

Law & Democracy

College of Alameda

POSC-008 (43825)

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OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This course is an introduction to the makings and applications of law in American democracy. Students will examine both historical and modern social justice movements to gain an understanding of current laws. Students will also develop tools to think critically by arguing multiple sides of an issue and engaging in peer debates. The course is designed to leave students with a practical understanding of civil, criminal, and constitutional law.

The course will examine legal theories that makeup and constantly change the American legal system. Students will examine legal theories around race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexuality, gender, and sex to critique the American legal system and offer legislative and judicial solutions for present day injustices.

Together we will explore four central themes this semester. First, we will examine the foundations of law and government—what makes up our democratic system, how are laws made, and what relationships exist between citizens and government. Second, we will study the diverse and rich civil rights movements of the U.S. to learn from the legal tactics different communities have used to change the law to better serve its citizens. Third, we will examine our criminal justice system with a critical lens. From the “War on Drugs” to the “War on Terror,” students will learn how to identify racial bias within themselves and the law, and ultimately analyze structural changes proposed for the American legal system. Lastly, students will take what they’ve learned in the first three themes to develop an understanding of present day social justice movements to recognize how law and democracy impact every citizen’s (your) life. On a weekly basis, the class will address these concepts and questions through lectures, short films, group discussion (debates), and readings.

Students will be challenged to become critical thinkers, develop strong legal arguments, and become familiar with legal writing. By the end of the course, students should be able to communicate what they’ve learned in their own words to others and promote an increased awareness of the law. In this way, we can help foster a more accessible justice system.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The following life skills are the ‘learning outcome’ areas for this course.

1. Demonstrate knowledge mastery of democratic legal problems – historical background, governing principles, and institutions of the local government and governance – and how to resolve problems within that context in the United States.
2. Demonstrate proficiency of critical political & legal thinking and analysis (theory and philosophy), such that students will learn and apply these discipline skills, in the process of negotiating the intricacies of local government and dealing with conflicts and legal problems for social change.
3. Demonstrate a capacity for personal resiliency and efficacy in using socio-political and legal concepts in a 21st Century Modern World context.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

Students are required to have access to Street Law: Understanding Law and Legal Issues. There are many used copies of this book available for sale or rent online. You may search online using the book's ISBN number (9780076624058). In addition, this book is available for purchase and rent at the COA bookstore.

McGraw Hill, Street Law: Understanding Law and Legal Issues, New York 2012

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADE WEIGHTS

	20%	Grading Scale
Participation		
Debates	20%	A 90-100%
Term Paper	20%	B 80-89%
Midterm	20%	C 70-79%
Final	20%	D 60-69%
		F Below 60%

CLASS COMPONENTS

Reading. You will read chapters from our Street Law textbook and additional assigned articles in preparation for each class meeting. Weekly reading assignments are posted on the class calendar and will be announced in class. Additional articles will be handed out in class. Any updates to the weekly reading assignments will be announced in class. Closely read the assigned materials, take notes and bring your notes and the texts to class as a basis for discussion and debates.

Participation. Participation is worth 20% of your total grade. There are two components to your participation grade: attendance and reflection assignments.

Participation/Discussion Questions and Assignments: You are encouraged to participate in class discussions and debates in a thoughtful and respectful manner. Each class meeting, you will turn in a homework assignment consisting of a short response to a prompt (either from the textbook or the instructor). Discussions based on students' questions may be on the exams. Assignments should be submitted online on our class blog that can be found at www.professorcrain.org. Late assignments will not be accepted. You must turn in your homework assignments in class in order to receive credit. In total, you will turn in 10 short blog assignments.

Group Debates. The second portion of your overall grade consists of active engagement with the course content. We will review several topics in both civil rights and civil liberties via our textbook

readings, short films, and articles to critique and comment on the American legal system. Twice in the semester, you will work with your group to craft arguments to articulate an assigned point of view pertaining to a specific civil rights or civil liberties topic. You will turn in your written arguments.

Term Paper. You will pick a topic related to an issue highlighted in the outline of this course and write a 6 to 8 page research paper. You will be graded on the qualitative content of your paper, your analysis of the identified problem, how the legal issue impacts your life (family, community, friends, culture, animals, environment, etc.) the reference and sources cited, a works cited page, and the quality of your proposed solution or resolution of the problem (including any remaining problems or new problems that could arise). Papers are due in class on Friday, May 20th. Late papers will be reduced a letter grade for each 24 hour cycle it is late. Detailed instructions will be handed out in class.

Exams. There will be a midterm and final exam in this course. The exams will cover the unit completed and will consist of multiple choice questions, term identification and short answer questions. Exams will be based on readings, lectures, films and discussion. The class will work with the instructor to create a study guide for each exam. Exams are closed notes and closed books and electronic devices are not permitted during an exam. In the event that you miss an exam, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor and schedule a make-up.

Extra Credit. (You may receive extra credit from both of the opportunities below).

Perfect attendance: You can earn extra credit in this class for perfect attendance for the entire semester - having excused. Students with perfect attendance will receive 10 points of extra credit.

Learning Resources Center: You can receive extra credit for 10 hours of attendance in the Learning Resource Center this semester. The Learning Resource Center requires that you make an appointment by calling (510) 981-2971. LRC requires that you login and logout and will track the hours you spend in the lab for the semester. You must designate that the hours are for this class (POSCI-008). You will receive 10 points of extra credit for logging a minimum of ten hours. This happens on campus: College of Alameda

CLASS POLICIES

Attendance. Attendance is mandatory. You are required to attend class regularly and to arrive to class on time. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. Late arrivals are distracting and disruptive to the instructor and your colleagues. Please be courteous and arrive on time. Students who are consistently absent (more than 3 classes) will be dropped from the class.

Civility. In this class we will challenge each other to read, write, speak and think in a critical manner. In doing so, we will treat each other respectfully at all times and be open to different ideas and perspectives.

Electronic Devices. Cell phones should be on silent-mode during class time. Please quietly step out of the class if you need to take a call. Tablets or laptops may be used for note taking and in-class research.

Instructor Communication Policy. I prefer to receive electronic communication to my email account. Please include your full name and course name in all emails.

Accommodations Policy. If you have a disability which may require classroom or test accommodations, please contact Programs and Services for Students with Disabilities (DSPS) in Room D117 or call DSPS at 510-748-2328. You will need to provide written documentation of your disability. If you think you have a disability but currently have no documentation, DSPS may be able to help you. If you already have an accommodation notification from DSPS, please submit it to the instructor privately. All information will be kept confidential.

Withdrawal and Incomplete Policy. Students who wish to withdraw must do so before the last “W” date and must inform the registrar’s office. No incompletes will be awarded without timely consultation with the instructor prior to any due dates and only with an appropriate reason and only where there is a minimal amount of work to finish.

Plagiarism/Cheating Policy. Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s ideas and/or words in part or total without proper academic citation. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating on an assignment or paper in any way will receive a grade of zero (0) for that assignment.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

Basic skills and language issues. If English is not your first language, if you have a documented learning disability or if you have difficulties with basic skills of college level performance, you are encouraged to make use of our Learning Resource Center. You can receive one-on-one help from tutors and other professionals with studying, reading, writing and general language issues. Other difficulties (e.g. learning disability) can be addressed as well – however, you must see me so special arrangements can be made to improve your performance on the exams and assignments. See the extra credit section as you can earn extra points for attending the Learning Resource Center.

Class Website. You will post your homework assignments online on the class blog. You will find it at www.professorcrain.org. Go to Alameda and click on POSC 8. You will find a link to the blog where each student can post their assignment.

Student Success. You are expected to take responsibility for and be active participants in your education. Students arrive in this class with differing levels of preparation and I encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to maximize your learning experience. There are a host of opportunities available for students who need additional support. I encourage students to come to my office hours, participate in study groups and to take advantage of campus academic support services.

THIS SYLLABUS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT AND MAY BE ALTERED IF THE NEED ARISES.

Introductions to the course and field	Jan 25/Jan 27th
What is law and how is it made? (homework due)	Feb 1/Feb 3
What is the relationship between citizens, law and government? (homework due)	Feb 8/ Feb 10
Color Insight: Race and “Reverse Racism” (homework due)	Feb 17
Debate 1; Sex and Gender in the Law	Feb 22/ Feb 24
Queering the Law (homework due)	Feb 29/ March 3
ADA: HIV and the Law (homework due)	March 7/ March 9
Undocumented v. Illegal (homework due); Study Guide	March 14/ March 16
Midterm	March 21/ March 23

Crime and the “War on Drugs” (homework due)	March 28/ March 30
The Right to Remain Silent (homework due)	April 4/ April 6
Veteran’s Day (no class)	April 11/ April 13
Juvenile Justice (homework due)	April 18/ April 20
Debate 2; Privacy, Discrimination, and the “War on Terror”	April 25/ April 27
Civic Participation and Grassroots Organizing (Term Paper Due)	May 2/ May 4
Gun Control and The 1% (homework due); Study Guide 11	May 9/ May
Criminalization of Dissent & the Final Exam	May 16/May 18