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### PHL 395.01: Prelaw Seminar

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**PRELAW SEMINAR  
SYLLABUS – FALL 2013  
Soazig Le Bihan**

## **Course Description**

This course will enhance students' understanding of how to prepare for, and how to be successful in law school as well as provide them with specific information concerning 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. The main goal of the course is to help students to make a well-informed and appropriately self-aware decision about whether or not, and if yes, why, a career in the law is the professional path that best suits their personality traits, their academic strengths and weaknesses, their core values, and life interests. Upon completing the course, it is expected that students will:

1. be knowledgeable about the true benefits and challenges of an education and career in the law,
2. be knowledgeable about career opportunities available to one with a law degree, including the various specialty areas of practice,
3. be knowledgeable about law school admission requirements and application process,
4. have learned about how to effectively prepare for the LSAT,
5. have learned about how to be successful in law school,
6. have learned about how to finance a legal education,
7. have learned about how to choose the right law school for them,
8. have developed amicable and constructive relationships with other students seeking admission to law school at the university,
9. have developed a thoughtful, reflexive, personal and well-informed understanding of whether or not, and if yes, why, they want to go to law school and pursue a career in the law.

## **Course Logistics**

Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan

Office: LA 153

Mailbox: LA 101

Contact: soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu

Office Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays 3-4pm; Thursday 3:30-5pm, Fridays 1-3pm.

Course location and time: Thursdays, 5:10 to 6pm, DHC 118

## **Workload and Assessment**

### **Assignments outside of the classroom:**

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

**Homework** Students will be assigned an average of 10 pages of readings each week to be discussed in class. They will also be asked to prepare at least 3 questions relating to the topic covered by such readings.

**Class Attendance and Participation** 40% of the final grade.

Students are expected to attend every class meeting (that is to say, they are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class each week). The penalty will be of 5% for each class missed (that is, half a letter grade). *Three late arrivals count as one absence.* If a student has to leave early, it is her or his responsibility to let the instructor know at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class.

Students are expected to give their full attention to the class. Cell phones or other means of communication should be silenced for the duration of class. They will be asked to leave if they 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 will be required in such cases. Students also will be expected to work through the material covered during the classes they may have missed.

Participation will be graded along the following scale:

**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 lecture 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** The student comes to class, but often unprepared. This student's contributions are often unrelated to the topic at hand, provide no insightful ideas, and do not facilitate discussion.

**F range** The student often does not come to class, or, if he or she does, he or she generally neither participates nor makes any insightful contributions related to the topic at hand.

**Maintenance of a Reflection Journal** 60% of the final grade.

Students will be expected to write at least one 1/2 page entry a week.

The reflection journal will be graded twice over the semester along 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 his or her own future.

**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** Most entries satisfy Criterion (1) above. Most entries fail to satisfy two or more of Criteria (2) to (5) above.

**F range** The student fails to complete journal entries, or journal entries are unrelated to assignment objectives.

## Tentative Schedule

**Textbook:** Robert H. Miller. *Law School Confidential. A Complete Guide to the Law School Experience: By Students, for Students*, Macmillan, Revised Edition, 2011.

Henceforth referred to as **LSC**

Also to read: “A life in the law” from the American Bar Association

**Week 1 – 8/29** Welcome, introductions, and discussion of course syllabus and course requirements. Introduction and explanation of the two leading questions for the reflection journal: “why do I want to go to law school and which kind of law career would be the right fit for me?” and “which traits and skills do I have that make me a strong/weak candidate for law school and the legal profession?”.

**Week 2 – 9/5** – Choosing to Practice Law

What is your current image of an attorney? What skills, knowledge, and abilities does a competent attorney need?

How do you currently assess your strengths and weaknesses regarding the possibility of pursuing a career in the law? What steps do you think you can take to increase your strengths and minimize your weaknesses?

Readings: LSC Chapter 1

Speaker: John Mudd (to be confirmed)

**Week 3 – 9/12** – Law School Admissions and application process (1)

The LSAT: What is it, when to take it, and how to prepare well?

Readings: LSC Chapter 2

**Week 4 – 9/19** – Getting involved

How involved are you in your community? How involved should you be in your community? What are the opportunities for community service that would best fit your schedule, interests and abilities? And what is it exactly that is called leadership?

Speaker: Colleen Kane from the Office of Civic Engagement and Brad Haas, Peace Corps Representative (to be confirmed).

**Week 5 – 9/26** – Morality and the law

How do you think practicing law squares with moral or ethical values? What are your core ethical values and how do these square with the legal profession?

Speakers: Prof. Tom Huff (to be confirmed)

**Week 6 and 7 – 10/3, 10/10** – Law School Admissions and application process (2)

Discussion of the application process, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of applications.

Readings: LSC Chapter 3

Computer workshop: let’s pretend we are registering and applying for law school on the LSAC website.

Speaker: 10/10 Lori E. Freeman, J.D., Director of Admissions & Career Services, The University of Montana School of Law

**Week 8 – 10/17** – Legal Education

What to expect in a law school classroom? What are the best strategies to be successful in law school? What are the sure ways to fail?

Speaker: Hillary Wandler (to be confirmed)

Readings: LSC Chapter 4

**Week 9 –10/24** – Choosing a law school

Which law school would be the “right fit” for you? What are the criteria to consider when choosing a law school? What difference will it make for my future life and career?

Readings: LSC Chapter 5

**Week 10 – 10/31** – Financing law school

Readings: LSC Chapter 6

Speaker: TBA

**Week 11 – 11/7** – Personal Statement Workshop

Making use of your reflexion journal: why do you want to go to law school and why are you a strong / weak candidate? Why do you have to bring into the law school that is unique and interesting?

Questionnaire and peer feedback.

**Week 12-14 – 11/14, 11/21, 11/28, and 12/5** – Domains of the law, Variety of law careers

Panels or individual presentations from a variety of law professional to be determined according to the interest of the particular pool of students in the class.

Examples of topic that could be covered: Criminal Law, Environmental Law, International Law, Insurance Law, Indian Law, Being a Judge, Careers with a law degree outside of the legal profession etc.

## University Resources

**Writing Center** Students from all levels can take advantage of the writing center (LA 144, drop in or by appointment)

“The Writing Center exists to help all UM students improve their writing skills as they pursue their academic and professional goals. We provide free writing instruction through one-on-one tutoring, in-class workshops, and the Writing Assistant program.” (quoted from the writing center website)

The tutors will not write your paper for you, but they will teach you how to write better. For more information, go to the website: [http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcome\\_about.htm](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcome_about.htm)

**Students with Disabilities** This course is accessible to and usable by otherwise qualified students with disabilities. If a student has a disability and wishes to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, it is of his or her responsibility to contact me privately to discuss the specific modifications s/he wishes to request. Students should be advised that I will request that they provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying their right to reasonable modifications.

If, as a student with a disability, you have not yet contacted Disability Services, located in Lom-masson 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/).

**Academic Misconduct** All students are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/documents/StudentConductCode1.pdf>), which embodies “the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, human rights, and responsible citizenship” (University of Montana Student Code of Conduct, p. 3).

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be a student’s own. If a student plagiarizes, his or her assignment will receive a zero. S/he 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 students may have about how to document sources properly. Anytime students borrow a phrase or sentence from someone, they have to quote it. Anytime students take an idea from someone, they have to cite your sources. To conduct research on a topic is at the core of academic work; to recognize the work of others is at the core of academic ethics.