

**Academic & Professional Skills for U.S. Law Studies I
Syllabus
Fall 2020**

**LAW-560
Academic & Professional Skills for U.S. Law Studies I
Tuesdays, 9:00 am-10:50 am (PST)**

Zoom Meeting ID:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/91429640122?pwd=YjZhS3RleUM0NnI2NHNES24zRnNMUT09>

**Meeting ID: 914 2964 0122
Passcode: 1t114x**

Course Description

Academic and Professional Skills for U.S. Law Studies I (LAW-560) is a two-unit course taken during fall semester. This course is designed to help foreign law students succeed in our LL.M. program by focusing on and improving students' communication and listening skills. This course will help students improve their English in a legal setting by teaching students how to effectively read and brief cases, participate in class discussions, and answer a law school exam. Students will be encouraged to participate and interact in class in order to improve their vocabulary and pronunciation skills through group exercises and class discussions. In addition, students will learn listening strategies and techniques for taking clear and effective notes from lectures.

Course Learning Objectives

1. To prepare students for speaking and participating meaningfully in legal discussions.
2. To prepare students to fully engage in legal courses with the use of effective note-taking and outlining by identifying the most important points and legal principles.
3. To provide students with an understanding of U.S. law and U.S. law school.

Instructor Information

Mona R. Shah

Email: mshah@law.usc.edu

Office hours: immediately after class on Tuesdays and by appointment.

Class Format

Class will start and end on time. Please do not arrive late to class. **Participation is required.** Please do not hesitate to ask questions in class.

Classes will include:

- Reading assignment to be completed before class session
- Interactive lecture with PowerPoint presentation
- Small group discussions and/or activities
- Outline/notes sheet for students to follow along according to lecture
- Vocabulary list of words emphasized in class
- Short writing assignment to be completed after class session
- Guest speakers

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Blackboard

The university's Blackboard website will be used for all correspondence and posting of class material. Students are required to check the course's Blackboard website on a daily basis and monitor any announcements, updates, and materials posted.

Readings

Students are required to read assigned readings prior to each class period. Students who are not able to participate in class due to having not read that week's reading assignment will receive point deductions from their participation grades. The best way to fully engage in the class period and learn with our class is to read every assigned reading. Assigned readings are listed below in this syllabus. All assigned readings are found in the required book listed below.

Required book: LAW-560 Custom Course Reader, *University Readers*
Available online at: <https://store.cognella.com/22748>

Highly Recommend: Academic Legal Discourse and Analysis: Essential Skills for International Students Studying Law in the United States, Authors M. Baffy and K. Scheartzel. Available online on Amazon.com. Portions of this book may be referenced during the semester.

Attendance and Class Participation

Attendance, timely log in, and participation in this course is **mandatory**. Cell phones should be silenced and put away completely during class. Video cameras must be kept on unless prior approval by professor to turn off video camera is obtained. Up to 3 points will be awarded each week for attendance/participation. Active participation, being present, listening, and 'thinking on your feet' are critical to being a good law student and lawyer.

Timely arrival, attendance, & thoughtful participation	3 points
Attendance but no participation, or excused absence previously-confirmed by instructor	1 point
Unexcused absence	0 points

Vocabulary Lists

Students will be introduced to new vocabulary words each week. Select vocabulary words will be provided on a list each week via Blackboard. In order to practice with new legal vocabulary, students are recommended to use at least a few of those select words during the week's class session and in their weekly writing assignments.

Writing Assignments

Most weeks, students will be required to turn in a one-page writing assignment according to a prompt provided in the syllabus. See specific prompts in each week's description below. Writing assignments are strictly due at 11:59 pm the night before the next week's class. Writing assignments should be submitted on Blackboard, but they can also be emailed directly to Prof. Shah at mshah@law.usc.edu. Hard copy submissions will NOT be accepted. Assignments will be graded for content only. Written work will not be combed thoroughly for grammar mistakes, though comments may occasionally be made. Students do not need to

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pour hours into making the writing perfect (save that for Legal Writing), but focus on content. Up to 2 points will be awarded each week for attendance/participation as follows

On-time, thoughtful, thorough submission	2 points
Submission did not follow instructions, lacked thoughtfulness, and/or was submitted late	1 point
No submission	0 points

Guest Speakers

During weeks 8 and 9, we will have guest speakers in class consisting of legal professionals working as both lawyers and judges.

Exam

A final take home exam will be given the last week of the semester so that students can have the opportunity to practice a simulated exam as well as test their skills and knowledge of academic preparation. The 20-point exam will be comprised of 20 multiple choice questions (worth ½ point each) and one essay question (worth 10 points) on topics we will have covered throughout the semester.

Class Grade

The course will be graded on a pass/fail basis. In order to earn a passing grade, students must earn 60 or more points (of 100 total points) in the course. Points will be awarded as follows. A “high pass” designation, provided by a letter from the Graduate & International Programs office, will be awarded to the top 5 students in the class, according to points earned.

Class Participation (This includes attendance and active speaking during lecture)	3 points/week	40% of final grade
Writing Assignments	2 points/week	30% of final grade
Exam	30 points	30% of final grade

Pass	60-100 total points
Fail	0-59 total points

High Pass

At the end of the semester, the top 20% of students will receive a ‘high pass’ recognition and letter. For this, a letter will be written by the instructor acknowledging the student’s ‘high pass’ score.

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Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Funds for Students

<https://we-are/usc/edu/faqs/faq-support-funds/>

USC has several resources available for students. Eligible students can apply for assistance from the COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Fund and the USC Student Basis Needs Department.

This webpage answers FAQs for each resource and describes important university resources for low-income students:

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- 1) food insecurity (<https://studentbasicneeds.use.edu/resources/food-insecurity/>)
- 2) housing insecurity (<https://studentbasicneeds.usc.edu/resources/housing-insecurity/>)
- 3) tech assistance (<https://studentbasicneeds.usc.edu/resources/technology-assistance/>)

USC Policies on Accessibility for Online Courses

The University of Southern California is dedicated to maintaining an environment that ensures that all students with documented disabilities, including deafness, ADHD, dyslexia, visual impairments, learning disorders, physical/chronic health conditions and other disabilities, have equal access to its educational programs, activities and facilities. This policy covers all students at USC and in distance learning programs. The accommodations are designed to level the playing field for students with disabilities, while maintaining the integrity and standards of USC's academic programs.

Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis. Examples of typical accommodations include assistance in providing note-takers, sign language interpreters, real-time captionists, readers, scribes, advocacy with faculty, accommodated exam proctoring, alternative text formats, adaptive technology, referrals to community resources, support groups and other support services for individual needs unique to a student's disability.

Therefore, any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. DSP will review all complete files with documentation; however, please know that additional follow-up steps may be necessary prior to final accommodation decisions. Once a decision has been made, access your approved accommodations from the myDSP portal and generate accommodation letters to provide to your instructor.

To talk to a live technical support agent, please call the following number:

**Toll-free 877-803-3455
Support Center <http://usc.echelp.org>**

This class will be held live each Tuesday at 9:00 am to 10:50 am (PST) via Zoom.

We recognize this is an unusual school year. Syllabus, reading, and assignments are subject to change as the semester progresses to best deal with changes in academic needs and provide dynamic instruction for you all. For example, I plan on asking a few guest speakers to speak to you all, but I do not yet have their schedules confirmed yet.

Online learning can be tedious. I encourage of all you to actively participate in class. Answer questions, ask questions, comment your thoughts, all are encouraged! Please do not hesitate to email me with any questions about materials, learning, finding support, anything at all. We are in this together!

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Class Schedule & Reading Assignments

Week 1: Tuesday, August 25, 2020

What is Law School All About?

- Individual Student and Profession Introductions
- Learning in Law School: Listening, Analysis, Understanding to see “Both Sides to Everything”
- Practical Skills Lawyers use Every Day
- Bar Exam Information

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 1-3, (If you cannot complete this prior to class, it is fine)
- <https://blog.ceb.com/2015/09/09/ten-things-every-new-lawyer-should-know-part-1/>
- <https://blog.ceb.com/2015/09/11/ten-things-every-new-lawyer-should-know-part-2/>

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, August 31, 2020)

- Write a one-page essay about what you hope to gain out of this class, and your 2-year LLM program in general. Where are you located, goals for after graduation, and anything you would like me to know. Include what are your academic goals for your studies at USC. This will help me best arrange the course during the semester to meet your goals.

Week 2: Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Active Listening Skills

- Recognizing Cues
- The Importance of Asking Questions in Class and In the Professional Setting
- Various Sources of Law in the U.S.

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 4-9,
- Inga Stasiulionyte, 6 Underlying Benefits of Asking Questions, <https://www.success.com/6-underlying-benefits-of-asking-questions/>
- <https://blog.ceb.com/2010/06/11/listen-and-you-shall-learn/>
- <https://www.lawpracticetoday.org/article/learning-to-listen/>

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Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, September 7, 2020)

- Article Exercise on Page 4 of Reader

Week 3: Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Understanding How the U.S. Makes its Laws

- Organization of Federal and State Court Systems
- Historical Background of US Law
- The Constitution

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 55-65, 77-83

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, September 14, 2020)

- Write a one-page essay responding to the following prompt: Americans continue to debate whether there is a constitutional right to privacy and what the parameters of that right are. Discuss one issue you have heard in the news that illustrates the debate over privacy. Compare arguments for and against privacy in that context referring to what The Constitution says.

Week 4: Tuesday, September 15, 2020

U.S. Court System

- Time Management in Law School
- The Introduction of the Concept of 'Judicial Review'

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 66-75, 106-116

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, September 21, 2020)

- Refer to handout: read summary judgment for Marbury v. Madison and Thomas Jefferson's quote about it. What is Thomas Jefferson's position on the concept of judicial review? What arguments does he present? Do you agree or disagree with him?

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Week 5: Tuesday, September 22, 2020

Common Law System

- General Study Strategies for Law School
- Sources of Common Law

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 117-129, 145-150, 151-155

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, September 28, 2020)

- Read the summary of *Florida v. Jardines* below, as well as the Constitutional Amendment and precedent cases that are relevant. Write a one-page essay describing arguments in support of Florida OR *Jardines*.

Week 6: Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Reading Cases and Understanding Case Law: Why Do We Focus So Much on Case Law?

- How to Identify Relevant Facts in Cases
- Reviewing Procedural Posture

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 13-15, 176-181, 193-201, 203-205

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, October 5, 2020)

- Read the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 74 S. Ct. 686, 98 L. Ed. 873 (1954) – found at:
https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=12120372216939101759&q=brown+v+board+of+education&hl=en&as_sdt=2006
- In one page maximum, identify the main parts of the case in bullet point format.

Week 7: Tuesday, October 6, 2020

Briefing Cases

- Drafting Case Summaries: For You and Your Reader
- Impact of Case Holding

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 85-89, 207-218

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- Michael Makdisi & John Makdisi, Introduction to the Study of Law: Cases and Materials (2009)
- Ann M. Burkhart & Robert A. Stein, How to Study Law and Take Law Exams in a Nutshell (1996)

Writing Assignment

- What is your ideal legal career once you graduate? Is it in the US or somewhere else? What are you most worried about working as a lawyer in the US?

Week 8: Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Guest Speakers

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Cameron Forbes, 5 Practical Tips for Lawyers to Improve Their Presentation Skills, www.liv.asn.au/YoungLawyersBlog/May-2012/5-Practical-Tips-for-Lawyers-to-Improve-Their-Pres
- Marsha Hunter, Perfecting Your Presentation Skills, www.attorneyatwork.com/perfecting-your-presentation-skills
- JD Advising, Public Speaking Tips for Law Students and Lawyers, [read://https www.jdadvising.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jdadvising.com%2Fpublic-speaking-tips-law-students-lawyers%2F%23%3A~%3Atext%3D%2520Basic%2520Public%2520Speaking%2520Tips%2520for%2520Law%2520Students%2CIf%2520you%2520are%2520going%2520to%2520make...%2520More%2520](https://www.jdadvising.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jdadvising.com%2Fpublic-speaking-tips-law-students-lawyers%2F%23%3A~%3Atext%3D%2520Basic%2520Public%2520Speaking%2520Tips%2520for%2520Law%2520Students%2CIf%2520you%2520are%2520going%2520to%2520make...%2520More%2520)

Writing Assignment

- None

Week 9: Tuesday, October 20, 2020

Guest Speakers

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Same as week 8

Writing Assignment

- None

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Week 10: Tuesday, October 27, 2020

Taking Notes in Law School: Why Outline?

- Legal Shorthand/Abbreviations: A look at the legal language
- Identifying Key Points
- Why Outline?
- Sample Outlines

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 90-94, 182-192
- Becky Raquet et al., Tips & Techniques for Taking Notes in Class, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Updated-Tips-and-Techniques-for-Notes.pdf>
- Legal Abbreviations, <http://lawschooltraining.com/legal-abbreviations>

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, November 2, 2020)

- Watch 5-minute sample Con Law lecture at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di5GpL_ApN0
- Write up to one page of notes on the lecture and submit.

Week 11: Tuesday, November 3, 2020

What You Need to Know About The Legal Profession? Introduction to the Legal Profession:

- What Does It Mean To Give Legal Advice?
- Different Types of Lawyers: Transaction v. Litigation
- Stages of Litigation

Required Reading (to be completed before class) (*Reading and Assignment for this week are a continuation of the importance of note taking in law school and outlining)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 245-252
- Alexis Martin & Jennifer Bennett, Outlining Tips and Techniques for Class, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Outlining2009-1.pdf>
- Create an Outline for Each Class, <http://www.lawnerds.com/guide/outlining.html>

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, November 9, 2020)

- Using this syllabus, readings and outline/notes sheets from weeks 1-11, create an outline for this course (which you will use on your final practice exam).

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Week 12: Tuesday, November 10, 2020

What You Need to Know About The Legal Profession? Introduction to the Legal Profession continued:

- Stages of Litigation
- Role of Juries
- Role of Alternative Dispute Resolution

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- None

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, November 16, 2020)

- Write a summary of the type of lawyer you would like to be in the US: Transactional or Litigation, and why? From what you know, how do you think the US could improve its overall legal system?

Week 13: Tuesday, November 17, 2020

Issue-Spotting: Learning How to Think Like a Lawyer: Critical Thinking and Issue Spotting

- Identifying Issues in a Fact Pattern
- Sorting & Discussing Issues
- Lawyer as a Client Advisor

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 167-175, 239-244, 253-269

Writing Assignment (due on Blackboard by 11:59pm on Monday, November 23, 2020)

- Without referring to the specific laws involved, make a list of the simple issues you think would be apparent in the following hypothetical fact pattern:
Just as the sun is setting one night, Carl sees that the door to Vince's house is ajar. Carl knows that Vince has a home office in which there is expensive computer equipment. Carl pushes the unlocked door open, walks into the house and steals Vince's computer equipment that is valued at well over \$5,000.

Week 14: Tuesday, November 24, 2020

- **NO CLASS**

Required Reading

- None

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Writing Assignment

- None

Week 14: Tuesday, December 1, 2020 --LAST CLASS OF SEMESTER--

Preparing for a Law School Exam

- Putting Analysis into Practice
- Essays v. Multiple Choice

Required Reading (to be completed before class)

- Custom Course Reader, pages 157-166, 219-237, 270-277

TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM

- **Take home Final Examination, due on or before December 8, 2020 by 11:59 p.m. To be sent via email to Prof. Shah at mshah@law.usc.edu.**