

**LSJ 200: Introduction to Law, Societies, and Justice**

Instructor: Jonathan Beck  
Office hours: Wednesdays 9:00-10:00 a.m. and 1:45-2:45 p.m.  
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**Lectures:** MWF 1:30-2:20 in KNE 210

**Teaching Assistants:**

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**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	15%
Big Ideas Assignment 1	20%
Big Ideas Assignment 2	20%
Big Ideas Assignment 3	25%

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. If you are concerned about your Engagement grade you should have a discussion with your teaching assistant.

**Reading/Discussion Assignments:** Throughout the course, there will be several short reading/discussion assignments, which the instructor will make available a week before each is due. 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.

**Big Ideas Assignments:** The Big Ideas Assignments are designed to check in with your comprehension of course material and development of important academic skills (analysis, original research, writing, etc.). The assignments are not technically cumulative, but will require you to build on conceptual knowledge and academic skills we develop throughout the course. Assignments will primarily cover material as follows:

- **Big Ideas Assignment 1:** Weeks 1-3
- **Big Ideas Assignment 2:** Weeks 4-7
- **Big Ideas Assignment 3:** Weeks 8-11

**Weekly Due Dates**

Week 1 – no assignments

Week 2 – Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 1 due Sunday, October 9 @ midnight

Week 3 – no assignments (Discuss Big Ideas Assignment 1)

Week 4 – Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 2 due Sunday, October 23 @ midnight

**Week 5 – Big Ideas Assignment 1 Due Sunday, October 30 @ midnight**

Week 6 – no assignments (Discuss Big Ideas Assignment 2)

Week 7 – Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 3 due Sunday, November 13 @ midnight

Week 8 – Work on Big Ideas Assignment 2

**Week 9 – Big Ideas Assignment 2 Due Tuesday, November 22 @ midnight**

Week 10 – Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 4 due Sunday, December 4 @ midnight (Discuss Big Ideas Assignment 3)

Week 11 – Work on Big Ideas Assignment 3

**Final Exam Week: Big Ideas Assignment 3 due Monday, December 12 @ 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](http://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

### Week 1: Introduction, Key Concepts

#### **Wednesday, September 28: Welcome and Introduction to the Course**

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

#### **Thursday Section:**

- No readings

#### **Friday, September 30: Norms and Law**

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

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

#### **Monday, October 3: Law as Social Control**

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

#### **Tuesday Section:**

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

#### **Wednesday, October 5: The Indeterminacy of Law**

**Guiding Question:** Why are there differences between law as written and law as practiced?

#### **Thursday 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](#)"

#### **Friday, October 7: 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?

*Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 1 due Sunday, October 9 @ midnight*

### Week 3: Law and Power

#### **Monday, October 10: The Boldt Decision as Case Study**

**Guiding Question:** What are the real life consequences of the complex and layered legal systems within which we live?

**Tuesday Section:**

- Sally Engle Merry, *Colonizing Hawai'i* (chapter 2)
- Taylor Weik, "[What Native Hawaiians Want You to Know Before You Travel to Hawaii](#)"

**Wednesday, October 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:**

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

**Friday, October 14: Law and Inequality**

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

**Week 4: Criminal Law I****Monday, October 17: Implicit Bias and State Violence**

**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](#)
- George S. Bridges and Sara Steen, "Racial Disparities in Official Assessments of Juvenile Offenders: Attributional Stereotypes as Mediating Mechanisms"

**Wednesday, October 19: 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, October 21: 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?

*Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 2 due by Sunday, October 23 @ midnight*

**Week 5: Criminal Law II****Monday, October 24: Law and Punishment, cont.****Tuesday Section:**

- Listen: "The Experiment" from WNYC, "[Is There Justice in Felony Murder?](#)"
- Justin E.H. Smith, "There is blood, a lot of blood, very red blood"

**Wednesday, October 26: Death Sentences**

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

**NO CLASS THURSDAY AND FRIDAY: work on Big Ideas Assignment 1**

***Big Ideas Assignment 1 Due Sunday, October 30 @ midnight***

**Week 6: Immigration Law**

**Monday, October 31: 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?

**Tuesday Section:**

- Jeremiah Bourgeois, “The Irrelevance of Reform”
- Arthur Longworth, “[How to Kill Someone](#)”
- Dana Goldstein, “[Too Old to Commit Crime?](#)”

**Wednesday, November 2: Love and Mercy**

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

**Thursday Section:**

- Kitty Calavita, “Immigration Law, Race, and Identity”
- UW Center for Human Rights, “[Human Rights at Home](#)” (see reading questions for instructions)

**Friday, November 4: Law, Borders, and Displacement**

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

**Week 7: Law and Capitalism**

**Monday, November 7: Immigration and Rights**

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

**Tuesday Section:**

- Michael McCann and William Haltom, “Java Jive: Genealogy of a Juridical Icon”

**Wednesday, November 9: Public Law and Private Property**

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

**Thursday Section: No sections, work on Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 3**

**Friday, November 11: Veterans Day, no class**

*Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 3 due Sunday, November 13 @ midnight*

**Week 8: Law and Social Change I**

**Monday, November 14: Lochner and Labor Rights**

**Guiding Question:** What can we learn from labor law about why so many people seem unhappy at work?

**Tuesday Section:**

- Anna-Maria Marshall, “Idle Rights: Employees’ Rights Consciousness and the Construction of Sexual Harassment Policies”

**Wednesday, November 16: Legal Consciousness**

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

**Thursday Section:**

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

**Friday, November 18: Legal Mobilization**

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

**Week 9: Thanksgiving Holiday – no class**

*Big Ideas Assignment 2 due on Tuesday, November 22 @ midnight*

**Week 10: Law and Social Change II**

**Monday, November 28: Fighting in the Public Arena**

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

**Tuesday Section:**

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

**Wednesday, November 30: Civil Disobedience, Political Violence, and Social Change**

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

**Thursday Section:**

- [AAUW, “Deeper in Debt” \(website\)](#)
- Eleni Schirmer, [The Aging Student Debtors of America](#)
- [Deborah Hermanns, “Abolishing tuition fees: lessons from Germany”](#)

**Friday, December 2: Tuition, Student Debt, and Inequality**

*Weekly Reading/Discussion Assignment 4 due Sunday, December 4 @ midnight*

**Week 11: The Promise and Peril of International Law**

**Monday, December 5: The Rules of International Law**

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

**Tuesday Section:**

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

**Wednesday, December 7: 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:**

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

**Friday, December 9: Mobilizing International Law for Social Change**

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

**Exam Week:** December 12-17

*Big Ideas Assignment 3 due Monday, December 12 @ midnight*