

B. Master Syllabus

SOC 425 Sociology of Law

B1. SOC 425 Course Description

Provides a sociological understanding of law. Focuses on the reciprocal relationship between law and the social world. Uses family law as a case study to help students recognize, evaluate, and appreciate law in society.

B2. Rationale for Inclusion of Sociology 425 in UCC-21

Sociology of Law (Soc 425) is an appropriate **Tier 2 Social Science Domain** course for UCC-21. Through its focus on legal decision-making and sociological insights, the class teaches students to recognize that legal decisions occur within a societal context and are therefore influenced by social interactions, cultural norms, and institutional practices. It asks students to critique the validity of legal decision-making against a sociological backdrop and to formulate and defend alternative decisions. As a Tier 2 domain course, then, Soc 425 helps students transform knowledge into judgment through the development of effective decision-making skills (K→J).

Soc 425 enables students to accomplish the Knowledge → Judgment (K→J) transformation through a focus on active-learning centered pedagogies, which include large and small group discussions, modified lectures, primary source readings, journal writing exercises, and thought papers. These pedagogies help students:

- develop an understanding of the common law system in the United States
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of judicial decision-making
- critique the consequences of using various forms of information for arriving at particular decisions in a case
- develop effective decision-making skills

- Thus, students in Soc 425 develop 4 of the 7 cognitive skills associated with the K→J transformation:
 1. use multiple sources of information and knowledge to evaluate competing hypotheses, form judgments, and provide their rationale
 2. evaluate strengths and weaknesses of arguments and actions
 3. describe effective decision-making strategies
 4. explain others' values as well as their own

B3. SOC 425 Course Objectives

This course uses a variety of large and small group discussions, modified lectures, primary source readings, journal writing exercises, and thought papers in order to meet the UCC-21 Tier 2 Social Science Domain Course requirements as articulated in the following course-specific learning objectives. The UCC-21 cognitive skills that are listed above will be met via these course objectives.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- **identify** and **recognize** key terms, perspectives, and theories in the sociology of law
- **identify**, **compare**, and **evaluate** the various ways sociologists and legal actors determine the boundaries of the family
- **identify**, **compare**, and **evaluate** the various ways sociologists and legal actors determine the constitutional rights of families
- **identify**, **compare**, and **evaluate** the various ways sociologists and legal actors determine the boundaries and duties of marriage
- **identify**, **compare**, and **evaluate** the various ways sociologists and legal actors determine the rights and obligations of parents to their children

- **identify, compare, and evaluate** the various ways sociologists and legal actors determine the rights and obligations of adoptive relationships
- **formulate and defend**, in both written and oral form, decisions that are based on legal rationales and social science research

B4. Soc 425 Course Content Outline & Format

Introduction to Law

Defining Family

- Spousal Relationships
 - Traditional marriage
 - Cohabitation
 - Homosexual marriage
- Parent-child Relationships
 - Traditional families
 - Nontraditional families

Rights and the Family

- Marriage
 - Incest and polygamy
 - Constitutional law
- Privacy
 - Procreation and sexuality
 - Medical treatment
 - Parental decision-making

The Marriage Contract

- Traditional Expectations
- Nontraditional Expectations

Severing the Marriage Contract

- Divorce
 - Grounds
 - Dividing property
 - Child custody
 - Child support

Parents and Children

- Parental Failings
- State Failings

Adoption

The course format consists of modified lectures and class discussions that are conducted in a seminar-style environment. Students will engage with each other and with the instructor at every class meeting.

B5. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes will be assessed based on **in-class discussions**, **daily journal critiques**, and periodically written **thought papers**. The journal critiques require student to evaluate judicial decision-making, formulate their own decision for the case, and justify their rationale. The thought papers require students to use social science research, coupled with established case law, to formulate and defend a decision about a controversial common law issue. The UCC-21 transformations will also be measured with two additional data sources, both of which are described in Section D.

UCC-21 Cognitive Skills Addressed in Soc 425	Assessment Methods
<i>Knowledge → Judgment</i>	
1. use multiple sources of information and knowledge to evaluate competing hypotheses, form judgments, and provide their rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal critiques that ask students to evaluate judicial decision-making against the backdrop of social science research and then to formulate and defend their own decision in the case • Thought papers that ask students to use social science research and established case law to formulate and defend decisions about controversial common law issues
2. evaluate strengths and weaknesses of arguments and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class discussions that ask students to critique judicial decisions as well as formulate and defend their own decisions in the case • Journal critiques that ask students to evaluate judicial decision-making against the backdrop of social science research and then to formulate and defend their own decision in the case • Thought papers that ask students to use social science research and established case law to formulate and defend decisions about controversial common law issues

3. describe effective decision-making strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class discussions that ask students to critique judicial decisions as well as formulate and defend their own decisions in the case • Journal critiques that ask students to evaluate judicial decision-making against the backdrop of social science research and then to formulate and defend their own decision in the case • Thought papers that ask students to use social science research and established case law to formulate and defend decisions about controversial common law issues
4. explain others' values as well as their own	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class discussions that ask students to critique judicial decisions as well as formulate and defend their own decisions in the case • Journal critiques that ask students to evaluate judicial decision-making against the backdrop of social science research and then to formulate and defend their own decision in the case • Thought papers that ask students to use social science research and established case law to formulate and defend decisions about controversial common law issues

C. WISER+ Designation

Soc 425 will carry a Writing designation as well as an American Institutions/History designation. The WISER+ proposal is appended to this Master Syllabus.

D. Course Assessment

The instructor for Soc 425 will gather assessment data from three sources. First, **grades** from the journal critiques and the thought papers will be used to assess the degree to which the course is meeting the K→J transformation. Second, in order to measure growth over time, the instructor will create a **growth rubric** that will be used to periodically assess each student's overall achievement on the four UCC-21 objectives listed above. The baseline assessment will take place during the third week of class, followed by a midterm assessment, and an end-of-the-semester assessment. Third, the instructor will also create a brief **student survey** that students will respond to anonymously. The survey will ask students to assess the degree to which they feel the course meets each of the UCC-21 transformation objectives and the degree to which they feel they have personally met each of the transformation objectives. These data will be gathered and summarized for each semester the course is taught.

E. Faculty Qualifications for Domain Courses

Soc 425 is within the traditional Social Science domain. Instructors for Soc 425 will hold a doctoral degree in Sociology or a related field and will have a research specialization in law.

F. Supplemental Rationale or Other Statement

Not applicable

B. WISER+ Rationale

Soc 425 is both a **Writing Intensive** course and an **American Institutions/History** course. It should carry both a **W** and an **A** designation.

Writing Intensive

Students write **daily journal critiques** of the cases they read (a total of approximately **90** over the course of the semester). Each journal entry is approximately one-half single-spaced pages long; they consist of a concise summary of the assigned case and a critique of the case decision, including a rationale for agreement or disagreement with the judge's decision. All journal critiques are graded for clarity of writing and the ability to effectively communicate one's decision-making rationale for the case. Grammatical errors are not graded in the journal critiques.

Students also write **six** of ten assigned **thought papers**. Each thought paper is 2-3 single-spaced pages and requires students to synthesize legal rationales and social science research to formulate and defend a position on a controversial legal and social issue. Thought papers are graded for both grammar and content – 10 of 25 points are based on grammatically correct, error-free papers that use proper punctuation, spelling, and paper/sentence structure (including thesis statements, introductions and conclusions, subject/verb agreement, and consistent verb tense). All errors in grammar and writing are marked and students are expected to correct errors on subsequent papers. The remaining 15 points are based on the clarity of the argument, use of the legal rationales and social science research, and the degree to which students are able to effectively communicate and defend their position on the issue at hand.

As such, the Writing Intensive designation constitutes a **continuous thread** in Soc 425 and is associated with 87% of the course grade.

American Institutions/History

Soc 425 focuses on a particular American institution – **the American legal system**. Specifically, the course uses a focus on family law to teach students about the “case law” system (also called the “common law” system) that is a defining feature of the U.S. legal arena. Through an intensive focus on reading and critiquing judicial decisions, students learn about the legal and social influences on law, the importance of precedence in judicial decision-making, the process of legal change, the role of the Supreme Court and lesser appellate courts in the U.S. common law system, and the degree to which constitutional law influences their daily lives. Through readings, class discussions, and the journal critiques and thought papers that were described above, students develop an intimate knowledge of the common law system in the U.S.

As such, the American Institutions/History designation constitutes a **continuous thread** in Soc 425 and is associated with 100% of the course grade.

C. Assessment

Writing Intensive

The instructor for Soc 425 will gather assessment data from three sources. First, **grades** from the journal critiques and the thought papers will be used to assess the degree to which students are demonstrating effective writing skills. Second, in order to measure growth over time, the instructor will create a **writing growth rubric** that will be used to periodically assess each student's overall writing skills. The baseline assessment will take place during the third week of class, followed by a midterm assessment, and an end-of-the-semester assessment. Third, the instructor will also create a brief **student survey** that students will respond to anonymously. The survey will ask students to assess the degree to which they feel their writing skills improved over the course of the semester and the degree to which any improvement is associated with the course assignments and the instructor's feedback. These data will be gathered and summarized for each semester the course is taught.

American Institutions/History

The instructor for Soc 425 will gather assessment data from two sources. First, **grades** from class discussions, journal critiques, and the thought papers will be used to assess the degree to which students are demonstrating an understanding of the U.S. common law system. Second, the instructor will create a brief **student survey** that students will respond to anonymously. The survey will ask students to assess the degree to which they feel their understanding of the U.S. legal system improved over the course of the semester and the degree to which any improvement is associated with the course assignments and the instructor's feedback. These data will be gathered and summarized for each semester the course is taught.

D. Soc 425 Master Syllabus

The Master Syllabus for Soc 425 is included with this proposal.