies and practices over time and across jurisdictions (both in the United States and in other countries) will be considered.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2775: Wrongful Conviction

The criminal justice system was once considered infallible – innocent people did not end up in prison. But the advent of DNA evidence has revealed that innocents are incarcerated and perhaps

even executed. This course focuses on: (1) the prevalence of wrongful conviction; (2) the harms caused by wrongful conviction; (3) the causes of wrongful conviction; (4) strategies for reducing wrongful conviction; and (5) the prospect of compensating the wrongfully convicted.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2780: Women and the Law

Impact of law on women and effect of law on women's participation in the legal process; law as both a source of social change and social control.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2785: Family and the Law

The government is actively involved in deciding who gets to be a family and what families should look like. The state and its laws are involved in shaping family life, making decisions for family members, and mediating familial conflict. This course looks at the appropriate role of the state in family life by examining state legislation and court decisions and social research on a variety of topics.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2790: Policing Society

Emergence and development of police organizations and tactics; factors that influence policing styles and objectives; historical precedents; policing the street; policing the boardroom; policing the world; and policing everyday life.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810.

SOCI 2795: Capital Punishment

The course examines three main topics: (1) the history of capital punishment (facts and trends, public opinion, legislation, and landmark Supreme Court cases); (2) the supposed case for abolition (arbitrariness, cost, and innocence); and (3) the supposed case for retention (deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution). Because science cannot answer moral questions, the course does not attempt to answer the question of whether the state should execute offenders. But the course does include information that might be helpful in contemplating such a profound question.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

SOCI 2820: Drugs and Society

The relationship between drug use, drug control and social contexts; various sociological themes relating to use and control of drugs in American society.

Prerequisite: SOCI 1810

*=These courses are special topics courses and may not be offered on a regular basis. Contact the Director of SLS for more information.