

PS 212 Law and Legal Systems  
Spring 2020  
CCC 321  
TR 12:30-1:45

Prof. John C. Blakeman  
Department of Political Science  
CCC 482  
Ext: 4111  
John.Blakeman@uwsp.edu  
Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 9:30-11am and by appointment

This course investigates law and legal systems in the United States, and focuses on *what the law is, how it is organized, and how it works*. Since this course is an introductory course, we take a broad look at the substance and content of law and the basic legal institutions and actors in the legal system. The goal of this course is to give you a good introduction to the many—and diverse—roles, functions, organization, and areas of the law, so as to help you decide whether you want to pursue further study or not.

**Interdisciplinary Designation—General Education Program**

This course fulfills the interdisciplinary requirement of the UWSP General Education Plan. It includes aspects of the social sciences and humanities. The course studies law and legal institutions from a social science perspective by using quantitative and qualitative data to understand how legal institutions (and actors within those institutions) operate. The humanities component relies on the use of legal cases to give added understanding to how the law operates and changes over time.

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the conclusion of this course, you should have a basic understanding of the various components of the U.S. legal system. You should be able to explain and appreciate:

- 1) the roles and interactions of institutions and persons involved in the judicial process;
- 2) the procedures, processes, and constitutional and legal protections involved in trials and sentencing;
- 3) the roles, purposes, and jurisdictions of various types of courts;
- 4) the ability to read carefully and think critically about primary sources on law such as legal cases;
- 5) how social science and empirical data help clarify the development, operation, and change of American law and legal institutions; and
- 6) how the development of American law is affected by political, social, and economic forces.

**READING:**

**The reading for the course comes from two sources, the text rental and materials in CANVAS.**

**Text Rental:** Mays, G. Larry. *American Courts and the Judicial Process*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

**Readings in Canvas:** for certain course modules there are readings in Canvas to complete.

**Grading:**

Exam #1 Multiple Choice (In Class March 5)	20%
Exam #2 Multiple Choice (In Class April 23)	20%
Final Exam (Online Essay in Canvas during exam week)	30%
Mandatory Module in Canvas on Problem Solving Courts	10%
Response Paper in Canvas (rolling deadlines)	20%

**NOTE: as specified below, much of the grading in this course is through Canvas. Therefore, you must be able to access Canvas on a regular basis in order to successfully complete the course.**

**Exams**

IN-CLASS MULTIPLE CHOICE: There are TWO in-class multiple choice exams. Each will be administered during a regularly scheduled class period. Make-up exams will be given only with an excused absence and verification.

Exam #1: March 5. Exam covers the material *up to March 5*.  
Exam #2: April 23. Exam covers the material *between March 5 and April 23*.

FINAL EXAM ONLINE ESSAY: There is ONE essay exam during the final exam period. The exam is administered through Canvas. You will type your answers to essay prompts in Canvas. The essay exam is an open-book exam.

The Online Final Exam Essay will be open during the Final Exam week only on these dates and times: May 11, 8am to May 12 5pm. This will include the scheduled final exam period for this class, which is May 12 8am-10am. The online final exam will be open at that time should you wish to take it then. Otherwise you may take it at another time when it is open.

**Mandatory Canvas Module on Problem Solving Courts**

There is one mandatory module in Canvas that all students must complete. It covers problem solving courts. The module will be open during a specific time frame and must be completed within that time. It consists of online readings following by short quizzes. The Mandatory module opens on March 9 at midnight and closes on March 13 at midnight.

**Response Paper in Canvas**

You must write **one** paper and upload it to Canvas. There are 10 paper assignments to choose from. You will respond to a specific paper prompt and submit a paper of approximately 400 words, or about 1 page. You can choose which paper prompts to respond to, and you can complete more than one paper assignment. Only your highest paper grade will count so you can complete more than one paper assignment if you want to improve your grade. The paper assignments are spread out through the semester and generally correspond to topics being covered in class. Be sure to check the due dates.

Once a paper prompt opens it will remain open for one week.

A grade rubric for the response papers is posted in Canvas. Be sure to review it.

**Course Final Grade Scale:** Your course grade is based on a straight percentage scale. An A will be 93 or above, A- 90-92.99, B+ 87-89.99, B 83-86.99, B- 80-82.99, C+ 77-79.99, C 73-76.99, C- 70-72.99, D+ 67-69.99, D 60-66.99, F 59.99 and below.

**Canvas:** A Canvas website exists for this course. The PowerPoint slides for each chapter are available in Canvas, and other information relevant to the course will be available too. Your grades will also be posted in Canvas.

**Communication:** UWSP e-mail is the official means of communication for this course. Check your e-mail account frequently. You must be able to access your UWSP e-mail in order to take this course.

**Make-up exams:** If you miss an exam, and have a valid and *documented* excuse, you may take a make-up exam. However, make-up exams are scheduled by me. The mid-term will not be rescheduled for students who miss it due to spring break travel considerations and so forth. Plan accordingly.

**Attendance:** You should attend class. Class attendance is linked to exam performance—those who attend the most usually do the best on exams in this course.

**Class Decorum:** academic success hinges upon a classroom environment that supports learning. To that end, I ask that all classroom disruptions be kept to a minimum. At the very least, please do not confer with your classmate during lectures, please turn off all cell-phones and other electronic devices, please arrive to class on time, and so forth. If you do arrive to class late, please take your seat with a minimum of disruption; likewise, if you have to leave early. If you need to leave early, clear it with me prior to class. If you arrive late, please see me after class is over.

**Statement on Academic Integrity:** I take very seriously the issue of academic integrity—the idea that academic honesty is a vital part of higher education. For the UWSP policy on academic integrity—what it is, and violations of it—I refer you to pages 5 and 6 of the Community Rights and Responsibilities Document given to all UWSP students. Academic misconduct in this course may result in sanctions, which may include (but are not limited to): a 0 on a specific assignment; a failing grade in the course; removal from the course.

**Student Privacy:** Federal law protects your privacy as a college student, which means your academic records generally cannot be released without your permission. Therefore, I cannot discuss your grades and classroom performance with your roommate, friends, and even parents.

## January

---

21	Introduction
23/28	Chapter One: An Overview of the American Legal System
30	Chapter Three: The Courtroom Work Group

## February

---

4	Chapter Three
6/11	Chapter Four: Judges
	Canvas Response Paper: Judicial Elections in Wisconsin
	Canvas Response Paper: Alexander Hamilton, Federalist Paper #78
	Canvas Response Paper: Federal Judicial Appointments
13/18	Chapter Five: Lawyers and Litigants
20	<b>No class;</b> Canvas Response Paper on Measuring Crime

25/27 Cases and Issues: The Constitution and Criminal Due Process  
NOTE: These three class days will be devoted to lecture and discussion of the Constitution and the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Amendments.  
Canvas Response Paper: Gideon at 50

## March

---

3 As above  
5 In class Exam #1

**10/12 Class will not meet. Mandatory Module in Canvas on Problem Solving Courts. The module must be completed by Friday March 13 at midnight. It will NOT be extended.**

**17/19 No Class Spring Break**

24/26 Chapter Seven: Trials  
Canvas Response Paper: Zacharias Mousiaoui Trial

31 Chapter Seven: Trials  
Canvas Response Paper: Plea Bargaining

## April

---

2/7 Chapter Eight: Sentencing  
9/14 Trial Courts: Chapters 9 and 10  
Canvas Response Paper: Problem Solving Courts. This paper is a separate assignment that the Module on Problem Solving Courts.  
16/21 Trial Courts  
23 In Class Exam #2  
28/30 Criminal Law and cases. NOTE: this section will be devoted to lecture and discussion on the substance of criminal law. Readings to be announced.  
Canvas Response Paper: Incarceration USA video.

## May

---

5/7 Tort Law  
Canvas Response Paper: Tort Cases

## **Final Exam:**

Online essay exam opens on May 11 at 8am and closes on May 12 at 5pm. The scheduled final exam period for this class is May 12, 8-10am, so you may take the online final during that time period.