

**C/LA 302:
SPECIAL TOPICS IN LIBERAL ARTS –
PRE-LAW PREPARATION**

**Spring 2016
MW, 2-3:15
SSPA 211**

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Book Pre-Law Advising Appointments Online at:

<http://www.cla.csulb.edu/departments/polisci/advising/dr-jason-whitehead-advising-booking-calendar/>

Course Description and Goals. This credit/no-credit course consists of a series of interactive workshops for students considering law school and a legal career. We will discuss such topics as: deciding whether a legal career is right for you, what law school is really like, choosing the right law school, preparing yourself academically and non-academically for law school, the LSAT, and applying to law school successfully, including preparing key application documents such as personal statements and resumes, how admissions and financial aid decisions are made by law schools, how to finance a legal education, and the realities of the legal job market.

As a result of this experience, you will:

- Gain a better understanding of whether law school and a legal career is right for you;
- Learn how to become the kind of student that law schools are looking for;
- Be able to compare different law schools and make better decisions about where to apply;
- Know the basics of the law school application process;
- Solicit and receive strong letters of recommendation;
- Understand the basic skills tested on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and when to take the exam;
- Write clear and effective application documents, such as personal statements and resumes;
- Master the on-line application system on LSAC.org;
- Understand how law school admissions and financial aid decisions are made; and
- Develop a financial plan to pay for law school.

Course Assignments (all of the following are required to receive credit):

- **Class Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. Any student missing more than 3 class sessions without an acceptable excuse will not receive credit for the course. See syllabus appendix for list of acceptable excuses and necessary procedures for being excused.
- **Pre-Law Survey (Due online Mar. 6, 11:59 PM).** This document consists of a series of questions about your personal and academic background, as well as your career goals. It is

designed to help me provide you with better, more specific, pre-law advice. The document is available on BeachBoard.

- **Law School Roadmap (Due online Apr. 17, 11:59 PM).** In this document, you will begin compiling some information you will need if you apply to law school, including a list of law schools, information about their application requirements, a list of possible recommenders, and a list of ideas for your personal statement. A template for the document is available on BeachBoard.
- **Reflective Essay OR Application-Related Document (Due online Monday, May 9, at 2:30 PM).** For your final assignment, you may choose between two options: (1) you may write one of the documents you will need when you apply to law school, such as a resume or a personal statement; or (2) you may write a short essay reflecting on Scott Turow's book, *One-L: The Turbulent True Story of a First Year at Harvard Law School*. Instructions for the application-related document will be discussed in class; Instructions for the reflective essay are posted on BeachBoard.

Submitting Assignments. The only way to submit a written assignment is to upload it to the appropriate electronic dropbox on BeachBoard in one of the following formats: .doc., .docx, .pdf, or .txt. *I will not accept assignments submitted in any other way.* You must save a copy of the electronic notification you receive when you successfully upload your assignment to BeachBoard. In the event of a discrepancy as to whether or when you submitted the assignment, this electronic notification is the only proof I will accept. You must also keep an electronic or paper copy of any document you upload.

Grading of Written Assignments. For written assignments, I will award a grade of credit or no credit on BeachBoard soon after the due date. If you fail to receive credit for an assignment that you uploaded, you may rewrite it as many times as you need until you receive credit. The only exception is the final assignment, which is turned in at the very end of the semester.

Individual Advising Sessions. You are welcome (but not required) to meet with me in person to discuss your individual situation. However, please do not use regular office hours for this purpose. Instead, individual advising sessions may be booked online here:

www.CSULBPOSCWHITEHEAD.clickbook.net.

If you need an advising session but no satisfactory time-slot is available online, e-mail me at Jason.Whitehead@csulb.edu with the days and times that work for you and I will do my best to accommodate. *ALL ADVISING SESSIONS ARE HELD IN MY OFFICE – SSPA 251.*

Course Readings. There are no mandatory readings for the course (except the book that is required for the optional reflective essay, which can be checked out at no cost). However, short readings and web resources are available on BeachBoard for many of the topics we cover each week. Hopefully, you will find them informative and helpful.

Workshop and Assignment Schedule

Jan. 20: *Introduction to Course*

Jan 25: *No Class – I will be out of the state at a national pre-law advisor’s conference*

Part One – Before You Apply

**Jan. 27 &
Week of Feb. 1:** *Understanding the Reality of Law School*

Topics:

- Required and Elective Courses
- The Case Method
- The Socratic Method
- Law School Exams and Grading
- Extracurricular Activities
- Clinical and Work Opportunities
- Career Placement
- Costs and Benefits of Law School
- Regular vs. Alternative Formats

Readings: “Resources” for “Understanding the Reality of Law School” (BeachBoard)

**Week of Feb. 8 &
Feb. 15:** *Understanding the Legal Profession*

Topics:

- Overview of the Adversarial Legal System
- The Role of Lawyers in American Society
- Fields of Law
- What Lawyers Do
- Types of Legal Practice
- The Legal Job Market

Readings: “Resources” for “Understanding the Legal Profession” (BeachBoard)

**Feb. 17 &
Week of Feb. 22:** *Becoming a Successful Law School Applicant*

Topics:

- Characteristics of Successful Law School Applicants
- Developing the Right Academic Credentials
- Developing the Right Personal Character
- Preparing For and Taking the LSAT
- Summer Prep Programs
- Researching Law Schools

Readings: “Resources” for “Becoming a Successful Law School Applicant” (BeachBoard)

**Week of Feb. 29 &
Mar. 7:** *Factors in Successful Law School Admission*

Topics:

- The Law School Application Timeline
- The Rolling Admission Process
- The Law School Application File
- “Gatekeepers”
- “Soft Factors”
- Standing Out in the Crowd

Readings: “Resources” for “Factors in Successful Law School Admission” (BeachBoard)

Mar. 6, 11:59 PM: **Pre-Law Survey Due Online**

Part Two – Applying to Law School

Mar. 9: *Deciding Where to Apply*

Topics:

- The Law School Rankings Game
- Law School Ranking vs. Class Ranking
- Factors to Consider
- Accelerated and Part-Time Programs
- Establishing Residency for Public Law Schools

Readings: “Resources” for “Deciding Where to Apply” (BeachBoard)

Mar 14: *Letters of Recommendation*

Topics:

- What Law Schools are Looking For
- Choosing Recommenders
- How to Get Great Letters
- Procedures for Letter Submission

Readings: “Resources” for “Letters of Recommendation” (BeachBoard)

Mar. 16 and

Week of Mar. 21: *Personal Statements*

Topics:

- What Law Schools are Looking For
- Differences Between General Personal Statements and Diversity Statements
- Personal Statements vs. Addenda
- Style, Content, and Format
- What to Avoid
- Brainstorming Possible Topics

Readings: “Resources” for “Personal Statements” (BeachBoard)

Week of Mar. 28: **No Class – Spring Break**

Week of Apr. 4: *Resumes*

Topics:

- What Law Schools are Looking For
- Differences Between Law School Resumes and Other Resumes
- Presenting Academic History Effectively
- Presenting Internships, Organizations and Honors Effectively
- Presenting Work History Effectively

Readings: “Resources” for “Resumes” (BeachBoard)

Week of Apr. 11: *The Application*

Topics:

- Setting up LSAC and the CAS Accounts
- Setting Up Your Profile
- Adding Schools
- Questions Asked by Different Schools
- Uploading Documents
- Disclosing Embarrassing Details

Readings: “Resources” for “The Application” (BeachBoard)

Apr. 17, 11:59 PM: **Law School Roadmap Due Online**

Part Three – After You Apply

Week of Apr. 18: *Admissions Decisions*

Topics:

- Types of Decisions: Admit, Conditional Admit, Deny, Waitlist, Defer
- Timing of Decisions
- Seat Deposits
- Choosing Between Schools

Readings: “Resources” for “Admissions Decisions” (BeachBoard)

Week of Apr. 25: *Financial Aid Decisions*

Topics:

- Budgeting for Law School
- Law School Debt Issues
- Types of Financial Aid
- Timing of Financial Aid

Readings: “Resources” for “Financial Aid Decisions” (BeachBoard)

Week of May 2: *Negotiating With Law Schools*

Topics:

- Getting off the Waitlist
- Getting Financial Aid
- Campus Visits and Other Contact

Readings: “Resources” for “Negotiating With Law Schools” (BeachBoard)

Monday, May 9, at 2:30 PM: Reflective Essay or Application-Related Document Due

Appendix: Miscellaneous Course Policies

Assignment Submissions. You must upload your assignments to the appropriate electronic “dropbox” on BeachBoard in one of the following formats: .doc, .docx, .txt, or .pdf. *I will not accept assignments submitted in any other way.* You must save a copy of the electronic notification you receive when you successfully upload an assignment to BeachBoard. In the event of a discrepancy as to whether or when you submitted the assignment, this electronic notification is the only proof I will accept. You must also keep an electronic or paper copy of your assignment.

Excuses for Absences and Late Assignments. It is your responsibility to arrange your schedule around your academic responsibilities. In general, **exceptions will only be made for the following reasons, for which satisfactory documentation must be provided:** (1) Illness or injury to the student; (2) Death, injury, or serious illness of an immediate family member or the like; (3) Religious reasons (listed in California Education Code section 89320); (4) Jury duty or government obligation; or (5) University sanctioned or approved activities, such as artistic performances, forensics competitions, participation in research conferences, intercollegiate athletic activities, student government, required class field trips, etc.. **To be excused under #1 or 2, you must provide BOTH satisfactory documentation as soon as possible AND evidence of work completed on the assignment at the time of sickness or illness. To be excused under #s 3-5, however, you must provide me with satisfactory documentation at least 1 week prior to the class or deadline.** If you have a legitimate excuse for missing an assignment deadline, we will work out an appropriate alternative deadline AS LONG AS you can demonstrate that you have already completed an appropriate amount of work on the assignment.

No Credit for Unexcused Late Assignments. Written assignments are due at the date and time listed in the syllabus and assignment instructions. **Students will not receive any credit for unexcused late assignments.** Make the most of the time you have to complete written assignments; no allowances will be made for last-minute problems with computers, networks, etc..

Cheating and Plagiarism. It is my policy to deal with any form of cheating and/or plagiarism by immediately giving a failing grade on the assignment and reporting you to the department and other administrative authorities for other possible sanctions. If you are having problems with the course material, please come and see me before doing something that could put your academic career in jeopardy. Please note that “plagiarism” includes *any use* of the ideas or work of others as if they were one’s own, without giving appropriate credit.

Students with Disabilities. I am completely committed to providing reasonable accommodations for any student with a verifiable physical or other disability. This may include alternative testing or note-taking arranged through Disabled Student Services. However, it is your responsibility to notify me in advance of the need for such an accommodation.

University Withdrawal Policy. It is your responsibility to withdraw from class if you wish to do so. I have no obligation to withdraw registered students who stop attending or completing assignments. **The deadline to withdraw from a class without a “W” for this semester is Feb. 1, 2016.**

Withdrawal from a course after that date requires the signature of the instructor and the department chair, and is permissible only for serious and compelling reasons. For example, severe or extensive medical problems would be serious and compelling, but fear of receiving a final grade lower than desired, or a change in one’s work schedule would not be considered serious and compelling. If withdrawal is allowed, a “W” will appear on your transcript.

DURING THE FINAL THREE WEEKS OF INSTRUCTION (after April 15, 2016) WITHDRAWALS ARE NOT PERMITTED EXCEPT IN CASES SUCH AS ACCIDENT OR SERIOUS ILLNESS WHERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES CAUSING THE WITHDRAWAL ARE CLEARLY BEYOND THE STUDENT’S CONTROL. THE CAUSE MUST BE DOCUMENTED. ORDINARILY, WITHDRAWALS IN THIS CATEGORY INVOLVE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY. YOU WILL NEED THE APPROVAL OF THE COLLEGE DEAN AS WELL AS THAT OF THE CLASS INSTRUCTOR AND THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON FOR EACH COURSE FROM WHICH YOU WISH TO WITHDRAW.