

## **Poli Sci 4323: LSPI Courts In Action Legal Writing Class Online Summer 2020**

<b>CRN</b>	34407
<b>Professor</b>	Lisa J Soto <a href="mailto:lsoto9@utep.edu">lsoto9@utep.edu</a>
<b>TAs</b>	Jorge Dominguez <a href="mailto:Jorge.Dominguez@ttu.edu">Jorge.Dominguez@ttu.edu</a> A. Vianey Martinez <a href="mailto:avmartinez99@gmail.com">avmartinez99@gmail.com</a>
<b>Time/Days</b>	Class meetings with integrated small group sessions: Mon-Fri 10:00 a.m. to noon Group A class meeting: Mon-Fri: 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. Group B class meeting: Mon-Fri: 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. LSAT Vocabulary Sessions: Sat 11:00 a.m. to noon Individual LSAT Vocabulary Exams on July 5 and 6 or earlier as scheduled
<b>Office Hours</b>	Sun-Thurs 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. and by appointment
<b>Location</b>	Modules and Assignments on Blackboard Collaborate and YuJa Meetings and Office Hours on Zoom

### **Course Description**

This course addresses the legal system in action by introducing you to legal analysis and legal writing. It instructs on active reading and critical understanding of the law coming from the courts and the legislature; emphasizes strong writing and grammar fundamentals as strategies for effective legal writing; and requires you to engage in objective legal analysis and legal writing. The course will also include vocabulary growth on key LSAT words, LSAT writing sample strategies, and a head start on personal statements and résumés for law school applications. Please see the attached course calendar.

Aims of this course include:

- Sharpening your grammar and writing skills thereby boosting credibility in your communication;
- Strengthening your ability to: work with others, listen carefully, be professional, and consider diverse viewpoints and ideas in an effort to create superior solutions through collaboration;
- Improving upon your critical thinking and problem solving skills;
- Building confidence, maximizing learning through trial and error, improving oral advocacy skills, and sharpening your ability to think and reason on your feet;
- Actively reading and extracting key information from judicial opinions and statutory law;
- Learning how to identify and objectively analyze legal issues based on the current state of the law in the applicable jurisdiction;
- Beginning to understand and engage in structured, objective, predictive legal writing;
- Improving upon vocabulary and writing principles for strategic legal writing; and
- Analyzing the law, taking public policy into account, and exercising advanced critical thinking skills in applying law and policy to complex problems with real world implications.

## **Materials Provided by LSPI (not to be duplicated; provided for use in this class only)**

*Excerpts From The Elements of Legal Style (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)* by Brian A. Garner (books owned by LSPI)  
*Excerpts from A Lawyer Writes: A Practical Guide to Legal Analysis* by Christine Coughlin, Joan Malmud Rocklin, and Sandy Patrick (books owned by LSPI)  
Harvard Law School: Case Studies materials via links and excerpts (provided with permission)  
*Additional handouts throughout the course*

## **Assignments & Projects**

Various individual and small group small-scale assignments (in-class and homework, including discussion boards); a legal memorandum; a small group case study project to include a paper, proposed regulations, and presentation; LSAT writing sample exercises; LSAT vocabulary flashcards, and a final vocabulary examination. A first draft of a personal statement and résumé for the law school application process will serve as extra credit if submitted no later than July 6, at 10:00 p.m.

## **Grade Policy**

Your final grade in the class will be based upon the following:

- 25%: Legal Memorandum
- 25%: Harvard Law School Case Study Project
- 15%: Grammar & Writing Exercises
- 7.5%: LSAT Writing Exercises
- 7.5%: LSAT Vocabulary
- 20%: Performance in Class and Completion of Classwork and Homework\*
- EC Personal Statement, Résumé

\*Performance in class means attendance plus active engagement with meaningful participation. I expect everyone to complete all work and be ready to participate in class each day. I expect you to submit all assignments in a timely manner. Late assignments will be downgraded one letter grade per day late, up to three letter grades. You may be dropped from the class for failure to complete a major assignment.

Assignments will be graded according to the requirements, standards, and objectives of each project.

## **Attendance Policy**

Attendance is mandatory. University policy requires that you attend all class sessions. If you do miss a class, for whatever reason, **you are responsible for finding out about missed information and completing assignments in a timely manner, whether on the syllabus or assigned in the class itself.** If you have an emergency or an absence that you believe should be excused, contact me directly to address it, and do so prior to the absence, when possible.

\*You may be dropped from the class for failure to attend and participate in multiple class and group sessions. Failure to participate in the class and group sessions will equate to failure to contribute to collaborative work, which should be borne equally by all group members.

If anything prevents you from fully engaging and working, please advise me immediately. My goal is to personally invest in your edification and do what I can to facilitate your access and success.

### **Library Hours Policy**

The UTEP Library's Second Floor is open with available computers Mon-Sat, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

### **Plagiarism Policy**

A suspected act of plagiarism (or other form of academic dishonesty) will be referred to the Dean of Students. **Please familiarize yourself with the ethical guidelines for conduct spelled out in the Student Affairs section of the Handbook of Operating procedures:** <http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?alias=admin.utep.edu/hoop> and be aware of our University regulations. If you have any questions, please ask.

You must do your own original work in this class and appropriately identify that portion of your work that is collaborative with others, borrowed from others, or extracted from other sources, including legal materials. Whenever you borrow **original** materials, quote from a source (three words or more), or use ideas from others, you are legally and ethically obligated to acknowledge that use, following appropriate conventions for documenting sources. You will learn basic legal citation in this course within the legal memorandum assignment.

### **Compositions Policy**

You are expected to produce original, high-quality, sophisticated work. Neatness, visual appeal, and mechanical and grammatical correctness are essential, but do not guarantee that a text is well constructed. I expect you to proofread and edit each submission to avoid careless errors; **spelling and grammar check is not a sufficient method of proofreading for grammar or for spelling.** Your out-of-class assignments should be composed in a formal, high-quality form. Your written documents should also have appropriate margins, spacing, pagination, and formatting. All assignments should comport with the instructions given.

### **Respect for Others Policy**

You are expected to carry yourself with professionalism and respect for others. Part of showing respect is being prepared and contributing fully to each group and project in which you are involved. Additionally, it is important to listen carefully to each other in a group. We are doing group work for a reason. Do not be quick to dismiss any contributions; even if you do not agree with something,

understand that it may spark another idea or response that adds to the quality of the collaboration. We do not come to the best solutions by operating in a vacuum or maintaining a sense of superiority.

We will be addressing some challenging topics in class, as the law often does. While emotions cannot and need not be removed from controversial topics, I expect you to exercise sincere listening skills and genuinely consider diverse opinions even if they upset you. I expect robust discussion, debate, and differences of opinion in class and also expect that everyone interact and discuss issues in a respectful manner. Remember that as a legal professional, it is critical to learn all you can about contradictory opinions and positions, especially if you are ultimately going to advocate against them.

## **Discussion Board Policy**

**Language:** Given the absence of face-to-face clues, written text can easily be misinterpreted. Avoid the use of strong or offensive language and the excessive use of exclamation points. If you feel strongly about a point, it may be best to write it first as a draft and then review it before posting it, in order to remove any strong language.

**Be Forgiving:** If someone states something that you find offensive, mention this directly to the instructor. Remember that the person contributing to the discussion is also new to this form of communication. What you find offensive may quite possibly have been unintended and can best be cleared up by the instructor.

**This is Permanent:** Think carefully about the content of your message before contributing it. Once sent to the group, there is no taking it back. Also, although the grammar and spelling of a message typically are not graded, they do reflect on you, and your audience might not be able to decode misspelled words or poorly constructed sentences.

**Test For Clarity:** Messages may often appear perfectly clear to you as you compose them, but turn out to be perfectly obtuse to your reader. One way to test for clarity is to read your message aloud to see if it flows smoothly.

**Remember Your Place:** A Web-based classroom is still a classroom, and comments that would be inappropriate in a regular classroom are likely to be inappropriate in a Web-based course as well. Treat your instructor and your fellow students with respect and professionalism.

**Follow the Parameters and Stick To The Point:** Follow the posting requirements and parameters set up for each module. Contributions to a discussion should have a clear subject header, and you need to stick to the subject. If you want to share something else, use the Module Six discussion board forum.

**Read First, Write Later:** Do not add your comments to a discussion before reading the comments of other students unless the assignment specifically asks you to. Doing so is tantamount to ignoring your fellow students and is rude. Comments related to the content of previous messages should be posted under them to keep related topics organized, and you should specify the person and the particular point you are following up on.

## **Netiquette Policy**

It is important to recognize that the online classroom is in fact a classroom, and certain behaviors are expected when you communicate with both your peers and your instructors. These guidelines for online behavior and interaction are known as netiquette.

**SECURITY:** Remember that your password is the only thing protecting you from pranks or more serious harm. • Do not share your password with anyone • Change your password if you think someone else might know it • Always logout when you are finished using the system; **GENERAL GUIDELINES:** When communicating online, you should always: • Treat instructor with respect, even in email or in any other online communication • Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof., or if in doubt, use Mr. or Ms. • Use clear and concise language • Remember that all college-level communication should have correct spelling and grammar • Avoid slang terms and texting abbreviations such as "u" instead of "you" • Use standard fonts such as Times New Roman and use a size 12 or 14 pt. font • Avoid using the caps lock feature AS IT CAN BE INTERPRETTED AS YELLING • Limit and possibly avoid the use of emoticons like • Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm, as tone is sometimes lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or be offensive • Be careful with personal information (both yours and others'); **EMAIL NETIQUETTE:** When you send an email to your instructor, teaching assistant, or classmates, you should: • Use a descriptive subject line • Be professional, polite, and brief • Avoid attachments unless you are sure your recipients can open them • Avoid HTML in favor of plain text • Sign your message with your name and return e-mail address • Think before you send the email to more than one person. Does everyone really need to see your message? • Be sure you REALLY want everyone to receive your response when you click "reply all" • Be sure that the message author intended for the information to be passed along before you click the "forward" button; **MESSAGE BOARD NETIQUETTE AND GUIDELINES:** When posting on the Discussion Board, you should: • Make posts that are on-topic and within the scope of the course material • Take your posts seriously and review and edit your posts before sending • Be as brief as possible while still making a thorough, thoughtful comment • Always give proper credit when referencing or quoting another source • Be sure to read all messages in a thread before replying • Do not repeat someone else's post without adding something of your own to it • Avoid short, generic replies such as, "I agree." You should include why you agree or add to the previous point • Always be respectful of others' opinions even when they differ from your own • When you disagree with someone, you should express your differing opinion in a respectful, well-reasoned, professional way • Do not make personal or insulting remarks • Be open-minded

## **Accommodations Policy**

I am committed to following the laws that pertain to individuals with disabilities and to making reasonable accommodations, in accordance with the applicable law, and in consultation with students and Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). If you believe you have a disability for which accommodations are needed or if you already have a documented disability for which accommodations are needed, please (1) notify and consult with CASS as soon as possible (747-5148; Union East, Room 106) and (2) inform me of the accommodations needed, as applicable.