Sociology 369
Fall 2013

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Sociology of Law

This course will focus on the role and function of legal institutions in society, especially the courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court. A sociological analysis of legal systems and processes can offer considerable understanding of how a modern society functions. Pre-law, Sociology, and Criminal Justice majors and others interested in the law as an important institution and as a product and a cause of social change will find this course useful. Law as a social product, representing the ethical values and goals of major interest groups in society, will be a focus of the course. Although most materials will deal with the American context, there will be comparative and historical material included, including especially the assigned parts of the Chambliss & Katz and the Black textbooks, as well as the unit on Islamic law. We will have coverage of Islamic law and legal issues, covered by supplementary materials available via WebCampus. A special unit on the origins of Nevada’s ethical and morals legislation (gambling, divorce, drugs) will be included, as will a short unit on Nevada’s welfare law history. Law as a form of social control will be covered, along with the issue of differential access to the legal system. Selected social psychological theories relevant to the course will be examined, as we examine the role and function of the jury in the American legal system.

**Course prerequisite:** SOC 101.

**This course satisfies Core Objective 12 (Ethics)**

**CO 12:** Students will demonstrate understanding of the ethical principles in general or in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to recognize, articulate, and apply ethical principles in various academic, professional, social, or personal contexts.

**SLO 1:** Students will learn about sociological theories that help explain the American justice system and develop a comparative understanding of international law concerning, ethics, the rule of law, and justice based on a set of ethical and juridical principles.

**SLO 2:** Students will learn through case studies how laws are developed, and the many ethical issues that contribute to law making in societies, as well as how laws are used to exert social control over nonconforming groups and individuals.

**SLO 3:** Students will learn how our judicial system operates, including how juries function in American society, and how laws are to be applied in an ethical and just manner.
**SLO 4:** Students will analyze major court cases that apply to the implementation of basic human freedoms and be able to discern if they are applied across various diverse racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in a fair and ethical way.

**Required readings** for the course include the following books:


There will also be a few required articles or chapters available electronically through WebCampus, library electronic reserves, or sent via email for you to read, on Islamic law and other topics.

**Course Evaluation and Assessment Methods and Procedures**

The Student Learning Objectives will be assessed by take home essay exams, a required in-depth term paper on a significant topic, and through in class discussions following the syllabus. The course outline is arranged by general topic area, instead of by specific date; readings are assigned to the topic area. Therefore, it will be up to the student to stay current. Make sure you know what will be covered in each week of the course, and ask if you are not sure. You should read ahead on all assignments so that lectures and discussions will be more valuable to you, and so you can better participate in class. **You must attend class and participate if you are to keep up and do well in the course.** If students appear not to be doing the reading, then pop quizzes will be used to determine levels of preparation.

This course is a combination lecture/seminar class, with students expected to be involved in discussions and making presentations. Your instructor will employ a Socratic method of presentation (calling on specific people to answer questions) which also will demonstrate teaching methods used in law schools. Part of your grade will depend on your participation in class discussions.

Testing will be two take-home exams, plus an in-class final exam given on Dec. 18 from 8 till 10 a.m. If a student has a certified disability (check with student services on this issue) extra time can be granted for the in-class final. Your responses to take-home exams will need to be typed (double-spaced) and carefully proof read. You will have a week to complete take-home exams. **Always keep a personal copy of any exam or other papers submitted.** Late work will have points taken off for being late, the amount depending on how late the work is when submitted.

Each student will be required to do a research term paper-project on a topic approved by the instructor in which theories covered in class will be applied. You should begin thinking right away of topics that interest you, and look in the course materials and lectures for ideas. Some of these which are of broad interest may be presented to the class. The term paper/project must be completed by Nov. 19, but a detailed outline of a couple of pages is due by Sept. 26, and must be approved by the instructor before you proceed. **Term projects must be your own work, of course.** Check the rules on plagiarism.
below, which will be enforced. I will require both a hard and an electronic copy of your term projects, so they can be checked if questions arise about any work you turn in. You also will be expected to do summaries of some articles and chapters placed on electronic reserve, as well as an analysis of a recent major Supreme Court case. These assignments are important so do not ignore them. Please use correct spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure in any written work. Do not use sexist language. Proofread your papers and tests – not doing so will lower your grade.

**Grading:**
Take home exams (two): 40%
Final exam: 20%
Term project: 30%
Participation and summaries 10%

**Grades:** The grade distribution for this course is as follows:

- 94-100 A
- 90-93 A-
- 87-89 B+
- 83-86 B
- 80-82 B-
- 77-79 C+
- 73-76 C
- 70-72 C-
- 67-69 D+
- 63-66 D
- 60-62 D-
- 59 and below F

Some films and guest lecturers will be planned for the course. Students should also plan to visit a trial court for a few hours to investigate the operation of that part of the legal system, and write a short summary of what was observed, for extra credit. Other extra credit opportunities may be given as well during the semester when events (lectures, TV specials, etc.) related to the course occur.

**Final Comments and Cautions.** Mutual discussion of take-home exam questions is encouraged, but each student must do his or her own separate response. No copying or sharing of answers will be acceptable.

**Teaching Assistant:** The teaching assistant is Jason Wilkerson. His email is jdwilkerson@umr.edu and he will be available in his office, room MSS 110C, holding office hours on Thursday from 10 until 12:00. Feel free to drop in during that time. If they don't work for you please schedule an appointment with him, using email or by talking with him before or after class.
Read the following very carefully, and ask questions if it is not clear to you. These policies will be enforced.

**Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating on exams, plagiarism) is a serious offense. All work that you submit in this class must be your own original work, and must have been generated by you specifically for the assignments. Academic dishonesty can take on many forms including, but not limited to, the use of prohibited materials during examinations, having one’s own assignments completed by a third party, submit the identical paper in two different courses, and plagiarism—each of which is a serious offense.

Each student is responsible for being familiar with UNR policies on academic dishonesty, available at [http://www.unr.edu/stsv/acdispol.html](http://www.unr.edu/stsv/acdispol.html). It is the policy of the Department of Sociology that any student who engages in any act of academic dishonesty will receive automatically a course grade of “F.” Further, in accordance with the UNR’s Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty Procedures, a record will created with the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. Repeated offenses may lead to the expulsion from the university.

**What is plagiarism?** Whereas most acts of academic dishonesty are obvious, students are sometimes unclear what “plagiarism” entails. Plagiarism means that you incorporate another author’s work into your own, but create the impression that you yourself are the original author. For instance, it is plagiarism when you cut and paste another author’s text into your own paper, but do not clearly mark it as a quote and do not credit the original source. Another example of plagiarism is when you use another author’s text, but change the syntax and vocabulary only slightly. Yet another instance of plagiarism involves using another person’s ideas and presenting them as your own. The web offers a number of great resources on the subject of plagiarism that help you decide when you need to credit another author and when something can be assumed to be common knowledge (in which case you do not need to credit a source). See, e.g., [http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/](http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/).

**How to avoid plagiarism?** When writing a paper, focus on what and how you want to say something, not on the language another author used. The easiest way is to follow a “closed source” policy: That is, when you have read a paper, book or website that is relevant to a paper that you are writing, close it and put it aside before you write your own text. Once you are done, go over your paper again and make sure that have not inadvertently copied another person’s language. Likewise, make sure that you do not pretend that another person’s insights are your own.

Keep in mind that plagiarism is more easily detected than you might think. Many instructors and graders have access to the same resources as you (e.g., the internet) and routinely check up whether any text you have submitted appears elsewhere. If you are in doubt whether something constitutes plagiarism or not, ask your instructor, the TA, or the UNR writing center, [http://www.unr.edu/cla/wc/](http://www.unr.edu/cla/wc/).

**Course Outline**

Week One: Course overview
Read: Chambliss & Zatz, selected chapters.

Weeks Two and Three: Recent major Supreme Court cases
Read: Chambliss & Zatz, selected chapters.
Weeks Three and Four: Nevada’s legal system: selected issues (CO12)
Read: Galliher and Cross and Galliher and Balswick articles on reserve.

Weeks Five and Six: Nevada’s moral legislation: A case study in sociology of law. (CO12)
Read: Galliher and Cross and Galliher and Balswick articles on reserve.

Week Seven: Nevada’s welfare system: why did it change? (CO12)
Read: Rusco article on electronic reserve.

Week Eight: Midterm Exam

Weeks Nine and Ten: Sociological approaches to law and legal institutions. (CO12)
Read: Black, selected chapters, the Appendix, and Cooney article (on reserve).

Weeks Eleven and Twelve: Organization and functioning of legal systems in society. (CO12)
Read: Chambliss & Zatz, selected chapters.

Week Thirteen: Key roles and processes in the jury system. (CO12)
Read: Vidmar and Hans, selected chapters.

Weeks Fourteen and Fifteen: Islamic law (CO12)
Read: Jamila Hussain article on electronic reserve

Week Sixteen: Final Examination