

IPAC Program Description

Name of Program

Pre-law Studies

Contributor

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Brief Description of the Program

Pre-law studies is a phrase used to refer to the sampling of undergraduate courses for the purpose of either (1) investigating one's potential interest in the subsequent study of law, or (2) establishing a strong foundation of knowledge and skills for legal studies. Successful law students will rely on excellent writing and research skills, and this fact will be reflected in the selection of courses that any pre-law student will want to take. Moreover, at least some coursework in economics and finance, as well as political science and criminal justice, will invariably be recommended for pre-law students. There are heuristics for identifying courses that might be valuable for a particular student interested in pre-law, but there is not specific set of courses recommended for all those who are interested in pre-law studies. These heuristics are grounded in such concepts as critical thinking, design science, systems theory, empirical reasoning, social problems, ethical issues, humanistic understanding, and interdisciplinary research. Experienced legal practitioners and scholars are in a position to apply these heuristics in the context of student interests and strengths to produce candidate sets of courses that could serve a student very well with respect to their particular pre-law studies goals. Consequently, advisement is a particularly important component of pre-law studies. Although pre-law is not a major or minor at SUNY Oswego, it is nonetheless a valued program of study for students interested in phenomena associated with the legal system.

Interdisciplinary Nature of the Program

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (in 1897!) anticipated what is now commonplace in law schools, the incorporation of interdisciplinarity into legal scholarship, when he said: "For the rational study of the law, the black letter man may be the man of the present, but the man of the future is the man of statistics and the master of economics." A simple Google search on interdisciplinarity and the law reveals that scholarly journals representing interdisciplinarity and the law, academic Centers representing interdisciplinarity and the law, and advanced degrees representing interdisciplinarity and the law are common place. There is good reason for this. Although there remains

tension between "doctrinalists" and "interdisciplinary" in legal circles, the ability to make persuasive arguments, the hallmark of a great lawyer, is seen now more than ever to be a matter of coupling the power of domain specific knowledge with legal doctrine. The nature of legal training with its already substantial and increasingly significant appreciation of interdisciplinarity is reflected in authentic pre-law studies. Moreover, the defining characteristics of interdisciplinarity -- its focus on complex social problems (think immigration reform), its goal of reaching an enhanced understanding of difficult issues and mysterious systems (think debt-ceiling crisis), and its association with advancements in technology (think about protection vs privacy) -- are characteristics of cases that legal scholars and practitioners are increasingly being confronted with. This being the case, pre-law studies, like legal studies, tends to be seen as an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor

Relationship to Interdisciplinarity at Oswego

Pre-law is related to HPAC, another vibrant interdisciplinary program at SUNY Oswego, by virtue of the fact that both programs serve populations of students interested in exploring or entering a valued profession -- the law or medicine. Pre-law is related to interdisciplinarity at Oswego by virtue of the fact that it draws heavily on interdisciplinary courses that are regularly offered on campus. Pre-law relates to a number of interdisciplinary majors on campus by virtue of the legal issues that are enmeshed with the content of those majors -- women's studies and global and international studies come to mind. Moreover, pre-law will be seen to relate to a number of compelling new interdisciplinary initiatives on campus, including the big data initiative and the digital humanities initiative.

IPAC Support

IPAC will provide shared space for both academic and professional advisors to meet with pre-law studies students.

IPAC will provide secretarial support for scheduling use of the shared space, for facilitating advisement, and for supporting the advisors in small but meaningful ways.

Relevant Dates

This program will commence sometime in the Fall 2013 semester and will continue for the foreseeable future.