COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

The law touches on all areas of social life, but why do we need social science to help us understand the law? After all, law is an area of study that is taught by its own specialized instructors and practiced by a select group of professionals. Surely, you might argue, law is for law schools, law books, and lawyers? But there is much more to it than that. Law, which affects so many social processes, is itself a product of those same social processes. It is people—as judges, attorneys, police officers, legislators, defendants, and plaintiffs—who make the law. The actions of these people are influenced not just by “law on the books,” but also by their own experiences, by their social relationships, and by their interpretations of the world around them. Given this viewpoint, how can anyone understand the law without social science?

In this course we shall look at how social theorists conceptualize and explain the relationship between law and society. For example, we shall examine how law shapes and is shaped by broader economic forces. We shall also discuss how law is influenced by race, ethnicity or gender. A core theme throughout this course is the exploration of law’s relationship to culture and legal consciousness. We shall also think about how law operates to liberate and to oppress. The primary purpose of this course will be to develop our perspective on law beyond the legal profession. By the end of the semester, you should have developed an understanding of the social processes that affect the legal system. More importantly, you should have developed your capacity to think critically and communicate effectively about themes, concepts, and arguments surrounding the law. I would add this is not a technical course on practicing law.

COURSE FORMAT AND PROCEDURES

Classes will be challenging and involve lecture, discussions, and class exercises. I expect you to come to class prepared, namely having read the assigned materials and being willing to discuss them. I am keen on fostering a seminar-like atmosphere, so I will call on you to participate. If for any reason this makes you uncomfortable, you should let me know. The purpose of lectures and discussion is to help clarify and develop the readings, not to simply rehash them. To do well in the course, it is important that you take good notes (in class and on the readings) and ask questions to help you recall what was covered during class.

CLASS RULES

1. Be respectful by coming/leaving class on time. Turn off your cell phones and do not engage in annoying or disruptive behavior (e.g., surfing the web or texting).
2. I encourage you to offer your perspective during class discussions and to back it up with facts and arguments. I expect there to be disagreements, but these should be civil.
3. If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, these need to be identified at the start of the semester. Please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.
4. Make sure that your GMU e-mail account has been activated and that you check it regularly. I will communicate announcements through this address.
5. When examinations are handed out, do not begin until instructed to do so. Read and follow the instructions carefully. During exams, students may only speak to me. You must begin the exam at the designated time and you may not leave the classroom once the exam has begun and return. If you arrive late for the exam, you may not be permitted to take it.

**COURSE GRADING AND REQUIREMENTS**

**Class Participation** (40 points)

Evaluation of class participation is based on 5 pop quizzes throughout the semester (10 points each). Students may drop their lowest quiz score. These quizzes can only be completed in class and may well cover material assigned for that specific day. If you are not in class, you will not receive credit for the quiz. Again, it is very important that you come to class regularly, prepared, and willing to discuss the reading(s). Should your course grade be border-line at the end of the semester, your active, appropriate, and consistent participation in class discussion will push your grade toward the higher mark. I would add that discussion is one of the best ways to clarify your understandings and test your conclusions.

**Mid-term exams** (2 x 40 points = 80 points total)

There will be two mid-term exams. The exams will include multiple-choice, identification, and short answer questions. The purpose of the exams is to obtain a fair estimate of your grasp of the course material and your ability to apply it.

**Final Exam** (80 points)

The final exam is cumulative and will be held on Tuesday 12/18 (10:30 a.m. -1:10 p.m.).

Makeup exams will be allowed only when the student provides satisfactory written verification of personal illness, death/serious illness in the immediate family, or other serious emergency. Students approved to participate in an athletic event during the exam must bring an official request form from the Athletic Department in advance. Students who present false information will be charged with academic dishonesty. Students who know in advance that they will miss an examination should notify the instructor in advance. All makeup exams will be scheduled at the convenience of the instructor. All makeup exams will be in essay form. Below is the grading scale for this course.

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<th>POINTS</th>
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**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Students are expected to abide by the requirements of the University regarding academic integrity (see “Honor System and Code” in the GMU University Catalog). Any form of cheating or dishonesty will be
considered a serious violation of academic integrity, will be reported to the Honor Committee, and may result in a failing grade for the course and other administrative action.

Special note on plagiarism

All graded course work must be done independently. Without honest effort, a learning community has no substance or validity. For more on cheating and an overview of the Honor Code go to http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Kitty Calavita. 2010. Invitation to Law and Society: An Introduction to the Study of Real Law. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Available at the PW bookstore: $15.00 new, $11.25 used)
- Course readings available through Blackboard

SCHEDULED TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS (by class session)

I. Introduction and Overview

Aug. 28  What is law and society?
Calavita, pp. 1-9 (Chapter 1)

II. Social Theories of Law

Sep. 4  Types of society, types of law
Calavita, pp. 10-29 (Chapter 2)


III. Law and Social Interactions

Sep. 11  Gender and race and the law
Calavita, pp. 51-93 (Chapter 4)


IV. The Courtroom Process

Sep. 18  Courts and plea bargaining


**Sep. 25** Mid-Term Exam 1

**Oct. 2** Juries


Frontline movie: *Inside the Jury Room* (60 minutes)

**Oct. 9** No class (Due to Columbus Day, Monday classes meet this day)

**V. Law and Social Control**

**Oct. 16** Deterrence and legitimacy


**VI. Law and Criminal Justice**

**Oct. 23** Police

Calavita, pp. 94-115 (Chapter 6)


**Oct. 30** Mid-Term Exam 2

**VII. Law and Dispute Processing**

**Nov. 6** The Dispute Process

Calavita, pp. 30-50 (Chapter 3)


**VIII. Law and Legal Consciousness**

**Nov. 13** Common Place of Law, Chapters 1, 2, and 4

**Nov. 20** (No class –Thanksgiving Break)

**Nov. 27** Common Place of Law, Chapters 5 and 6
Dec. 4  Wrap-Up and Review for Final Exam

Calavita, pp. 116-154 (Chapters 7 and 8)

Dec. 18  FINAL EXAM (10:30 a.m. – 1:10 p.m.)