SOC*3490 Law and Society
University of Guelph
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Winter 2025

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Guelph resides on the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. The institution's campuses resided within the Dish with One Spoon Treaty. I recognize the land this institution is situated on is home to many past, present, and future First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

Instructor Information

Name: Tandeep Sidhu
Email:
Office Location:
Office Hours:

Course Information

Course Location: TBD
Course Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30 AM to 12:50 PM
Prerequisites: (SOAN*2112 or SOC*2700), (POLS*2650 or SOAN*2120)

Teaching Assistant Information

Name:
Email:

Course Description

The institutional and symbolic framework of the legal system offers sociologists an opportunity to critically examine and interrogate the operation of the legal system while understanding the intersections between broader cultural, political, social, and economic factors and the legal system. This course explores numerous assumptions of the legal system, like the objective and neutral application of the law, factors influencing legal decision-making, challenging the system's neutrality, and the use of the law as a vehicle for social change, among other topics. Furthermore, this course examines how the legal system may discriminate against various marginalized groups in Canadian society. This course allows students to engage with multiple elements of the legal system and understand the dichotomy of law on the books and law in practice. This course is divided into three distinct units. The first unit provides students with a conceptual and theoretical basis for critiquing the legal system, emphasizing a range of classical

and contemporary legal theories. The second unit of this course explores how the legal system perpetuates social inequalities. Finally, the third unit engages in an examination of the intersections between science and technology and the legal system, with an emphasis on the use of technology and forensics in the legal system.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course:

1. Students develop an understanding of the relationship between law and society, and what challenges face the legal system and those in contact with it.
   a. Understand the differentiation between substantive and formal equality
   b. Develop a stronger understanding of the dichotomy between law in the books and law in practice
   c. What forces influence changes and patterns in the legal system, with particular emphasis on how the concepts of objectivity and truth are developed in the courts
   d. Understand the limitations of using the law as a vehicle for social change.
   e. Engaging in the application of critical theories to further interrogate how the operation of the legal system may impose barriers to numerous marginalized communities.
2. Students will have an understanding of how sociological and criminological theory are applied to engage in a critical analysis of the legal system and its guiding principles.
   a. Completion of this course contributes to a greater knowledge and understanding of a range contemporary theories.
   b. Understand the central tenets of and critique the theories presented in this course
   c. Understand how to critique and utilize theory within the context of research papers and class discussions when assessing the strengths and limitations of certain
   d. Critically engage with the concepts of justice, equality, and objectivity concerning the legal system
3. Course deliverables seek to improve student skills, particularly in the area of essay writing.
   a. Demonstrate how to use the PEEL method to effectively articulate their main arguments in research essays, while incorporating existing research to support that argument.
   b. Engage in critical discussion with peers to highlight how sociological concepts can be used to explain certain police practices.

    c. Understand how to effectively format their essays for writing at the university level

    d. Provide students with experience in engaging with their positionality

    e. Provides students with experience in reading case law and legal decisions

    f. Provides students with the opportunity to apply critical theory in relation to real-world issues in the legal system

Required Resources

1. Selected chapters and articles are provided on *CourseLink* as PDF documents.
2. Adobe Acrobat or another software capable of opening PDFs.
3. There is no textbook for this course.