

PSC 202 Law & Justice

Spring 2008

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Course Description:

A historically-based examination of the American legal system as seen from the perspective of the institutional practices and decision making processes whereby justice is administered in the United States. Particular attention is devoted to the subject of legal reasoning as this applies to the task of interpreting constitutions, statutes, and common law principles. The course also addresses the institutional characteristics of the American judicial system, the nature of legal education in the United States and the distinctive role that lawyers and judges play in regard to both the formulation and administration of law.

PSC 202 is a three credit course which serves as an introduction to the subject of legal reasoning and the judicial process. Hence, there are no prerequisites for the course and the instructor assumes that students possess little, if any, formal background in regard to these subjects. Within the context of the general education curriculum, PSC 202 has been qualified as a Social Sciences offering.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will acquire an understanding of the role that political, social and organizational factors play in regard to the administration of justice within the American judicial system.
2. Students will acquire an understanding of legal reasoning and the analytical techniques most commonly utilized by judges and attorneys in regard to the interpretation and application of common law, legislative statutes and constitutional provisions.
3. Students will acquire an understanding of the value trade-offs and ethical dilemmas that judges, attorneys, litigants and citizens face in applying abstract legal principles within the context of real world cases.

Assessment

Class Conduct

To maintain an environment conducive to learning, everyone is expected to arrive on time for class, act with respect toward other students and refrain from behavior that could serve to disrupt the class or infringe on the rights of other members of the class. Students also are expected to abide by the letter and spirit of the college's Honor Code

The instructor will adhere to the Code of Ethics established by the American Political Science Association, as these principles relate to a faculty member's responsibilities in the classroom and to students. Given the nature of this course, the instructor is mindful of his obligation:

- To not impose partisan views, conventional or otherwise, upon students.
- To faithfully represent the normative values, policy positions, and academic work of others.
- To respect and defend the intellectual freedom and procedural rights of students.
- To evaluate the performance of students equitably on the basis of criteria which are applied uniformly and in a nondiscriminatory manner.

Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with the instructor during the first week of classes. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Advising Center.

Students wishing to arrange an incomplete for the course should discuss this option with the instructor prior to the end of the semester.

Required Texts:

H. Abadinsky (2003) *Law & Justice*, 6th edition (Prentice Hall, 0-13-232863-1)

L.H. Carter and T.F. Burke (2007) *Reason in Law*, 7th classic edition (Pearson, 0-321-43942-2)

Weekly Topical Outline:

Jan. 20: Law & Justice	(A1)
Jan. 27: Common & Civil Law Systems	(A2)
Feb. 3: The American Judicial System	(A6-7)
Feb. 10: Law Schools & Legal Education	(A4)
Feb. 17: Lawyers & Judges	(A5/9)
Feb. 24: Law & Legal Reasoning	(C1/2)
Mar. 3: Interpreting Common Law	(C3)
Mar.10: No Class	
Mar.17: Interpreting Statutory Law	(C4)
Mar.24: Interpreting Constitutional Law	(C5)
Mar.31: Administering Criminal Justice	(A10)
Apr. 7: Administering Juvenile Justice	(A13)
Apr.14: Administering Civil Justice	(A12)
Apr 21: Alternative Dispute Resolution	(A14)
Apr.28: Law, Justice & Politics	(C6)