

The American Legal System

CELOP ▪ Boston University

Fall 2011

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| Instructor: | Joseph Pettigrew | Schedule: | Tuesday – IEC B10 |
| Office: | CELOP 207 | | Thursday – EOP 264 |
| Phone: | 617-353-7838 | | 1:30 – 2:35 pm |
| E-mail: | jpettigr@bu.edu | | 2:50 – 3:55 pm |
| Website: | http://joepettigrew.pbworks.com/Legal (for homework, relevant links) | | |

Course Description

This course examines the American legal system and its impact on American society and business. You will learn how the legal system functions, looking at both criminal and civil law, the jury system and significant cases, which have shaped American society. You will do substantial work in the areas of vocabulary building, listening, speaking, reading, and critical thinking while gaining a broad understanding of American culture and history. You will also evaluate and prepare oral arguments on different topics. Course activities and materials may include readings, discussions, debates and simulations, legal news stories from tape and print sources, and videos of actual or fictional cases. There will be some written work.

Course Objectives

- To understand why the United States is called a “nation of laws”
- To develop an understanding of the American common law system and traditions
- To understand federalism: the distribution of power between the various levels of government, federal and state
- To understand the structure of the US government and the balance of power between branches
- To gain an working knowledge of constitutional rights on daily life
- To understand the hierarchy of the judicial system, and the impact and workings of the Supreme Court
- To develop a working knowledge of pre-trial and trial procedures (civil and criminal)
- To develop the ability to make effective oral arguments
- To develop basic legal vocabulary
- The expand general English vocabulary
- To improve listening comprehension and reading comprehension around legal topics
- To have first-hand experiences with the legal system through court visits

This class has a dual purpose: you will learn about the American legal system while developing your English. Using materials with a law content, we will concentrate on the skill areas of listening comprehension, fluency, pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary building, reasoning and reading comprehension.

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for every class. If you are absent, please check the class website or contact me or another student in the class for the assignment.

English is the only language used in the classroom. Cell phones must be turned off. Texting is not allowed.

Topics

- An overview of the U.S. system of government: three branches, federalism, checks and balances
- The U.S. electoral system
- Some current political/legal questions
- Major Supreme Court decisions
- The lawmaking process
- The Bill of Rights and individual liberties
- Jury trials – theory and practice
- Federal and state courts

Materials and Activities

- Readings from books, newspapers, and websites
- Films and TV programs on legal topics
- Podcasts and news stories on legal topics for listening comprehension
- At least one visit to a federal or state court
- Written midterm and final exams on basic legal concepts and vocabulary covered in the course
- Individual presentations on a legal issue or a landmark Supreme Court decision, reflecting the students' level of English and legal expertise

1st Assignment – for Tuesday, October 4:

Government and Politics in the United States (reading)