**PSCI 1010: Politics and Pop Culture**

**Law and Pop Culture**

**Fall 2015 – Mondays, 6:30 – 9:20, 310 General Academic Building**

**Instructor**: Wendy Watson **Office Hours**: Mondays, 3 - 6;

153 Wooten Hall Wednesdays, 12 - 3;

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940.565.4413

**1. Course Description:**

Law is the foundation of ordered society. In the U.S., our popular culture is rife with legal narratives, and Americans have a preoccupation with the legal system (most notably the criminal justice system). In this class, we’ll explore the facts and fiction of the legal process. We’ll start by addressing the institutions of the legal system, both in reality and in works of popular culture. We’ll also consider the role of law in society (as a means of social control, as a means of fact finding, as a means of dispute resolution, and as a means of social change). Finally, we’ll consider whether and how popular culture affects the law.

Students who complete this course should have a better understanding of the U.S. legal system and the ways in which it affects our lives. Moreover, they should be more savvy consumers of popular culture, understanding the ways in which popular culture distorts the reality of the law.

\*\*\*NOTE\*\*\* The materials we read, view, and discuss in this class will often involve mature themes including (but not limited to) domestic violence, murder, sexual situations, and racism. You are responsible for all class materials. If you are particularly sensitive to these issues, you need to see me early in the semester to determine whether this class is appropriate for you.

**2. Texts, Etc.**

The readings for this class will come from book chapters and articles that will be located on Blackboard. It is imperative that you learn how to access Blackboard and keep up with the readings there.

In addition to these online readings, you will read *To Kill a Mockingbird* (by Harper Lee)

Please purchase your book at the UNT bookstore so that we all have the same edition.

We will be watching a number of films in and out of class. There is one documentary (at the end of the term) that will be available in class only (I have to play it through HBO-GO, the only format in which it is currently available). All other films and television episodes will be on reserve in the media library in Chilton Hall. Note that materials we are watching in class will not be available in Chilton until noon on the Tuesday after we watch them. You are responsible for viewing all materials. You can do this by using the reserve copy at Chilton or by finding the appropriate film/TV episode on any service you choose (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, etc.). Not all viewing materials are available through these sources, but **all** will be available at Chilton Hall.

**3. Requirements and Grading**

Your grade in this class will be based on the following components:

Attendance 10%

Paper 30%

Exams (15% each) 30%

Final Exam 30%

The presumed grading scale is

90% - 100% A

80% - 89% B

70% - 79% C

60% - 69% D

0% - 59% F

I reserve the right to manipulate this scale in favor of students, but the likelihood is very small. In the event the scale changes, it changes for everyone. Do not ask for special consideration.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class, after the break of every class., and once on the first day of class. This gives you a total of 23 points at which I will check your attendance. You get three “freebies”; after that, you lose 5% of your attendance grade for each missed class. If you check in for attendance and then leave, you will **not** receive credit for being present.

Sometimes I will take attendance by passing around a sign-in sheet. Other times, I will ask you to answer a question or two and turn in your responses. Those “quizzes” are not evaluated for accuracy, just for completion. Still, they will give me a sense of who is keeping up with class and who is not, and they may form the basis for me contacting you about your progress.

If I suspect that students are routinely coming to class unprepared, I reserve the right to lengthen the attendance quizzes and actually grade them; if I do so, (a) you will have advance notice and (b) you will only receive credit for attendance if you score a 70% or higher.

Paper

You will write a 6-8 page research paper based on a law-related movie. You will identify a movie to watch (and get my approval) on September 14. I am pretty open to your choices, but if you are having trouble identifying a movie to use as your primary source, I am happy to make some suggestions.

Please note that the movie will give rise to a RESEARCH QUESTION. We’ll spend some time in class working on that, but you will not simply review the movie. Rather, the movie will prompt your interest in studying a question about the legal system.

Your research must include at least five books and/or scholarly articles. It may also include newspaper stories and/or reliable websites, but you must have the five books/articles as a basis.

Note that there are several steps in the paper process. While the whole paper is worth 30% of your final grade, each step is worth some portion of your grade:

9/14 Movie Selection Due

9/28 Summary of Movie

and Research Question Due 15% of paper grade

11/2 Annotated Bibliography Due 15% of paper grade

11/30 Final Paper Due 70% of paper grade

Exams

There are three exams in this class: two unit exams (which will cover about 4-5 weeks worth of material each) and a cumulative final exam during the final exam period. The unit exams will be held during class periods and will be allotted 80 minutes each.

The final exam will be allotted the full three hours allowed for evening classes.

Exams will consist of a variety of question types including (but not necessarily limited to) multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Essay question options will be given out in advance of the exam and you will then be told, on the exam, which question you should answer.

Class Schedule

The class schedule is attached to this syllabus. Please note that it is subject to change in the event that class needs to be cancelled for any reason. If class is cancelled, I will create a revised course schedule and post it on Blackboard (and send it as an e-mail through Blackboard). You are responsible for being aware of any changes to the course schedule.

**4. Class Policies**

***ADA Statement***: The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) as amended, pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of their need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at [www.unt.edu/oda](http://www.unt.edu/oda). Also, you may visit the Office of Disability Accommodation in the University Union (room 321) or call (940) 565-4323.

***Cheating and Plagiarism***: Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam.  Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, which may impose a further penalty.  According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

***Acceptable Student Behavior:*** Student behavior that interferes with an instructor’s ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.  The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [www.unt.edu/csrr](http://www.unt.edu/csrr)

**5. Tentative Schedule (Subject to Change)**

**Date Class Topic Viewing/Reading/Due**

8/24 Class Introduction

**LEGAL INSTITUTIONS**

8/31 A Crash Course on the American *The Good Wife S. 4:* Legal System – Civil Law *“Red Team, Blue Team”* (in class)

*“’Tort Tales’ and TV Judges”*

(Wilson and Ackerman (2012))

9/7 Labor Day – No Class

9/14 The American Legal System – *Law & Order S. 16:*

Criminal Law *“Thinking Makes It So”* (in class)

*“Jay-Z’s 99 Problems, Verse 2”*

(Mason (2012))

**Movie Selection Due**

9/21 Lawyers *My Cousin Vinny* (pre-view)

*“Contingency Fee Lawyers as*

*Gatekeepers in the Civil Justice*

*System*” (Kritzer (1997))

9/28 Juries *12 Angry Men* (pre-view)

*“Six Persons, a Fair Cross-section,*

*and Nullification: The Right to a*

*Jury Trial”: Law, Social Science*

*and the Criminal Courts, Chap 8*

(Smith (2004))

**Summary & Research Q. Due**

10/5 EXAM

**FUNCTIONS OF LAW**

10/12 Law and Fact Finding *Reversal of Fortune* (in class)

*Commonwealth v. Amirault* (1997)

(link on Blackboard)

10/19 Law and Dispute Resolution *Judge Judy*: *Holtz v. Flemming* and

*Moore v. Bailey* (in class)

“*Grievances, Claims, and Disputes:*

*Assessing the Adversary Culture”*

(Miller and Sarat (1981))

10/26 Law and Social Control *Dead Man Walking* (pre-view)

*“Law and Social Control”: Law and*

*Society: An Introduction, Chap 5*

(Barkan (2009))

11/2 Law and Social Change: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (novel)

Civil Rights

**Annotated Bibliography Due**

11/9 Law and Social Change: *Erin Brockovich* (pre-view)

Big Guys and Little Guys

*“Why the ‘Haves’ Come Out*

*Ahead”* (Galanter (1974))

11/16 EXAM

**REVERSING THE ARROW: POP CULTURE AFFECTING LAW**

11/23 Effects of Pop Culture on Law *Captivated: The Trials of Pamela*

Cameras in the Courtroom *Smart* (in class)

11/30 Effects of Pop Culture on Law *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*

The CSI Effect(s) *S. 5: “Iced” (in class)*

*“Viewing CSI and the Threshold*

*of Guilt”* (Tyler (2006))

**Paper Due**

12/7 FINAL EXAM 6:30 – 8:30