

Course Outline

COURSE:	LAWS 5001 W – Legal Method and Social Inquiry
TERM:	Winter 2026
CLASS:	Day & Time: Wednesdays 11:35am – 2:25pm Room: Please check Carleton Central for current Class Schedule (in person seminar)
INSTRUCTOR:	Dr. Michael Christensen
CONTACT:	Office Hrs: Wednesdays 2:30pm – 3:30pm Telephone: Email: Michael.christensen@carleton.ca
BRIGHTSPACE:	https://brightspace.carleton.ca/d2l/home/366386

CALENDAR COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduces problems of research strategy and methods. Explores contrasting methodologies in legal research; evaluates methodologies employed in understanding legal reasoning, discourses, and practices. Includes seminars in which participants present outlines of their own research projects, focusing on methodologies and research questions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to some of the most common approaches Legal Studies scholars use to collect, interpret and critically analyze data. When scholars study social, cultural, political, or legal phenomena, they must make choices about how to approach their subjects. The range of available methodological options are always framed by the process of asking a research question, identifying sources of empirical data and reflecting on how to best interpret these in relation to existing theoretical and empirical research. It is also incumbent upon all scholars to examine their own social positions in relation to their research subjects. In this class, we will discuss the research process, the role of the researcher and the benefits and limitations of choosing different methods of inquiry. We will also discuss specific approaches, including qualitative interviews, ethnographies, and digital content analysis.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The topics presented in this course will help students achieve the following learning objectives:

1. Learn how to design a research project and choose an appropriate methodological strategy for a given topic and research question.
2. Develop a critical understanding of how methodological choices can shape the findings of a study.
3. Learn how to read research articles in Legal Studies and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the findings based on an assessment of the methodology.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy (2017) *The Practice of Qualitative Research*. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. [cost estimate: \$155.92]

- Please contact the professor for further information **before** purchasing the textbook as there will be alternative options arranged through the library.
- All other required reading materials will be posted to Brightspace.

EVALUATION

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the Department and of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Department and the Dean.

Evaluation Components

<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date(s) Due</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Participation	In-class participation	Weekly	5%
Perusall Comments	Commenting on Readings	Weekly	10%
Discussant	Leading discussion	Once per term	10%
Application Assignments	2 assignments @ 10 points	See below	20%
Scaffolding Exercises	3 assignments @ 5 points	See below	15%
Research Proposal	15-20 page report	April 1	40%

In-Class Participation (5%)

Students will be expected to participate in class discussions each week. The in-class participation grade constitutes the sum of this participation and is based on a wholistic evaluation of students' ability to contribute to class discussion. Students who are losing points based on insufficient participation will be contacted by the instructor and given a chance to adjust their level of participation. [Note: this grade is meant as a low-bar incentive to participate in class. Students who regularly attend and talk at least a little bit in class will get the full 5%]

Perusall Comments (10%)

We will be using the Perusall online platform to promote discussion comments about the readings. All readings will be uploaded to Perusall (accessed through Brightspace) and students will be expected to contribute comments or questions on the readings each week. Comments must be posted *before* class each week and will be evaluated based on quality over quantity. Each week, a student's comments will be assigned a grade of either 1 point (good engagement with the material), .5 points (satisfactory engagement), or 0 points (unsatisfactory/no engagement). 10 points is the maximum grade for the term.

Reading Discussant (10%)

At the beginning of the term, students will be asked to sign up to be a discussant for one of the weeks during the term. Discussants should bring 2-3 pages of notes and discussion questions based on the readings for their designated week and be prepared to lead our discussion of the readings. The sign-up for weekly discussant spots and a tip sheet for preparing notes can be found on Brightspace.

2 Application Assignments @ 10 points each (20%)

Students will be expected to complete three application assignments during the term, which are worth 10 points each. The instructions for each assignment will be posted in the "Assignments" module on Brightspace. The "Interview" assignment is due on **February 25**. The "Coding and Textual Analysis" assignment is due on **March 25**.

3 Scaffolding Exercises @ 5 points each (15%)

Students will be expected to complete three "scaffolding" assignments that will support the completion of the research proposal and are worth 10 points each. These assignments will include: a research question exercise (due on **January 21**), the submission of a draft of the research proposal coupled with a peer feedback exercise (completed in class on **March 11**), and an oral presentation which will be delivered verbally on **April 1**. Specific instructions for these assignments will be posted to Brightspace.

Research Proposal (40%)

Each student is required to write a research proposal that introduces a topic, a research question, and a discussion of which qualitative method(s) would be appropriate for the proposed study. The research proposal should be in the form of a 15-20 page report. The instructions for this assignment will be posted on Brightspace. The research proposal is due on **April 1**.

LATE PENALTIES AND REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS

Late assignments will only be accepted in consultation with the instructor. As soon as you know that you will not be able to turn in an assignment on time, please contact me. All other late assignments will be assessed with a standard late penalty of 5% per day.

The granting of extensions is at the discretion of the instructor, who will confirm whether an extension is approved and its duration. For information about requesting short-term or long-term extensions, deferrals for final exams, or academic consideration due to illness, injury, or other extraordinary circumstances, please visit the Academic Consideration Policy page. All requests must be submitted to the instructor before the assignment due date or, in the case of exam deferrals, directly to the Registrar's Office. Full details and instructions can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-consideration-policy/>.

SCHEDULE

January 7 – Introduction to the Course

- Course Outline Review
- Booth, Wayne, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams (2003) *The Craft of Research*, 2nd edition. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press. Pgs. 40-55 (Chapter 3).

January 14 – Sorting Through Different Approaches to Research

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 1)
- Creutzfeldt, Naomi (2019) "Traditions of studying the social and the legal: A short introduction to the institutional and intellectual development of socio-legal studies." In Naomi Creutzfeldt, Marc Mason & Kirsten McConnachie (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Socio-Legal Theory and Method*. Abingdon: Routledge. Pgs. 9-34.
- Law, John (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. London; New York: Routledge. Pgs. 1-17.

January 21 – The Role of Theory in Research

*****SCAFFOLDING EXERCISE DUE: Research Question Exercise*****

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 2)
- Martin, John Levi (2015) *Thinking Through Theory*. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company. Pgs. 1-15.
- Hunt, Alan (1987) "The Critique of Law: What is 'Critical' about Critical Legal Theory." In *Critical Legal Studies*. Oxford; New York: Blackwell. Pgs. 5-19.
- Healy, Kieran. 2017. "Fuck Nuance." *Sociological Theory* 35(2):118–27.

January 28 – Research Design and the Politics of Methodology

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 3)
- hooks, bell (2004) "Culture to Culture: Ethnography and Cultural Studies as Critical Intervention." in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber & Patricia Leavy (eds.) *Approaches to Qualitative Research*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pgs. 149-158.
- Burgis-Kasthala, Michelle (2016) Scholarship as Dialogue? TWAIL and the Politics of Methodology. *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 14: 921-937.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edition. New York: Zed Books. Pgs. 44-60.

February 4 – Research Ethics

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 4)
- Benson, Michaela (2015) "On Goffman: Ethnography and the Ethics of Care." In *The Sociological Review* (blogpost). <https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/on-goffman-ethnography-and-the-ethics-of-care/>
- Campos, Paul (2015) "Alice Goffman's Implausible Ethnography." In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. September, section B: 6-16.
- Pittaway, Eileen et al. (2010). "'Stop Stealing Our Stories': The Ethics of Research with Vulnerable Groups" in *Journal of Human Rights Practice*. 2(1): 229-251.

February 11 – Interview Research

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 5)
- Pugh, Allison (2013) "What Good are Interviews for Thinking About Culture? Demystifying Interpretive Analysis" in *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. 1(1): 42-68.
- Jerolmack, Colin & Shamus Khan (2014) "Talk is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy" in *Sociological Methods & Research*. 43(2): 178-209

February 18 – Winter Break

February 25 – Ethnographic Research

APPLICATION ASSIGNMENT DUE: Interviewing Assignment

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 7)
- Geertz, Clifford (1973) "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books/Harper Collins. Pgs. 412-453.
- Small, Mario Luis, and Jessica Calarco. 2022. *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapters 1 & 2. Pgs. 23-79

March 4 – Case Studies

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 8)
- Burawoy, Michael (1998) "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory*. 16(1): 4-33.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent (2006) "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research." In *Qualitative Inquiry*. 12(2): 219-245.

March 11 – Media Research and the Challenge of Digital Data

*****SCAFFOLDING EXERCISE: Draft Proposals Due*****

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 9)
- Marres, Noortje (2017) *Digital Sociology: The Reinvention of Social Research*. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press. Chapter 3 ("Do We Need New Methods?")
- Shaw, Ryland. 2025. "Is TikTok 'for' News? Sociotechnical Frictions and Workarounds in Environmental News Events on TikTok." *International Journal of Communication* 19: 3788–3807.

March 18 – Data Analysis and Interpretation

- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 11)
- *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Chapter 12)
- Calarco, Jessica McCrory. 2020. *A Field Guide to Grad School: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum*. Skills for Scholars. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Chapter 7. Pgs. 104-121
- Morgan, Hani. 2022. "Understanding Thematic Analysis and the Debates Involving Its Use." *The Qualitative Report* 27(10):2077–91.

March 25 – Futures of Inquiry in the Era of AI

*****APPLICATION ASSIGNMENT DUE: Coding and Textual Analysis*****

- Nelson, Laura K. 2020. "Computational Grounded Theory: A Methodological Framework." *Sociological Methods & Research* 49(1):3–42.
- Zittrain, Jonathan. 2019. "From Technical Debt to Intellectual Debt in AI." *Berkman Klein Center Collection*. (<https://medium.com/berkman-klein-center/from-technical-debt-to-intellectual-debt-in-ai-e05ac56a502c>).

- Arosio, Laura. 2025. "Generative AI as a Teaching Tool for Social Research Methodology: Addressing Challenges in Higher Education." *Societies* 15(6)

April 1 – Presentations*****RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE*******POLICY ON PERMISSIBILITY OF SUBMITTING SAME WORK MORE THAN ONCE, PERMISSIBILITY OF GROUP OR COLLABORATIVE WORK, AND PERMISSIBILITY OF USING GENERATIVE AI**

Students are strictly prohibited from submitting any work that has been previously submitted for academic credit in another course. Any such submission will result in a grade of 0, and the student will be referred to the university's academic integrity office for review. Re-using any portion of previous work, regardless of its extent, will be treated as a violation of academic integrity, unless the student is given permission by the instructor.

Collaboration is permitted in specific instances where the instructor allows it. For example, group projects or collaborative assignments may be part of the course, in which case students are encouraged to work together and divide the tasks evenly. In all other cases (such as individual assignments), students must complete their work independently.

Students may use AI tools like ChatGPT, but only in specific, limited ways. AI tools can be used to assist with tasks such as gathering ideas, researching initial sources, or proofreading a final draft for grammar and style. However, students are not allowed to use AI to organize or communicate their core ideas. The focus of the course is on developing original thought and critical thinking skills, so AI should not be relied upon for creating the main content of an assignment. Any use of AI must be clearly documented and cited, including the prompts used and how the tool assisted in the process.

Note: Students can also access resources related to citing Generative AI on the [MacOdrum Library website](#).

Winter 2026 Sessional Dates and University Closures	
<i>Please find a full list of important academic dates on the calendar website:</i> https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/	
January 5, 2026	Winter term begins.
January 16, 2026	Last day for registration and course changes (including auditing) for Winter courses.
January 31, 2026	Last day to withdraw from full winter courses and the winter portion of fall/winter courses with a full fee adjustment.
February 16, 2026	Statutory holiday. University closed.
February 16-20, 2026	Winter break. No classes.
March 15, 2026	Last day for academic withdrawal from Winter courses.
	Last day to request Formal Examination Accommodations for April full winter, late winter, and fall/winter final examinations from the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Note that it may not be possible to fulfil accommodation requests received after the specified deadlines.
March 25, 2026	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in full winter term or fall/winter undergraduate courses, before the official April final examination period.
April 3, 2026	Statutory holiday. University closed.
April 8, 2026	Winter term ends.
	Last day of winter and fall/winter classes.
	Classes follow a Friday schedule.
	Last day for take home examinations to be assigned.
April 9-10, 2026	No classes or examinations take place.
April 11-23, 2026	Final examinations in fall term courses and mid-term examinations in fall/winter courses will be held.
April 23, 2026	All final take-home examinations are due on this day, with the exception of those conforming to the examination regulations in the Academic Regulations of the University section of the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar.

UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

PLAGIARISM

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

STATEMENT ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

As a University student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>

Emergency Resources (on and off campus):

- <https://wellness.carleton.ca/get-help-now/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (students.carleton.ca/course-outline).

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows.

Pregnancy and Family-Status Related Accommodations

Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details about the accommodation policy, visit the [Equity and Inclusive Communities \(EIC\)](#) website.

Religious Obligation

Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, please go to: <https://carleton.ca/equity/focus/discrimination-harassment/religious-spiritual-observances/>.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation.

You can find the Paul Menton Centre online at: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>

If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. Read more here: <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>.

For more information on academic accommodation, please visit: <https://students.carleton.ca/services/accommodation/>.

Academic Consideration for Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances

Due to medical and other extenuating circumstances, students may occasionally be unable to fulfill the academic requirements of their course(s) in a timely manner. The University supports the academic development of students and aims to provide a fair environment for students to succeed academically. Medical and/or other extenuating circumstances are circumstances that are beyond a student's control, have a significant impact on the student's capacity to meet their academic obligations, and could not have reasonably been prevented.

Students must contact the instructor(s) as soon as possible, and normally no later than 24 hours after the submission deadline for course deliverables. If not satisfied with the instructor's decision, students can conduct an "informal appeal" to the Chair of the department within three (3) working days of an instructor's decision. We have created a webform specifically for appeals to the Chair, which can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/law/application-for-review-of-refusal-to-provide-academic-consideration/>. *Note: This form only applies to LAWS courses and is not the same as a formal appeal of grade.* More information about the academic consideration can be found [here](#).