

# HONR 391: Prelaw Seminar

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## Course Information

- Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan
- Contact: (406) 243 6233, [soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu](mailto:soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu), Mailbox in LA 101. I try to always respond to email messages within one business day (24-32h). Students are expected to check their university email daily.
- Office hours: Fridays 1-4pm in LA 153 – I recommend that you schedule an appointment as my office hours are full a week in advance. *Please feel free to contact me if you need to arrange an appointment outside of office hours.*
- Class meets: Fridays 12 – 12:50pm, DHC118
- Course website on Moodle

## Course Description

This course is targeted to students considering a career in the law. The main goal of the course is to give the students a chance to reflect on what a life in the law would involve for them. Answering that question has some clearly practical aspects: students will learn about the best way to prepare for, and to be successful in law school, as well as about the variety of possible careers in the law. Students will gain practical insight and have the unique opportunity to interact with legal professionals and law school admission officers to explore their futures in law school and the legal profession. On the more theoretical sides, the course will also explore some of the ethical issues that students will be likely to encounter as attorneys.

The course learning outcomes are that at the end of the course, students will have:

- developed a critical understanding of some of the major issues in legal ethics,
- developed a well-informed, coherent, and circumspect view of their own on some of the major issues in legal ethics,
- improved their writing skills,
- learned about how to apply to, and be successful in, law school,
- learned about the true benefits and challenges of an education and career in the law,
- developed a thoughtful, reflexive, personal and well-informed understanding of whether or not, and if yes, why, pursuing a career in the law suits their personality traits, their academic strengths and weaknesses, their core values, and life interests.

## Textbook

Robert H. Miller *Law School Confidential, A Complete Guide to the Law School Experience, by Students, for Students*, Thomas Dunne Books, Third Edition 2011.

Other readings will be available on Moodle.

## Course Requirements

The final grade will be based on:

- Attendance and Participation: 20%
- Journal: 60%
- Paper: 20%

In addition, students are expected to complete the following assignments outside of the classroom:

- Attendance to at least one hearing at the Court House,
- Attendance to at least one class at the UM law school,
- Attendance to the Constitution Day lecture, or to one of the relevant events on Campus (President Series Lectures, Talks at the Center for Ethics, Talks at the Philosophy Forum or others).

*It is required that journal entries be completed for each of these assignments.*

### Attendance

Attendance is required, and necessary to succeed in the course. There will be a lot of material covered, and the material covered will be difficult. You are allowed to miss 2 classes without penalty. Following that, you will lose 2% each time you miss a class up to a maximum of 10% (that is, one letter grade). You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. *Three late arrivals count as one absence.* If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class. You are also expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other means of communication should be silenced for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc. *Three offenses of this type will count as one absence.* That said, absences may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. Note that you also will be expected to work through the material covered during the classes you may have missed.

### Participation

Active participation is essential for learning. I want to hear from you.

Trying to answer questions or asking questions qualify as participation. You will not be penalized for answering incorrectly. I want to emphasize that questions are welcome and that you should aim to leave the classroom with a good understanding of the material covered.

A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in class. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.

B range: The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in class and shows interest in other students' contributions.

C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.

D range and under: The student does not meet the basic requirement of section participation. The student is unprepared, does not participate, or participate in irrelevant ways.

## Journal

Students are required to write a journal entry on Moodle for each class session. The journal entries will be graded according to the following scale:

A range: Entries satisfy all the criteria below:

- (1) Writing. The student completes all journal entries. All entries are of appropriate length and utilize appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation.
- (2) Focus and Organization. Entries are well targeted on the topic at hand and well structured.
- (3) Knowledge Gain. Entries include specific insights the student has gained from the readings and class discussions.
- (4) Connections. Entries demonstrate the student's capacity to make connections between personal experience and new knowledge acquired in class.
- (5) Self-Reflection.] Entries give evidence of self-awareness and self-reflection relating to the possibility of going to law school and of conducting a law career. They also give evidence of the student's ability to keep track of his or her own progress towards becoming well-informed and thoughtful about the law and law careers.

B range: All entries satisfy Criterion (1) above. Most entries satisfy most of Criteria (2) to (5) above.

C range: All entries satisfy Criterion (1) above. Many entries do not satisfy one or two of Criteria (2) to (5) above.

D range and under: Entries do not satisfy Criterion (1) above. Most Criteria (2) to (5) are not satisfied either.

## Essay

You will be required to write a brief essay of about 1000 words, excluding references. The topic for the essay is the following:

Describe one area of the law that peaked your interest (e.g. business law, criminal law, family law, environmental law). Describe the kind of work that attorneys do in that area of the law. Explain why you are interested in that area of the law. Explain why you would find it rewarding to have a career in that area. Explain what kind of difficulties you would expect to face. Explain some of the strategies you could develop to surmount these difficulties.

The paper is due on December 16<sup>th</sup> on Moodle.

You are welcome to give me a draft of your paper in advance if you'd like some feedback. The latest I will accept a draft will be on Week 14.

Your essay will be graded along the following scale:

A range: This paper is outstanding in form and content. The material covered in class is understood in depth: the student shows that s/he has a command on, including a critical understanding of, the material. The thesis is clear and insightful; it is original, or it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course. The argument is unified and coherent. The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled. The analysis is complex and nuanced. The sources are original texts or quality scholars' literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.

B range: The argument, while coherent, does not have the complexity, the insight, or the integrated structure of an A-range paper. The material covered in class is well understood: the student does not make any mistake on the materials but does not show great depth in critical understanding. The paper's thesis is clear and the argument is coherent. The paper presents evidence in support of its points. The sources are original texts or quality scholars' literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.

C range: This paper has some but not all of the basic components of an argumentative essay (i.e., thesis, evidence, coherent structure). For example: the paper features a clear misunderstanding of some of the material covered in class, or the thesis is not clear or incoherent, or the argument is not coherently structured, or evidence in support of the thesis is lacking, or only non-scholarly sources are used. The student still utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as an appropriate argumentative writing style.

## Course policies

### Responsibilities

My role as an instructor is to provide you an opportunity to learn and master the material. I will do my best to explain things clearly and let you know what is expected of you. I want you to succeed in this course and I am available to help you!

Your role as a student is to be proactive and to advocate for yourself. If you do not understand something or are confused, please let me know. It is your responsibility to voice your questions and concerns. We will work together to help you master the material. Be sure to advocate for yourself. In my experience, students who put in effort, attend class regularly, turn in assignments, and ask questions when they are confused can succeed in my classes.

“Show up, Pay attention, Ask for help” (Anonymous on [www.ratemyprofessor.com](http://www.ratemyprofessor.com))

### Late Assignments

Late Assignment Rule: Without prior arrangements, the grade of any late assignment will be lowered by one letter grade a day.

### Drop Policy

I adhere to the UM policy on dropping courses. Between the first and 45th instructional day, it is entirely your decision whether to drop the course or not. If you want to drop course between the 46th instructional day and the last instructional day prior to finals week, and you want me to recommend the drop, you will have to provide reasons that you should be allowed to drop the course. Acceptable reasons demonstrate that some (post 45th instructional day) circumstance out of your control interferes with your ability to complete the course. Simply not having done the work required of you, or belief that you do not think that

you can get the grade you want, or that you need such and such grade to maintain your financial aid, are not sufficient reasons for me to recommend dropping the course after the 45th instructional day, though they might be prior to the 45th day.

## Academic Misconduct

You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code  
<http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/documents/StudentConductCode1.pdf>.

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be your own. If you plagiarize, your assignment will receive a zero. You may fail the class altogether depending on the circumstances. Also, I will report the case to the Dean. I will be glad to answer questions you may have about how to document sources properly. Anytime you take a phrase or sentence from someone, you have to quote it. Anytime you take an idea from someone, you have to cite your sources.

## Important Note

*If you encounter difficulties concerning an assignment, it is almost always possible to make arrangements before the assignment is due. No accommodation is possible once the deadline has passed as it would not be fair to the other students. **Never hesitate to come and talk to me, but do it before it is too late.***

## University Resources

### Writing Center

Students from all levels can take advantage of the writing center (LA 144: drop in or by appointment). The tutors will not write your assignment for you, but they will teach you how to write better. For more information, go the website: [http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcom\\_about.htm](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcom_about.htm)

### Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and wish to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, it is your responsibility to contact me and discuss the specific modifications you wish to request. Please be advised I may request that you provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying your right to reasonable modifications. If you have not yet contacted Disability Services, located in Lommasson Center 154, please do so in order to verify your disability and to coordinate your reasonable modifications. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/).

## Tentative Schedule

- Week 1 (9/2): Syllabus, Introductions, explanation of the leading questions for the course.
  - Why do I want to go to law school and what kind of law career would be a good fit for me?
  - Which traits and skills do I have that make me a strong/weak candidate for law school and the law profession?
  - Which strategies do I have to put into place in order to get into law school?
  - Which strategies do I have to put into place in order to have a successful and rewarding career in the law?
- Week 2-3 (9/9, 16): Choosing to practice law I
  - Speakers: John Mudd, Director of Alumni Relations, A. Blewett III School of Law
  - Readings:
    - LSC, 23-37
    - Segal, D. (2011) "Is Law School a Losing Game?"
    - Mitchell, L. E. (2012) "Law School Is Worth the Money"
    - Stevens, E. L. (2012) "Will law school students have jobs after they graduate?"
    - Optional: NALP's Legal Employment Market Update -- Spring 2013
- *Constitution Day Celebration 9/20: Orin Kerr on the digital Fourth Amendment: Talk at 7:30 in room 101 of the law school. Meeting with interested students at noon in LS 201.*
- Week 4 (9/23): The Happy Lawyer?
  - Readings:
    - Seligman, M. (2004) Authentic Happiness, Chap. 4
    - Levit, N. and Linder D.O. (2010) The Happy Lawyer, Chap 1, 3
- Week 5 (9/30) The Good Lawyer?
  - No class: either come to Jim Murray's talk, or write a report on:
  - Readings:
    - Milde, "Legal Ethics"
    - Huff, "The temptations of Creon"
- Week 6 (10/7): Admission Process
  - Speaker : Sarah Pepe, Director of Admissions, Alexander Blewett III School of Law.
  - Reading:
- Week 7 (10/14): Getting Involved
  - Speakers: Colleen Kane, Associate Director of Community Engagement and Student Programs
- Week 8 (10/21): LSAT Prep / Personal Statement
- Week 9 (10/28): What to expect in the LS classroom?
  - Speakers: TBA
  - LSC Chapter 4
- Week 10 (11/4): Choosing and Financing: No class – Report on:
  - Readings:
    - LSC Chapter 5, 6
- Week 11 (11/11): Veterans' day – No class
- Week 12 (11/18): Law Careers – Speaker TBA
- Week 13 Happy Thanksgiving
- Week 14 (12/2): Law Careers – Speaker TBA
- Week 15 (12/9): Law Careers – Speaker TBA
- Week 16 (12/15): 8-10PM Law Careers – Speaker TBA