



The University of Western Ontario

SOCIOLOGY 4455F-001

Challenging the Law

Fall 2025

In-person

Instructor: Dr. Ballucci, Associate Professor

Department of Sociology

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Course Description: This course examines law as a social institution, exploring both classical and contemporary understandings of the law. By examining empirical examples, we examine different explanations of how the law operates and affects social relations.

Prerequisite(s): Registration in third year or above in any Department of Sociology module, or fourth year in any module.

Unless you have either the prerequisites or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in the course, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Anti-requisite(s): None

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

This course aims to examine the law as a product of social action, organizations, and processes. Contrary to the traditional legal approach, which views the law as a formal system of rules operating autonomously from society, this workshop treats law as a social institution. We will examine concepts and frameworks for thinking about law and legal process. We will explore classical and contemporary theoretical and empirical developments in sociology and in the more interdisciplinary area of socio-legal studies. This course aims to understand how sociologists study law and explain some of the patterns and dynamics of law in various social settings. We will focus on classical theoretical contributions to the sociology of law, selected writings from the contemporary sociology of law, and empirical themes of law and law-related processes to which sociological theories will be applied. This course places a strong emphasis on gender, race, and the implementation and process of law. Upon completing this course, students should understand how sociologists study law and empirically analyze the relevant dynamics of law and law-related phenomena.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Analyze law as a social institution shaped by power, inequality, and social action.
- Apply feminist and socio-legal perspectives to challenge assumptions about law's neutrality and universality.
- Evaluate how law structures and reproduces inequality across race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship.
- Critically connect socio-legal theories to contemporary cases, media examples, and real-world justice issues.

Course Material:

Required Text(s):

All readings will be made available to students on Bright space, as a PDF link in the syllabus or via email.

Communication:

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL Brightspace site

(<https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/login>) on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

How to Contact Me:

I can be contacted via email at dballucc@uwo.ca. Only emails that use proper etiquette will be answered. For example, a salutation is required. "Hello Professor Ballucci, or Dr. Ballucci" is acceptable. "Hey", "Miss", or the absence of a salutation is not sufficient. Also, no texting terminology is acceptable. Lastly, provide me with your name, the course and the section (if applicable) that you are emailing about.

Also, please do not email me questions about course content or course procedures. I will take time in every class to answer these types of questions. There are, however, two main exceptions to this policy:

1. You are experiencing a personal emergency that I need to know about before the next class.
2. You want to make an appointment to see me.

I will try to respond to these emails within 24 hours on weekdays. I answer emails infrequently over the weekend.

Method of Evaluation:

The evaluation methods described in the course outline are essential requirements for the course.

1. Leading discussion on an article 20%
2. Hot Seat 5%
3. Brief work 10% (4 cases) for each week - 40%
4. In-Class Writing Assignment 35%

1. Seminar Presentations, Hot Seat, and Participation- Sign-up sheet

This course is organized around student-led seminars. Each week, two or three students will work together as a team to lead the discussion on the assigned readings for a two-hour block. Presenters are expected to go beyond summary by identifying the central arguments of the reading(s), providing necessary context, and highlighting one or two key points of critique or debate. The presentation must be a coordinated, team-based effort rather than a set of individual summaries. Presenters are also responsible for preparing two to three debate or discussion questions that will form the basis of an interactive activity. They will divide the class into groups, assign perspectives, and moderate a 20–30 minute structured exchange. Each seminar should conclude with a short synthesis of key insights and one or two takeaways that connect the reading(s) to broader course themes.

Non-presenting students are expected to complete all readings, participate actively in group discussions and debates, and contribute to the interactive activities facilitated by the presenters. The final hour of class each week will be reserved for a short break followed by a full-class debate or synthesis activity. This format ensures that all students—not only the presenters—are accountable for the readings and are consistently engaged in applying course concepts to both scholarly arguments and real-world issues.

PLEASE see Appendix 1, the course schedule and the readings document for further details.

2. Hot Seat

In addition to presenters, two students each week will be assigned to the Hot Seat. Hot Seat students are responsible for bringing in one relevant media example (such as a news article, NGO report, op-ed, podcast, or documentary clip) that connects to the readings. They must share their chosen article or example with the class the day before they present, so that everyone has a chance to review it in advance.

Hot Seat students will briefly (3–5 minutes) introduce their example to the class, explain its connection to the readings, and pose at least one critical question or comment to spark discussion.

The Hot Seat rotates weekly so that every student participates in this role once during the term. Hot Seat students will present every week from Week 2 through Week 12, except Reading Week (no class) and Weeks 13 and 14, which are reserved for the in-class writing assessment and course wrap-up.

On weeks when the seminar focuses on **case briefs rather than articles**, Hot Seat students will instead be given a supplementary article related to the broader class material. Their responsibility is to connect this piece to the week's themes and raise at least one critical question for discussion.

3. Brief work 10% for each week - 40%

The success of this course as a seminar depends on informed and engaged student participation. All students are expected to attend class having done the readings and prepared for discussion. You must bring the reading material (on your computer is acceptable) with you to class each week, along with your nametag. Please refer to each other by name in class discussions.

This proportion of your grade will reflect your efforts to contribute meaningfully to building the case brief. This means participating in building the case brief and providing comments related to the readings that address course content. You will not receive grades for simply participating in group discussions and sharing your opinions, unless they relate to the course material. You must engage in meaningful conversations during brief development to attain these grades. I will evaluate not only how often you speak, but also the quality of your contributions. Your contributions should be informed by and grounded in the readings. Your attendance is also reflected in this grade. You will receive a mid-term grade on your participation.

4. In-Class Writing Assignment 30%: Nov 27 or Dec 4

During the final class, you'll complete a written assignment that draws together key concepts, themes, and debates from across the course. You will respond to a critical question related to the sociology of law—potentially involving a short reading, excerpted case, or scenario—and write a structured, well-argued response. This is your opportunity to show what you've learned and how you can apply it in an integrated, reflective way. The assessment is closed-book, completed in class, and no computers are permitted. You may bring and use your own handwritten or printed notes to support your response.

This assignment must be completed in class. If you are unable to make this assessment, you will need documentation for your absence that will be verified.

Course Schedule and Readings:

The course readings and schedule are located on Brightspace and in a separate document posted on Brightspace entitled 'Course Schedule and Readings'

Artificial Intelligence:

1. All assignments must be completed independently, without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) unless the professors advise otherwise.

2024-2025

Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Copyright: Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

Absence from Course Commitments: Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration](#) – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request using the Student Absence Portal (SAP) https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html . Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically scheduled during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described in the course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness must include the completed Western Student Medical Certificate (SMC) <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf> or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner. Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

Once the request and supporting documentation have been received and reviewed, appropriate academic consideration, if granted, shall be determined by the instructor in consultation with the academic advisor, in a manner consistent with the course outline. Students with an approved absence from an in-class test or exam will be required to write a makeup exam, unless otherwise specified in the course outline. The course instructor or teaching assistant(s) may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup text/exam. Students should be aware that the make-up test/exam will not necessarily be in the same format, be of the same duration, or cover the same material as the original test/exam.

Note: missed work can *only* be excused through one of the mechanisms above. Being asked not to attend an in-person course requirement due to potential COVID-19 symptoms is **not** sufficient on its own. Students should check the Western website to see what directives for Covid are to be followed. Western has been and will continue to follow directives established by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. That directive will state whether students should or should not come to campus/class and any other requirements (e.g., masks are mandatory). Please check on your own and do not email the instructor, the Department Undergraduate Advisor/Coordinator or the Faculty Academic Counselling Office.

Students who fail to write a make-up test or special examination will receive a grade of zero on that assessment. No other make-up opportunities will be provided unless further academic consideration is granted by the student's Home Faculty Academic Counselling office.

Religious Accommodation: Students should review the policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_religious.pdf. Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning: In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence or University approved emergency during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL Brightspace for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Code of Student Conduct: It is the responsibility of every student to read the Code and familiarize him or herself with its contents. The Code is available at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/code_of_conduct.pdf. Sanctions for non-compliance range from a warning or reprimand to expulsion from the University.

Student Responsibility: Students in a degree program must select courses in accordance with the published requirements. Students are responsible for ensuring that their selection of courses is appropriate and accurately recorded, that all course prerequisites have been successfully completed, and

that they are aware of any antirequisite course(s) they may have taken. Students must familiarize themselves with the Student Responsibility for Course Selection policy https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/academic_counselling.pdf and the Registration and Progression policy https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/registration_progression.pdf. Students are responsible for the successful completion of the Graduation Requirements for their degree program https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/registration_progression_grad/graduation.pdf.

Support Services:

Office of the Registrar Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

[Faculty Academic Advising](#) - Please visit your Home Faculty Academic advising webpage for information regarding adding/dropping courses, important dates, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters https://registrar.uwo.ca/faculty_academic_counselling.html.

[USC services](#) offers information about student the health/dental plan, Bus Pass, food support services, Peer support Centre etc <http://westernusc.ca/services/>.

[Mental health](#) – Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

[Health & Wellness Services](#) – Registered part-time and full-time students can book a physical health appointment at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/index.html>. Additional on-campus services are also available <https://www.uwo.ca/health/shs/services/index.html>.

[Accessible Education](#) provides supports and services to students with disabilities at Western, in all programs and faculties. Students with disabilities or accessibility challenges should work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

[Gender-Based and Sexual Violence](#) – Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experience GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: http://uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

[Western Libraries](#) – Visit the many library locations on campus. Western Libraries provide access to material in physical and digital formats <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/catalogue/index.html>. Research support is available <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/research/index.html>.

[Writing support](#) – Online writing resources, writing support and writing modules are available <https://writing.uwo.ca/undergrads/>

Bookstore: Search for Textbook availability and cost <https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search>