

Department of Political Science | University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Political Science 253 – Introduction to Law (online)
Spring Semester 2024

Professor Druscilla Scribner (Ph.D., University of California San Diego)

Office Location: Virtual

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 11 to 1 pm AND Wednesdays from 6-7 pm on MS Teams (or by appointment)

Email: scribnerd@uwosh.edu

Class Time: Asynchronous (paced)

Class Location: Online

Political Science Department Office: Sage 4631, (920) 424-3456

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Political Science 253 Introduction to Law (SS) The development of political systems of jurisprudence, the judicial system of the United States and Wisconsin, together with a survey of the major branches of law designating the place of law in society. **3 credits**

This course introduces students to the study of law. It will provide students with a basic understanding of the American legal system and the fundamentals of legal research and legal analysis. The course surveys several areas of law, including constitutional law, torts, contracts, property, and employment.

Introduction to law is taught by the Political Science Department and is a required course for the Law and Policy Minor. It is also an Explore – Social Science (SS) course in the University Studies Program (USP). **This course has no prerequisites;** it is open to all students regardless of major or disciplinary focus.

Student Learning Outcomes: After completing this course, you should be able to:

- Describe sources of law and the structure of the legal system in the U.S.
- Showcase a basic understanding of select major areas of law
- Utilize basic legal research skills to brief a case
- Apply legal rules to new situations to formulate legal conclusions
- Evaluate how the legal system addresses contemporary social issues
- Recognize issues of legal responsibility, professionalism, and ethics

Assessing student learning: This course uses a variety of methods, both formative and summative, to assess student learning. Assessment activities include quizzes, discussion assignments, writing assignments, and reflection. There is a cumulative final exam.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required textbook: *The Study of Law: A Critical Thinking Approach*, Fifth Edition. Katherine A. Currier, Thomas E. Eimermann, Marisa S. Campbell. Aspen Publishing

The text is available at the bookstore. It is also available as an eBook on Vitalsource.com. eBooks are offered at different price points for six-month, twelve-month, or lifetime access periods to accommodate students' varying preferences and needs. The eBook is less expensive and includes embedded accessibility options, such as read to me and linked vocabulary. You may also find a rental option. *As long as you have the 5th edition, you can choose the format for your text.*

ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This is an asynchronous online course - we do not have any zoom meeting times. But we do have a weekly schedule of assignments. You need to complete one week before moving to the next. Each new week is available starting the previous Wednesday at 11:59 pm.

There are a variety of activities to complete to reach our learning objectives each week. These activities include reading, online discussions, videos, mini-explanatory lectures, written assignments, quizzes, etc. These assignments have due dates.

Participation: In online courses, your **regular participation** involves logging in to our course, navigating through the content pages in a module, completing the readings and videos, participating in discussions and other activities, and submitting assignments and quizzes.

Your participation is an integral part of your learning, but it also contributes to the learning of your peers. As members of our learning community, we are responsible for creating an environment where we can all learn from each other. Depending on the size of our class, you may be placed in a discussion group of about 10 students (give or take) to make our discussions more intimate and manageable. Discussions are automatically tied to your group.

To ensure each member of our course feels included and welcomed, we will abide by a few key rules of etiquette. We will treat each other with dignity and respect while acknowledging that we are unique and have different views and opinions about topics. Some of the topics we cover may elicit strong reactions. To ensure everyone feels comfortable engaging in our discussions, please remember that written communications can be easily misinterpreted. Each time you make a post or reply to a discussion, read it twice before you submit it to ensure the words you have chosen are considerate but also convey your message. If you feel a peer has violated these expectations, don't hesitate to contact me directly; I will tend to your concern in a confidential matter.

Workload: For a three-credit course, the standard number of expected work hours is 9 hours per week. As a rule of thumb, that is 3 hours of lecture (in class with your professor/lecture) and 6 hours of time spent on coursework such as reading, note-taking, and assignments. You have a lot of flexibility with your time during the week. Each week is a module in Canvas that includes an overview highlighting what you need to accomplish in the module. *Make yourself a schedule*

for this course and stay organized and self-motivated to ensure you do not fall behind! I will provide you with reminders and deadlines to keep you on pace to completion.

Technology Requirements: We will use Canvas for class. Set up your Canvas notifications so you do not miss anything! Keep in mind that Canvas does not play that well with Apple. So be sure you are accessing Canvas through Chrome (not Firefox, and not Safari). Canvas only supports some file types (again, not Apple) - MS Word and PDF are good choices. Most assignments are simply submitted through the Canvas text box.

Depending on how you decided to purchase your text(s) for this class (e.g., rental, paper copy, or electronic book), you may have other technical requirements related to your textbook. You have purchase options so that you can do you!

Web-based applications you will use in this course are all provided by UWO. They include Canvas and Microsoft Teams. For any technical problems, make sure you contact the UWO help desk right away! That's their job... so don't wait! These are not things I can help you with. See also:

- [Canvas Help](#) and [Canvas Student Guides \(very comprehensive\)](#)
- [UWO Knowledge Base \(Tech Support\)](#)

COURSE POLICIES

Course Schedule: We have a course schedule that we follow over the semester. You can find this schedule in our START HERE module. It is hyperlinked to our modules in Canvas. A non-linked version is at the end of this syllabus for your reference.

The course is organized in weekly modules. Each includes an overview highlighting what you need to accomplish during the week. The week's overview page lists the activities and associated assignments for that week; these must be completed to unlock and move to the next module.

Assignments and Grading: Your final grade in this course will be based on the following weighted assignment groups, using the UWO 93/87/80 grading scale.

- Weekly Discussions: 45%
- Weekly Reading and Chapter quizzes: 15%
- Weekly Learning Reflections: 15%
- Case Brief(s) and Analysis (short papers): 15%
- Final Exam: 10%

Letter Grade	Percentage Range	
A	100%	to 93%
A-	< 93%	to 90%
B+	< 90%	to 87%
B	< 87%	to 83%
B-	< 83%	to 80%
C+	< 80%	to 77%
C	< 77%	to 73%
C-	< 73%	to 70%
D+	< 70%	to 67%
D	< 67%	to 63%
D-	< 63%	to 60%
F	< 60%	to 0%

I know it can be frustrating to wait a long time to receive feedback or to know your grade. For some items, like quizzes, you have instant feedback. Discussions and reflections take some time to get through. I will grade your work on Canvas as soon as possible (in conjunction with my other classes), ideally within 2-4 days from the

due date. You will see rubric comments and often additional comments in your grade book on your written assignments. [You can see comments on Canvas.](#)

Early Alert: A few weeks into the semester, your instructors will send you an **early alert message if they think that you are struggling with class**. This message will let you know whether your instructors have noticed any academic problems, attendance problems, or both. When you get such a message, it is a chance to address a problem and improve on your work. I suggest meeting with me in office hours (or by appointment) so we can work out a plan for your success in this class.

Absences, late work, and accommodations: Plan on submitting work on time. All assignments are due by midnight (11:59 pm) on the scheduled dates. Because this is an asynchronous course, you already have flexibility with your time and should be able to adjust to minor personal and family emergencies; however, if you have a significant illness or another issue that impacts your ability to participate in the course, communicate with me immediately.

Note that assignment deadlines are not flexible. *Discussion assignments every week have a key goal of students learning with and from each other.* Late assignments compromise this learning goal and affect both your learning and that of your classmates. Student contributions impact the learning process for other students – **student-to-student interaction is a requirement of online courses.**

You will be submitting all your work on Canvas. Canvas automatically assigns a zero on Canvas when the due date/time passes. **Late submissions are automatically subject to a 7% per day late penalty**, and the grade overrides the zero once the assignment is graded.

A late penalty can be removed for university-excused absences and for extenuating circumstances that temporarily impact your ability to participate in the course. *If you are experiencing extenuating circumstances, you need to communicate with me.*

- **Excused absences and late work:** According to University policy, excused absences require documented evidence of medical necessity or an approved college-sanctioned event. We will work out a schedule for you to complete your work *before or after* your absence. Zeros and late penalties will be removed once the work is turned in.
- **Unexcused absences and late work:** The late penalty is 7% per day – it is automatic and will diminish your potential grade to a floor of 60%. This means you can turn in late work and at least get a D- and therefore, you are always better off submitting something rather than nothing! All assignments must be submitted before the end of week 14 to get a D- rather than a zero.
- **Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities** that may affect their ability to participate in some *limited course activities* or meet some *minor course requirements*. Documentation must be on file in the University's "accommodate" system. Both the eBook version of the textbook and Canvas have accessibility features that you may find useful, such as the immersive reader function. For

more information on accommodations at UWO, see the Dean of Students website and the Accessibility Center.

Tips for managing online learning and participation

Online learning is different and can be challenging! What's out of sight can often be out of mind. Although you aren't coming to a physical classroom, ensure you stay engaged and on top of your work.

- **Create a schedule that works for you.** Plan your week and schedule consistent blocks of time to work on this class. Just like if you had an in-person class. Early each week, review the week's overview page and your "To do list" for each week on that overview page.
- **Budget time for working online.** You already know it will take you longer to respond to an online discussion than to raise your hand and comment in class - so give yourself time!
- **Use Canvas features, like the calendar.** Review your Canvas Calendar for assignment due dates. I will post materials on Canvas, primarily using the announcement tool to post reminders twice a week and stay in touch with the class.
- **Find a place to focus - avoid shared spaces;** let others know when you're working so they leave you alone (or remind you to stay on task!)
- **Don't procrastinate!** It can be effortless to delay work when you're not physically attending class. Keep up with what's posted in Canvas daily - set up a schedule for yourself so you don't fall behind.
- **Ask questions.** If you don't understand something, don't sit in silence. Message me! And/or see me virtually in office hours.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is using someone else's UNIQUE ideas, words, theories, evidence, findings, argument, etc., and passing them off as your own by not properly attributing or acknowledging the original source of those ideas.

Students may inadvertently plagiarize when they fail to provide page numbers for quotations in a paper or when they paraphrase or summarize the work of others without acknowledging the source in the text of their paper. Even "accidental" or "sloppy" plagiarism is widely considered wrong, unethical, and dishonest. If you are unsure whether or not what you have written constitutes plagiarism, ask before you turn it in. If there is an issue, we'll talk.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be complicated regarding plagiarism and academic honesty. AI text generators can be useful tools, but they are often prone to factual errors, incorrect or fabricated citations, and misinterpretations of abstract concepts. I have found that Chat GPT (and other AI tools) are *not reliable - they often make things up*, from academic citations and historical names. **Do not rely on AI to be correct!** AI is permitted in this course under certain circumstances as a tool but should be used cautiously. Moreover, AI programs are not a replacement for human creativity, originality, and critical thinking. These are skills that you must develop over time.

- The use of AI tools is permitted in this course to:
 - Check grammar and style.
- The use of AI tools is NOT permitted in this course to:
 - Impersonate you in classroom contexts, such as by using the tool to compose discussion posts or replies.
 - Write entire sentences, paragraphs, or papers to complete class assignments.

Remember that you are responsible for the content of any work submitted for this course under your name. This includes the information you submit based on an AI query such that it does not violate intellectual property laws, contain misinformation, or unethical content. Your use of AI must be properly documented and cited to stay within university policies on academic integrity. Any assignment that is found to have used generative AI tools in unauthorized ways runs afoul of the academic integrity expectations.

See the Dean of Students' [resources on plagiarism](#) for more information about how we address these issues at UWO. This class uses **Turnitin technology** to help you and me detect plagiarism issues and the use of AI.

Citations: Your written work, such as discussion posts, should consistently demonstrate that you have read the material, that you understand it, and that you can apply concepts and support your reasoning. **Use your textbook and course materials for support.**

If you are a political science major, the Political Science Department has [writing resources](#), including a citation style guide. **For this class, you will primarily cite the text (Currier et al. 2020: page number).** [UWO Libraries also has citation help.](#) This doesn't have to be perfect... but you do need to cite!

COURSE SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ACTIVITIES

We have a course schedule that we will follow over the course of the semester. The basic schedule is reproduced below. In Canvas, this schedule includes hyperlinks to our weekly pages with detailed plans and additional resources for each week. If anything changes in our schedule, I will inform you via announcements.

I have structured the course with lots of reminders and deadlines to keep you on pace to completion. You should sign up for Canvas notifications to ensure you do not miss class announcements and reminders.

Each week has its own module in Canvas, and each module is structured the same way with consistent assignments and due dates to help you structure your time. These include:

- *Learning objectives for the week*
- *Assigned reading in our textbook*
- *Related learning resources (such as a mini-lecture and/or concept explainer pages)*
- *Group discussion(s) assignments*

- *Chapter Quiz (due Friday)*
- *Learning Reflection (due Sunday night)*

Week 1: Introduction to Legal Reasoning and Critical Thinking

Feb 5-Feb 9 – Module available starting Jan 31.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study of Law

*Also introduce yourself to the class

Week 2: The Functions and Sources of Law

Feb 12-Feb 16 – Module available starting Feb 7

Chapter 2: Functions and Sources of Law

Week 3: The Classification of Law and the Court System

Feb 19-Feb 23 – Module available starting Feb 14

Chapter 3: Classification of the Law

Chapter 4: The Court System and the Role of Judges

Week 4: The Litigation Process and Its Alternatives

Feb 26-Mar 1 – Module available starting Feb 21

Chapter 5: The Litigation Process and Its Alternatives

Week 5: Constitutional Law – Freedom of Expression

Mar 4-Mar 8 – Module available starting Feb 28

Chapter 6: Constitutional Law

*Case Brief #1

Week 6: Constitutional Law – Freedom of Religion, Due Process and Equal Protection - Chapter 6: Constitutional Law

Mar 11-Mar 15 – Module available starting Mar 6

Chapter 6: Constitutional Law

Week 7: Torts – Intentional wrongful injuries

Mar 18-Mar 22 – Module available starting Mar 13

Chapter 7: Torts

Spring Break

Mar 25 - Mar 31

Week 8: Torts – Negligence and Liability

Apr 1-Apr 5 – Module available starting Mar 20

Chapter 7: Torts

*Case Brief #2

Week 9: Contracts – Making Enforceable Agreements

Apr 8-Apr 12 – Module available starting Apr 3

Chapter 8: Contract Law

Week 10: Property – Ownership Rights and Distribution after Death

Apr 15-Apr 19 – Module available starting Apr 10

Chapter 9: Property and Probate Law

Week 11: Business – Employment Law

Apr 22-Apr 26– Module available starting Apr 17

Chapter 10: Laws Affecting Business

Week 12: Family Law – Marriage, Divorce, Custody

Apr 29-May 3 – Module available starting Apr 24

Chapter 11: Family Law

Week 13: Ethical Dilemmas – Access to Justice

May 6-May 10 – Module available starting May 1

Chapter 14: Ethical Dilemmas Facing Attorneys

Week 14: Wrapping up and Final Exam

Exam Available May 13-17

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT POLICIES

Office Hours: The [Political Science Department](#) uses Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) for holding office hours. This system is available to all UWO students. Your Poli Sci faculty are available during their posted office hours (whether you are taking an in-person or an online class). To use MS Teams during office hours, send a chat to your instructor to let them know you want to meet - think of that as the equivalent of knocking on the door. **We're here for you! Please use our office hours freely and often.** Many faculty are also happy to set up meetings outside of office hours if students have conflicts with the posted times.

Expectations for Academic Honesty: A college education is intended to develop your skills, knowledge, and confidence. Graded assignments are designed to work on these items. Thus, to gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence of a college-educated person, all graded work is to be your own. When you are directed to work alone, an assignment or test must be done by you, its primary ideas are to be your own, and any outside materials should be dealt with appropriately (quoted when using someone's words and cited when quoting or referencing them in any other way). When you are asked to work in teams, that work should be done by the group collaboratively. [More information can be found here.](#)

Concerns or Grievances: The Department of Political Science is committed to offering you a high-quality classroom or online experience, and we take your feedback very seriously. If you have concerns about anything related to this course, assignments, or teaching method, you are encouraged to first speak with your instructor directly. If you are uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are invited to speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. Tracy Slagter. She can be reached at slagtert@uwosh.edu. Should she be unable to resolve

your concerns, she will guide you to appropriate resources within the College of Letters and Science.

Note to Political Science Majors: Congratulations on joining a great major - the world needs your critical thinking, creative problem-solving, knowledge of the issues, and stellar communication skills!

Political Science majors should take Political Methodology (245) in either their sophomore year or the first semester of their junior year. If you have questions about this requirement, your course schedule, possible internships, or career preparation, please reach out to your faculty adviser. Students are encouraged to meet with their faculty advisers at least once per year. If you are unsure who your adviser is, you can check TitanWeb.

Changes: If substantive changes are made to this course syllabus, such as changes in schedule or assignments, notification will be provided promptly, and a revised syllabus will be made available (see our course schedule page on Canvas).

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

I want you to be successful! There are many [student resources](#) dedicated to your academic and personal success.

UW Oshkosh strives to create inclusive learning environments. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements. For more information, see the [Dean of Students](#) website and the [Accessibility Center](#).

If you have any situation/condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect your ability to perform in this class or access class assignments; please reach out to me so that we can work together on a plan for your success. Canvas is an ADA-compliant course management software suite. Both Canvas and our textbook have accessibility features that you may find helpful such as the immersive reader function.

Diversity drives innovation, creativity, and progress. At the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, the culture, identities, life experiences, unique abilities, and talents of every individual contribute to the foundation of our success. Creating and maintaining an inclusive and equitable environment is of paramount importance to us. This pursuit prepares all of us to be global citizens who will contribute to the betterment of the world. We are committed to a university culture that provides everyone with the opportunity to thrive.

By federal regulations set forth by [The Higher Education Act of 1965](#) (amended in 1998), [consumer information](#) is available to all students at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

STUDENT RIGHT TO KNOW ACT (1990) Students are advised to see the following URL for disclosures about essential consumer protection items required by the Student Right to Know Act of 1990: <https://uwosh.edu/financialaid/consumer-information/>