

LSJ 200: Introduction to Law, Societies, and Justice

Instructor: Jonathan Beck
Office hours: By appointment (Zoom)
E-mail: jcbeck@uw.edu

Lectures: MWF 1:30-2:20 in ARC 147

[Week 1 Zoom Link](#)

Teaching Assistants:

Ayda Apa Pomesnikov (AG, AJ)
Gozde Burcu Ege (AA, AC)
Michael Esveldt (AB, AE)
Roman Pomeschikov (AH, AI)

Course Overview

Law is central to social life: it shapes the distribution of power and resources, opportunities, relationships, punishment, and even our personal identities. Law is also shaped by social dynamics in complex ways. But what exactly is the law, and what different forms does it take? What gives law its power? *How* does it shape our everyday lives and identities? How does it create and enact violence, even as it seeks to suppress it? How can it be used to both protect and challenge rights, power, and privilege?

This course will introduce you to the social scientific study of law, as well as some of the main foci of the Law, Societies & Justice major, including violence, rights, and justice. Real world topics will be explored to illustrate the larger themes.

1. **What is law, and how does it matter?** What are its intended and unintended consequences? Why does law on the books differ from law in action? How do social forces shape law's meaning, application, and enforcement, and why is the impact of these social forces changing and uncertain? Why is legal discretion inevitable, and why does this matter?
2. **What is law's relationship to violence?** How and why does law entail and enact violence, even as it seeks to suppress it? Why does this matter?
3. **What are rights, and how are they related to law and justice?** How do people make rights- claims in struggles over law and justice? What happens when rights claims conflict? How do struggles over rights relate to justice? How can rights-claiming enhance justice, and how can the assertion of rights trigger counter-mobilizations and undermine justice?

Required Reading: All required readings will be posted for free on Canvas. There are no required textbooks. There will be about 30 pages of reading per class session, and I will always provide reading questions to help guide you through the readings. These questions are not required for credit but should be considered a useful resource.

Assessment:

Engagement/Participation	20%
Reading/Discussion Assignments (4 of 5)	25%
Short Essay	25%
Final Project	30%

To receive credit for this course, you must complete all assessment components above. I include a brief description of each component below:

Engagement/Participation: We recognize that every student participates differently. Participation will reflect your active engagement with course material and support of your peers, and can include verbal contributions in class, note-taking in small groups, online discussions, peer review assignments, study groups, conversations with the instructor, among other activities.

Reading/Discussion Assignments: Throughout the course, there will be a total of five reading/discussion assignments, which the instructor will make available a week before each is due. *Students must complete four (4), including the **REQUIRED first assignment (due Sunday, January 9 at midnight)***. Students may complete the fifth for extra credit on their final project. These are low-stakes assignments meant to build confidence, help with comprehension, and provide you an opportunity for hands-on analysis of law and society. These assignments may sometimes ask you to engage material from outside the syllabus.

Short Essay: Mid-way through the course, you will write a short essay (1000-1500 words) that will ask you to summarize and analyze course readings and develop and defend a thesis statement related to course content up to this point.

Final Project: For the final project, students will choose from a selected list of course topics and compare how this legal topic is portrayed in popular sources (news, movies, tv, literature) with academic sources (academic encyclopedias, academic books, peer-reviewed journals). Analysis will include a thesis about what the key differences are and *why* that matters to everyday understandings and experiences of the law. The final project will include a 1500-2000 word typed paper OR creative exposition (with teaching team approval), a 500 word personal reflection, and an annotated bibliography.

Weekly Due Dates

Week 1: First reading/discussion assignment due Sunday, Jan 9 at midnight (**required**)

Week 2: Second Reading/Discussion Assignment due Sunday, Jan 16 at midnight

Week 3: Short Essay Thesis due Sunday, Jan 23 at midnight

Week 4: Third Reading/Discussion Assignment due Sunday, Jan 31 at midnight

Week 5: Short Essay due Sunday, Feb 6 at midnight

Week 6: Nothing due – work on Final Project Proposal

Week 7: Final Project Proposal due Sunday, Feb 20 at midnight

Week 8: Fourth Reading/Discussion Assignment due Sunday, Feb 27 at midnight

Week 9: Final Assignment rough draft due by Sunday, March 6 at midnight

Week 10: Work on Final Project

Exam Week: Final Project Due Tuesday, March 15 @ midnight

Academic Honesty: You are assumed to be familiar with the university's policies on cheating and plagiarism and the potential penalties involved (a link to those policies is on the section website or you can find it at: <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/honesty.htm>). In the event that there is a question about your work, you may be asked to produce any notes and outlines you used, to identify your sources, and to provide an electronic copy of your paper. Remember: When in doubt, cite.

Access and Accommodations: Your experience in this class is important to me, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you experience barriers based on disability, please seek a meeting with DRS to discuss and address them. If you have already established accommodations with DRS, please communicate your approved accommodations to your instructor at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. Disability Resources for Students (DRS) offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924, Mary Gates Hall 011, uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu.

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/) (<https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/>). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/) (<https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>)."

Basic Needs Policy: Your safety, health and well-being are far more important than anything going on in class. Please feel free to reach out to me if you need to talk. Any student who faces challenges securing their food, housing, or personal safety should feel welcome to come to the instructor so that we can connect you with any resources available through the university.

Diversity Statement: Diversity creates opportunities for people to engage, understand and respect others whose perspectives, values, beliefs, traditions, and world views have been shaped by experiences and backgrounds that may be different from their own, particularly those from historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. This account of diversity includes, but is not limited to differences in gender, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, immigration status, intellectual and physical ability, sexual orientation, income, faith, socio-economic class, family status, primary language, military experience, political identification, cognitive style, and communication style. If any student has concerns, they should feel welcome and encouraged to express their concerns to me in person or via e-mail. Please see a breakdown of some campus resources at the end of this syllabus.

Course Schedule

NOTE: This schedule is subject to change. The instructor will notify you of any changes.

I. Introduction to Socio-Legal Studies

Week 1: Introduction, Key Concepts

Monday, January 3: Welcome and Introduction to the Course

Guiding Question: What are socio-legal studies? What can we learn from this perspective?

Tuesday Section: Begin reading for Thursday

Wednesday, January 5: Norms and Law

Guiding Question: What are norms, and are they different from law? Why do people obey them, and can they be enforced?

Thursday Section:

- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (introduction and chapter 5)
- Fabiola Cineas, “[What the hysteria over critical race theory is really all about](#)”

Friday, January 7: Law as Social Control

Guiding Question: Where does law get its power, and does it matter much to everyday life?

REQUIRED: First Reading/Discussion Assignment due by Sunday, January 9 at midnight

Week 2: Law, Legal Systems, and Types of Law

Monday, January 10: Dispute Resolution, Discretion, and the Indeterminacy of Law

Guiding Question: Why is law important to dispute resolution, and how does it work?

Tuesday Section:

- CIA World Factbook, “[Legal Systems](#)”
- Tamir Moustafa & Jeffrey Adam Sachs, “[Islamic Law, Society, and the State](#)”
- Julian Brave NoiseCat, “[The McGirt Case is a Historic Win for Tribes](#)”

Wednesday, January 12: Legal Systems in Comparative Perspective

Guiding Question: What different types of law are there throughout the world, and where does the U.S. fit into that picture?

Thursday Section:

- Sally Engle Merry, *Colonizing Hawai’I* (chapter 2)
- Taylor Weik, “[What Native Hawaiians Want You to Know Before You Travel to Hawaii](#)”

Friday, January 14: Types of Law and Legal Systems in the U.S.

Guiding Question: What types of law co-exist in the contemporary United States, how do they matter, and do they ever combine or conflict?

Second Reading Discussion Assignment due by Sunday, January 16 at midnight

Week 3: Law and Power

Monday, January 17: HOLIDAY, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no class)

Tuesday Section: No Readings – TAs will provide instructions

Wednesday, January 19: Law and Inequality

Guiding Question: What is the relationship between law and inequality?

Thursday Section:

- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “[Until Black Women are free, none of us will be free](#)”
- MLK jr., “[America’s Chief Moral Dilemma](#)” (excerpts)

Friday, January 21: Introduction to International Law

Guiding Question: What is international law, and how does it matter to contemporary legal issues?

Short Essay proposal due by Sunday, January 23 at midnight

II. Law, Society, and Justice: Applying Our Socio-Legal Lens

Week 4: Criminal Law I

Monday, January 24: Implicit Bias and Discretion

Guiding Question: What is implicit bias, and how does it matter in the context of experiences with law enforcement and criminal law?

Tuesday Section:

- Majority and dissenting opinions in [Utah v. Strieff](#) (see Third Reading/Discussion Assignment for activity involving this case)
- George S. Bridges and Sara Steen, “Racial Disparities in Official Assessments of Juvenile Offenders: Attributional Stereotypes as Mediating Mechanisms”

Wednesday, January 26: Policing in Democracy

Guiding Question: What is the relationship between policing and democracy, and how might they undermine or reinforce each other?

Thursday Section:

- Teresa P.R. Caldeira, “The paradox of police violence in democratic Brazil”
- Rashawn Ray, “[How can we enhance police accountability in the United States?](#)”

Friday, January 28: Law and Punishment

Guiding Question: What is the purpose of punishment, can it reduce violence, and how is it reflected in state institutions like prison?

Third Reading/Discussion Assignment due by Sunday, January 31 at midnight

Week 5: Criminal Law II

Monday, January 31: Death Sentences

Guiding Question: What can we learn about the relationship between law and state power from the death sentence?

Tuesday Section:

- Listen: “The Experiment” from WNYC, “[Is There Justice in Felony Murder?](#)”
- Dana Goldstein, “[Too Old to Commit Crime?](#)”
- Jeremiah Bourgeois, “The Irrelevance of Reform”

Wednesday, February 2: Life Sentences

Guiding Question: What is the purpose of a life sentence in prison, why has it become more common, and what are its social consequences?

Thursday Section:

- Arthur Longworth, “[How to Kill Someone](#)”
- Justin E.H. Smith, “There is blood, a lot of blood, very red blood”

Friday, February 4: Love and Mercy

Guiding Question: What other paradigms besides “criminal justice” offer ideas about how to enhance social order in society?

Short Essay due by Sunday, February 6 at midnight

Week 6: Immigration Law

Monday, February 7: Law and Borders

Guiding Question: What are borders, why do they matter, and how does the law seek to establish and protect them?

Tuesday Section:

- Kitty Calavita, “Immigration Law, Race, and Identity”

Wednesday, February 9: Forced Displacement and Refugee Rights

Guiding Question: Who is a refugee, and what rights are they guaranteed under international and U.S. law?

Thursday Section:

- UW Center for Human Rights, “[Human Rights at Home](#)” (see reading questions for instructions)

Friday, February 11: Immigration and Race

Guiding Question: How does race impact experiences of immigration, and how does immigration law reflect racial politics?

Nothing due – work on final project proposal

Week 7: Law and Capitalism

Monday, February 14: Public Law and Private Property

Guiding Question: What is the relationship between law and private property in contemporary societies?

Tuesday Section:

- Michael McCann and William Haltom, “Java Jive: Genealogy of a Juridical Icon”
- Jack Kelly, “[‘Lying Flat,’ ‘Antiwork’ and The ‘Great Resignation’ Spreads Worldwide as Young People Protest Against System](#)”

Wednesday, February 16: The Rise of the Anti-Work Movement

Guiding Question: What can the rise of the “anti-work” movement teach us about the relationship between law and labor power?

Thursday Section:

- American Association of University Women, “[Deeper in Debt](#)” (web page)
- Andre M. Perry, Marshall Steinbaum & Carl Romer, “[Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation](#)”
- Adam Looney, “[Putting student loan forgiveness in perspective: How costly is it and who benefits?](#)”

Friday, February 18: Gender, Race, and Student Debt

Guiding Question: Why do we have tuition fees, and how can socio-legal studies help us understand who benefits and who doesn’t?

Final Project proposal due by Sunday, February 13 at midnight

III. Toward Justice in Law and Society

Week 8: Law and Social Change I

Monday, February 21: HOLIDAY, Presidents’ Day (no class)

Tuesday Section: No readings – TAs will provide instructions

Wednesday, February 23: Legal Consciousness

Guiding Question: How can people come to understand themselves and their community through law, and how does that matter?

Thursday Section:

- Anna-Maria Marshall, “Idle Rights: Employees’ Rights Consciousness and the Construction of Sexual Harassment Policies”
- Video: [PBS Newshour, “Women are speaking up about sexual harassment.”](#)

Friday, February 25: Legal Mobilization and Social Change

Guiding Question: What is legal mobilization, and can it lead to social change?

Fourth Reading/Discussion Assignment due by Sunday, February 27 at midnight

Week 9: Law and Social Change II

Monday, February 28: Litigating for Change

Guiding Question: Can litigation be important to social change, and what are its limitations?

Tuesday Section:

- Courtenay W. Daum, “Marriage Equality: Assimilationist Victory or Pluralist Defeat?”

Wednesday, March 2: Fighting in the Public Arena

Guiding Question: What legal strategies can activists take besides litigating in court?

Thursday Section:

- Adrian Carrasquillo, “[How The Immigrant Rights Movement Got Obama to Save Millions from Deportations](#)”

Friday, March 4: Direct Action and Civil Disobedience

Guiding Question: Why do activists sometimes decide that disobeying the law is their best choice?

Final Project rough draft due by Sunday, March 6 at midnight

Week 10: The Promise and Peril of International Law

Monday, March 7: The Rules of International Law

Guiding Question: Who makes the rules, who enforces them, and do states obey international law?

Tuesday Section:

- Nisha Varia, “Cleaning House: The Growing Movement for Domestic Workers’ Rights”
- George Bisharat, Jeff Handmaker, Ghada Karmi and Alaa Tartir, “Mobilizing International Law in the Palestinian Struggle for Justice”

Wednesday, March 9: The Promise of International Human Rights Law

Guiding Question: Can international human rights law improve lives for real people, or is it just another expression of state power?

Thursday Section:

- Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò and Beba Cibralic, “[The Case for Climate Reparations](#)”
- Lisa Vanhala, “The Diffusion of Disability Rights in Europe”

Friday, March 11: Mobilizing International Law for Social Change

Guiding Question: Does international law offer new opportunities for activists?

Exam Week: March 12-18

Final Project Due March 15 @ midnight