

# Undergraduate Program Assessment Plan

## Legal Studies Program

### 2013 Revision

#### I. Program Overview

The Legal Studies Program is an undergraduate program in the College of Letters and Sciences. Legal Studies currently has about 275 declared majors; over the past five years, the program has on average graduated 130 students a year.

#### II. Learning Goals and Objectives

##### A. Introduction

The Legal Studies Program's mission is to provide a liberal education across traditional disciplines, focusing on legal process, formal law and informal norms, legal institutions, and how they operate in society. The courses expose students to the many facets of the law as a social phenomenon – its evolution, its function, and its effects. This major is not a pre-law program, and it is fundamentally different from the professional program encountered in law school. It is, however, a suitable program for pre-law students and for those who plan to concentrate in law-related study to prepare for public service careers or graduate training.

##### B. Goals

The Legal Studies Program seeks to introduce students to:

- The social, political, economic, and cultural determinants of law.
- The social, political, and economic impacts of law at the macro level.
- The impact of law and other rules on individual level decision-making at the micro level.
- The dynamics of legal ideas and ideologies.
- The practical skills needed to analyze legal phenomena and to access legal resources, broadly defined.
- The nature of legal reasoning and analysis in common law, civil law, and other legal systems.
- The functioning of legal institutions, and how those institutions differ from other societal institutions.
- The place and relevance of law within the humanities and social sciences.
- The cross-cultural and international valences of law in distinctive social orders.

### **C. Specific Objectives**

Currently, Legal Studies has the following short- and long-term objectives for student learning:

- To increase student awareness of non-US legal systems, ideas, and institutions.
- To streamline and clarify for our students and ourselves the thematic requirements of the Legal Studies major.
- To implement a culminating experience that balances the need for students to have a broad-based summary course toward the end of the major with the realities of staffing a sufficient number of such courses given the large number of majors in the program.
- To continue to reorient and promote Legal Studies as an excellent major option within the liberal arts and to balance the humanities and social sciences requirements and aspirations of the program.
- To promote further linkages of law with other disciplines and areas of interest within the College of Letters and Sciences.

### **III. Efforts to Measures Student Performance**

#### **A. Recent Background & Program History**

In 2001-2002, Legal Studies faculty members undertook a major recreation of the interdisciplinary undergraduate program in the major. The purpose of this effort was to move toward a genuinely interdisciplinary program (rather than something that is simply inter-departmental) and to incorporate major developments in interdisciplinary legal studies that have occurred over the last 25 years. The new curriculum took effect in the fall of 2003.

A central goal of the redesign was to integrate humanities more prominently into the curriculum. Two of the people hired through the Legal Studies Cluster help provide the enhanced humanities focus, as do other additions to our teaching staff.

Beginning in the 2007-2008 academic year, Legal Studies undertook its most in-depth self-study to date which resulted in the development of a new curriculum. This curriculum took effect in the fall of 2010.

Three tangible changes resulted from this self-study:

- 1) Legal Studies reaffirmed its commitment to understanding law as a global, multicultural phenomenon. As an undergraduate instructional program, the primary way Legal Studies can further this commitment is to increase student exposure to transnational phenomena. As a result, increased our non-U.S. requirement by asking that all students complete at least two courses that have a

focus beyond the traditional U.S. legal institutions and phenomena. We have also encouraged faculty to include global perspectives in as many courses as possible.

- 2) Legal Studies eliminated a number of courses that are either no longer offered regularly or that do not meet the broader liberal arts background against which the program now understands itself.
- 3) Legal Studies revised and clarified its capstone or culminating experience requirement. A "Core Perspectives" requirement, meaning effectively that a student must take an advanced course taught by one of the Core Faculty in Legal Studies, was instituted. Core Perspectives courses all present thematic, topical, or historical studies of law in terms of foundational approaches in both the humanities and social sciences.

## **B. Measurements of Student Learning Outcomes**

The Legal Studies Program uses the following tools to assess student learning:

- 1) *Course evaluations* distributed in each course and used to assess both student performance and teaching effectiveness.
- 2) *Exit surveys* given annually to graduating senior majors (current version attached).
- 3) *Annual assessment report* submitted by the Academic Advisor in the program and presented as part of the Legal Studies Program annual assessment meeting. This report consists of a statement by the staff and faculty who work most closely with student majors to provide a state of the program for other faculty. Its contents are intended to be a qualitative measure of student performance based upon an aggregate, though often anecdotal, experience of student concerns and successes.

Legal Studies is also considering some form of portfolio review or other collection of student work as an additional measure of student performance and how that performance reflects the communication and achievement of the program's goals. Details of this assessment tool have yet to be formalized.

## **IV. Impact of Assessment Efforts**

Assessment and learning goals have been a central part of the Legal Studies Program. The most recent voluntary self-study exercise has served as a guiding framework for our internal self-evaluation and our external reporting. Specific efforts to ensure that the program is meeting its obligations and moving toward its aspirations include the following:

### **A. Use of Assessment Data & Continued Planning**

The assessment tools described above form the main data for the Legal Studies Program's annual meeting on assessment, during which the faculty and staff devote

significant time to a review of that year's data. Anonymous course evaluation data, grade distributions, exit surveys, and assessment reports are distributed in advance of this meeting and program members then suggest any changes or modifications they might make to the program's operations. The Director of the Center for Law, Society, & Justice, in consultation with the staff and faculty, collects any significant changes proposed and determines their feasibility and benefits to the program.

**B. To whom the results are reported:**

All data from the assessment tools are reported to the Director, Core Faculty, and staff. An annual report from the Director is then reported back to all affiliates of the program, after the annual assessment review. As needed, those annual assessment reports and data will be reported to outside units such as the Dean of the College of Letters & Science or outside, interested reviewers.

**C. Deadlines for achieving milestones related to the above activities.**

- Spring 2013 Determine criteria for distinction in the Legal Studies major.
- Fall 2013 Discussion of whether to implement a portfolio review.
- Spring 2014 Review Core Perspectives requirement in terms of both student learning and rotation of courses among faculty.