

PhD Course Descriptions

LAWS 6000 – Doctoral Seminar in Legal Studies

The recognition that law is not autonomous from social, political and economic relations of rule has led to a rich and varied set of questions about the place of law and ‘the legal’ in modern society. This course takes up some of these questions, and considers how they have been pursued and contested within legal studies scholarship. The course assumes a prior exposure to social and political theory (through LAWS 5000 or equivalent education), and examines the ways in which particular issues and debates, some emerging out of social and political theory, have come to occupy and define the terrain of legal study. While our focus in this course is on the debates and questions animating legal studies, students are encouraged to also adopt a critical stance to pronouncements about ‘debates’ and their significance: who were parties to the ‘debates’, what were the terms of ‘debates’, what other questions or directions might have been obscured by the predominance of some debates in legal studies over others?

Objectives

The objectives of the seminar are to:

- a) introduce students to some of the debates – substantive, empirical, or methodological – as they have emerged within different configurations of legal studies: law and society, sociology of law, socio-legal studies, and other appellations;
- b) encourage a critical analysis of the underlying suppositions that shaped these debates and led to particular directions and gaps within legal studies scholarship;
- c) Enable students to locate their own legal research interests and perspectives within a broader intellectual context; and
- d) explore the significance of, and dissonances caused by, interdisciplinary scholarship in legal studies.

LAWS 6001 – Proseminar in Legal Studies

This seminar, meeting every two weeks throughout the fall and winter terms, is designed to assist students in succeeding in the multiple dimensions of doctoral study in Legal Studies: as graduate students, researchers, scholars, teachers, and members of an intellectual community. The seminar design and content will be directed at assisting students with external and internal funding opportunities; defining and shaping a program of research; planning research and writing trajectories; and issues arising from (graduate) scholarship in the study of law.

Objectives

Oriented around presentations by faculty and other visitors, together with intensive reading and in-class discussion, the main objectives are to: Encourage students to define their own intellectual projects and interests with an awareness of the epistemological issues in identifying questions and bodies of research; Provide a productive scholarly environment to assist students in preparing grant applications, attending conferences and participating in other activities as researchers and scholars; Encourage an on-going critical examination of the intellectual processes in framing and answering research questions; Assist students in shaping their own identities as researchers and scholars; and Foster an environment of collegiality and appreciation for the intellectual benefits of exploring a broad range of interests and perspectives related to interdisciplinary legal studies.

Themes

The seminar content will be driven by two main themes:

- a) Professional development: what are the skills, knowledge and experiences needed for you to succeed as a PhD student in legal studies? The material pursued here will vary as students' needs vary but will cover such essentials as applying for research grants; applying to and attending academic conferences; developing a teaching portfolio; balancing the competing demands of a PhD;
- b) Conducting a research project in legal studies: drawing on the experience of faculty members and other researchers, together with selective readings, this aspect of the pro-seminar explores innovative and emerging directions in legal studies research and methodology. The emphasis here is on a collective learning process that explores the different stages of research design including the steps needed to answer research questions. Different approaches to research and methodology will be considered, as well as the experience of other researchers; lessons they learned, approaches they tried; the unexpected rewards of research they discovered, and so on.

LAWS 6002 – Law, Regulation and Governance

This seminar offers an interdisciplinary inquiry into the central problematics, key debates, and historical contexts of theories of law and the state, regulation, and governance. It is framed against a backdrop of frequent, but contested, claims that both the law and the state have been suffering crises of legitimacy in late modern society.

At the same time, many current questions of crisis and legitimacy reflect ongoing historical patterns and issues associated with the emergence of the modern state. We take up foundational arguments about the rule of law, sovereignty, citizenship and regulatory control, examine various challenges to those theoretical foundations, and explores more recent attempts to theorize the relational, diffuse and mobile sites, knowledges, and practices of governance and regulation. The course is intended primarily as a foundational course for students who have declared a concentration in Law, Regulation and Governance as they prepare for their field comprehensive examination.

LAWS 6003 – Human Rights, Citizenship and Global Justice

This course is primarily intended for PhD students in Legal Studies who concentrate in the field of Human Rights, Citizenship and Global Justice. The course will provide an overview of key currents and debates on human rights, citizenship, social justice, and the global order. Research on these issues is produced in fields and scholarly traditions as different as political science, law, history, analytic and continental philosophy, postcolonial and feminist cultural studies, anthropology, sociology and literature.

In the course, we will discuss the constitutive assumptions and epistemologies of different approaches; and we will look for productive frictions and gaps that emerge when we read texts from different approaches together. This course invites students to scrutinize human rights, citizenship, and global justice discourses for their sources, assumptions, and effects. It does not presume that these discourses contain the right answer to current (or past) problems. Rather, students are expected to reflect critically about the historical sources and social contexts of (their) concepts of rights and justice.

LAWS 6004 – Law, Crime and Social Order

This course exposes students to critical, theoretical understandings of state based attempts to control crime and promote security. We will explore major political and intellectual movements concerning the 'problem' of crime and security. While power can be theorized in many different ways, in this class we will look at core models of power as expressed in crime control which assume a 'top down' approach. The class begins by orienting students to three influential strains of critical criminology: Marxism / political economy, feminism and Foucaultian traditions. Following this, students will address shifts in governmental rationalities, moves from welfarism to neoliberalism to what many now hail as the rise of neoconservatism and the roles of expert knowledges, disciplinary powers and risk discourses in the project of governing crime and security.

In addition, the class will consider emergent critiques of contemporary criminal justice thought. These critiques could stem from, critical geography, queer theory, critical ethnography, science studies, studies of subjectivity, cultural studies and post-colonial studies. This is a theory driven course designed to orient advanced graduate students to the field of critical studies on crime and security. Students who complete the course will be well versed in the major debates in the field and will be oriented towards bodies of literature which can be explored in depth during the comprehensive exam process.