**General Education Course Inclusion Proposal**

**PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY**

*This proposal form is intended for departments proposing a course for inclusion in the Northern Michigan University General Education Program. Courses in a component satisfy both the Critical Thinking and the component learning outcomes. Departments should complete this form and submit it electronically through the General Education SHARE site.*

**Course Name and Number:** PS215 Introduction to Law

**Home Department:** Political Science

**Department Chair Name and Contact Information**: Carter Wilson; 227-1502, carwilso@nmu.edu

**Expected frequency of Offering of the course**: every fall

**Official Course Status**: Has this course been approved by CUP and Senate? YES

**Overview of course**:

1. Overview of the course content

Introduction to Law focusses on five inter-related topics: Foundations and Sources of Law, Ethics, Legal Institutions, Civil and Criminal Procedures and Substantive Areas of the Law. All of the topics are covered primarily through case-reading and discussion. Students also write and submit a series of case briefs, write a legal memorandum, attend a live judicial proceeding and stage a mock trial.

Foundations and Sources of Law covers the basic concepts and theories associated with the “birth” and development of the US legal system. Topics covered included the relationship between power and the law, natural and positive law, sociological jurisprudence and the objectives of the law. Students are also introduced to the English Common Law system and basic legal concepts such as equity, due process and *stare decisis* (precedent). Finally, the institutional sources of US law are discussed; statutory law (legislature), common law (courts) and administrative law (executive agencies).

The Ethics focus of the class emphasizes the need to be sensitive to ethical issues surrounding the law. Topics covered range from the ethics surrounding capital punishment, *Gregg v. Georgia,* to the imposition of societal morals through the police power, *Lawrence v. Texas.* The duties and responsibilities of the individual are also discussed, as well as business ethics and professional ethics.

Legal Institutions focusses on the different types of courts; 1) specialized (traffic, probate, small-claims, e.g.), 2) trial and 3) appellate. There is also a discussion of the parallel court system used in the United States; federal and state courts. Topics such personal and subject-matter jurisdiction are addressed, as are federal court jurisdiction (how do you end up in federal court). Students will also learn federal judicial appointments and the judicial philosophies of deference and activism.

The Civil and Criminal Procedures section of the class focusses on the differences between these two types of actions. Jury selection, rules of evidence, burdens of proof and judicial remedies are just some of the topics covered. Many of the procedural concepts are re-emphasized in the judicial proceeding attendance and the mock trial.

The Substantive Areas of the Law section covers topics such as criminal law, family law, contracts, property and torts. These are some of the areas where students of all majors are most likely to come into direct contact with “the law.” Each area is elucidated through the reading of three to four appellate cases. As with all the reviews of case readings, a modified Socratic method is used in this classroom.

1. Explain why this course satisfies the Component specified and significantly addresses both learning outcomes

PS 215, Introduction to Law, satisfies the critical theory and perspectives on society learning outcomes as defined by the NMU General Education Committee.

Critical Theory

This course examines the intellectual foundations of the US legal system. It traces our system to the English Common Law, including the importance of the Norman Invasion. The course continually returns to the US Constitution and the ideas and values embodied in this document.

Evidence

Students learn the text of the Constitution. They also read numerous cases that rely upon statutory interpretation and the doctrine of precedence (*stare decisis*). Students are required to do legal research to complete their legal memorandum. They become familiar with the Westlaw system as they are required to back all of their assertions with “primary” sources (common law, statutory law or administrative rules).

Integrate

Students learn how the different “goals” of the law can have an impact on court decisions, even court procedures. They better understand legislative and court decisions once they see the factors that are used in the formation of law (facts, legal precedence and public policy).

Evaluate

Students will be challenged to use sound legal reasoning to explain why they agree or disagree with specific decisions. They will be better able to comply with or challenge the legal issues that they face in their private and professional lives.

Perspectives on Society

Students completing this course will better understand the organization of judicial institutions, the relationship between law making and the role of the courts in interpreting law. Students will understand both the substance of the law and procedural law. This understanding of the law is critical in our “society of laws.”

1. Describe the target audience

The class will be targeted at undergraduate students, primarily sophomores through seniors, who recognize the importance of “the law” in our daily lives.

1. Give information on other roles this course may serve (e.g. University Requirement, required for a major(s), etc.)

The class currently is required within our Political Science Pre-Law track.

1. Provide any other information that may be relevant to the review of the course by GEC

Many fields of study have recognized the importance of a legal component within their curriculum. Including Introduction to Law in the GE classes will afford the general student population the opportunity to acquaint themselves with such an important component of their lives, without having to take a specialized law course.

**PLAN FOR LEARNING**

**OUTCOMES CRITICAL THINKING**

Assessing these learning outcome components will be accomplished through ~~four~~ distinct methods: two examinations, a written memorandum, and case briefs ~~and class participation (Socratic method)~~.

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| **DIMENSION** | **DIMENSION GUIDANCE** | **PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT** |
| **Evidence** | Assesses quality of information that may be integrated into an argument | Task Type: Multiple choice Exams  Questions will assess the degree to which students understand the difference between primary sources (force of law) and secondary sources (commentary). They will also be able to distinguish between the holdings of cases and *dicta.* Exams will constitute the bulk of the grade—it is expected that 80% of students will demonstrate proficiency in this area. ~~correctly answer at least 60% of the questions.~~  Task Type: Case Briefings  Students will have to use critical reading skills to distinguish between the important facts and judicial statements and those that are not relevant or are dicta. It is expected that approximately 60% of the class will demonstrate proficiency in this area. ~~do well enough on this component to improve their overall grade~~. |
| **Integrate** | Integrates insight and or reasoning with previous understanding to reach informed conclusions and/or understanding | Task Type: Memorandum  Students will need to work through a scenario, identifying the relevant facts and applying the appropriate laws. It is expected that 60% of the students will demonstrate proficiency in this area.  Task Type: Multiple Choice Exams (Essay Portion)  Students will be given a fact scenario and be required to identify the applicable legal issues. It is expected that 70% will demonstrate proficiency ~~t~~ in this area. |
| **Evaluate** | Evaluates information, ideas, and activities according to established principles and guidelines | Students will be given a scenario and will be required to identify relevant facts, apply the facts to the law, and evaluate the applicability of the law to the facts of the case. It is expected that 70% of the students will demonstrate proficiency in this area. |

**PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY**

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| **DIMENSION** | **DIMENSION GUIDANCE** | **PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT** |
| **Analysis of society** | Synthesis and analysis of social structures and processes or events | Task Type: Multiple choice Exams  Questions will assess the degree to which students understand the difference goals of the courts and the law. They will also be able to distinguish between the various different procedures used in the civil and criminal courts—it is expected that 80% of students will demonstrate proficiency in this area. ~~correctly answer at least 60% of the questions~~. |
| **Ethical Issues** | Addressing ethical issues in society | Task Type: Examinations  Essay questions have an ethical component. It is expected that 70% will demonstrate proficiency in this area. ~~improve their score through this section~~. |
| **Development and context of society** | Explore themes in the development of human society | Task Type: ~~Class Participation~~ Examinations  Essay questions will contain a component that asks about the association between law, governmental institutions and human society. It is expected that 70% will demonstrate proficiency in this area.  ~~Students will be continually asked about the trends in law, such as the increased value of property and the decline of governmental immunity. It is expected that approximately 60% will do well enough on this section to improve their overall grade.~~ |

**~~PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
CRITICAL THINKING~~**

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| **~~DIMENSION~~** | **~~WHAT IS BEING ASSESSED~~** | **~~PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT~~** |
| **~~Evidence~~** | ~~Assesses quality of information that may be integrated into an argument~~ | ~~Essay and multiple choice questions will assess the degree to which students understand the difference between primary sources (force of law) and secondary sources (commentary). They will also be able to distinguish between the holdings of cases and~~ *~~dicta.~~* ~~Exams will constitute the bulk of the grade—it is expected that 80% of students will demonstrate proficiency in this area.~~ |
| **~~Integrate~~** | ~~Integrates insight and or reasoning with existing understanding to reach informed conclusions and/or understanding~~ | ~~Essay and multiple questions will assess the degree to which students are able understand the substance of the law and apply the law to the facts of a case scenario. It is expected that 80% of students will demonstrate proficiency in this area.~~ |
| **~~Evaluate~~** | ~~Evaluates information, ideas, and activities according to established principles and guidelines~~ | ~~Essay and multiple choice questions will assess the degree to which students are able to apply legal principles to the evaluation of both the law and the facts and circumstances of a case scenario. It is expected that 80% of students will demonstrate proficiency in this area.~~ |

**~~PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY~~**

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| **~~DIMENSION~~** | **~~WHAT IS BEING ASSESSED~~** | **~~PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT~~** |
| **~~Analysis of society~~** | ~~Analysis of social issues, structures and processes or events~~ | ~~See above~~ |
| **~~Ethical Issues~~** | ~~Addressing ethical issues in society~~ |  |
| **~~Development and context of society~~** | ~~Explore themes in the development of human society~~ |  |