Encouraging Collaborative Work
Film Discussion Groups

In order to encourage each student in the class to try to enhance their learning-by-group-discussion outside of class, we have designed the following extra-credit opportunity:

Form a discussion or study group of four (4) students in Legal 250, section 1. For convenience of managing this process, you are restricted to groups of 4; and since this is about group discussion as a learning tool, no credit will be given for individual film viewing. You may wish to keep your study/discussion group intact throughout the rest of the semester and use it for general course work, exam study, and additional film work. If you do not know enough people in the class to form a group of four, let us know soon and we will make a few minutes of class-time available for introductions and group-forming.

Rent one of the films listed below (all have something to do with law) and watch it as a group. [I am trying to arrange to have the Library buy round two films and make them available for reserve screening by groups]. Immediately after seeing the film spend at least 45 minutes discussing the film with special emphasis on 1) the questions that accompany the film in the listing below and, 2) the brief reading referred to in connection with the film. Within five days each student in the group must write an individual, two-page, typed essay discussing the question(s) in light of the film, reading, and group discussion. The essay should be based on the group discussion, but also allow each individual to expand his or her ideas beyond what transpired in the group. Each individual essay must be the individual work of the student writing it. Hand in the essay (SA Filmbox, 102 Gordon Hall) with a cover sheet (form attached, duplicates available from Legal Studies office) showing the names of all students in the group, the date the film was watched, and your name and the date you wrote the essay. All the essays of group members do not have to be handed in together.

You may do this collaborative film discussion and individual essay twice, i.e. about two different films, one from each of the two groupings. The first film and discussion must be completed (and the first essay handed in by Tuesday, October 23rd, the second by Tuesday, November 20th. In other words, if you are going to do this twice, you must do one in each time period. If you hand in two essays in one time period, you will get credit for only one. Films in round one are not available for round two, and vice versa.

For each film, discussion, and essay that you do, an individual student can receive 2.5 points added to your semester average (for a maximum of 5 points added to your semester average). In order to receive the extra credit you must have written a “passing” essay and complied with all the other requirements mentioned above. Other than “credit” or “no credit” there will be no grade on your film essay.

After the round one or round two deadline, your essay will be returned with a brief comment and an indication of whether you received credit; but because of the extra work this project imposes upon us, no essay for round one will be accepted after October 23rd, and no essay for round two received after November 20th will be accepted.

The same strict standards of academic honesty apply to this extra credit work as to the course itself. We copy the essays and cover sheets to monitor this.
Films and Questions:
The questions for each film are in some way related not only to the film but to one or more of the topics in the course or in Before the Law (BTL). Each film note below contains a reference to a reading which you should read and to which you will need to refer in order to answer the question about the film.

ROUND ONE FILMS (essays due by October 23rd)

1) The Verdict (Paul Newman):
   What picture of the practice of law and the attitudes and mind-set of lawyers is painted by this film? Compare this picture of law practice with the picture painted by section 11.3 or 4.1 in BTL.

2) Twelve Angry Men (the original, with Henry Fonda):
   How would you characterize the strengths of the jury deliberations in this film? What is the meaning and importance of “jury of peers” in the film? In what way does BTL section 17.7 help you to understand this film and the importance of trial by jury?

3) Amistad (Anthony Hopkins, Morgan Freeman):
   What gives this film its impact on the viewer? Compare the role of law in maintaining slavery prior to the Civil War as suggested by the film with the role of law in maintaining racial segregation as seen in Plessy v. Ferguson, or in maintaining institutional racism as analyzed in BTL 16.6. Without law, can slavery or segregation exist? Without law can racism exist?

4) And Justice For All (Al Pacino):
   What kinds of personal and professional strains are placed upon a lawyer by the existence of plea bargaining and by the need to maintain client confidences? Compare the Al Pacino character to Martin Erdmann in BTL 13.3.

5) Inherit the Wind (with Spencer Tracy and Gene Kelly): What do you think the real motive of the Tennessee Legislature was when they passed the state statute prohibiting the teaching of Evolution? Although Scopes and his lawyer, Clarence Darrow, lost the trial, is there some sense in which they were victorious in the general struggle over Darwin and Genesis? What does that tell you about the purposes and effects of using the legal process? Does Darrow’s piece in BTL (section 8.2) help you to understand the political/social dynamics that led to the legislation and the Scopes trial?
ROUND TWO FILMS (essays due by November 20th)

1) The Front (starring Woody Allen but not directed by him):
   What is the role of law in maintaining the “blacklist” of television actors and writers and directors in the 1950’s? Why don’t the protections of the Bill of Rights help Howard Prince or the writers for whom he fronts? What connections can you make between The Front and Miller’s play, The Crucible, which was read for class? Or, reflect on whether BTL 13.4 helps you to understand anything about “The Front?”

2) Breaker Morant:
   Why do the men at the top of the chain of command hide their involvement in the “crimes” for which the three men are tried? Why is the law unable to uncover these facts? Should civilian standards of fairness, honesty, and human rights apply to military justice in time of war? Read, and give the citation for something on the Internet about the USAPATRIOT Act or about the military tribunals for hearing cases of persons labeled by the president as “illegal enemy combatants.” Does your viewing of the film make the use of military tribunals seem more or less justifiable in the war on terrorism?

3) Billy Budd (Terence Stamp):
   Did Captain Vere do the right thing in trying Budd on board ship rather than taking him back to port? In insisting on Budd’s conviction by the court martial? What does the film make you think about the connection between law and justice in perilous times? How does Captain Vere compare with Justice Keen in the “Case of the Speluncean Explorers,” or with Judge Danforth in The Crucible?

4) A Man for All Seasons (Paul Scofield):
   Was Thomas More’s resistance to Henry VIII’s power selfish and foolish or courageous and righteous? What did More mean when he said “I would give the Devil benefit of law for my own safety sake?” What does this suggest about the importance of due process protections? How does the treatment of individual conscience by the legal system differ in the film and in the Barnette case, which was read for class?

5) The Oxbow Incident (Henry Fonda):
   What is the difference between vigilante justice and trial by jury, considering that both are reflections of the views of the community? Is the “rule of law” an improvement over “the rule of man” or does the amount of “injustice” remain pretty much constant regardless of the form of legal process? Compare how the Zinn article, “Conspiracy of Law,” approaches the rule-of-law/rule-of-man question.
FORM FOR SUBMITTING
TWO-PAGE ESSAY AFTER
GROUP FILM DISCUSSION

______________________    ROUND ONE__________
print your name

______________________    ROUND TWO__________
your student number

______________________
date of essay submission

(Round one--not later than October 23)
(Round two--not later than November 20)

FILM THAT YOU WATCHED, and date on which you watched it:
Title:

Date watched:

Print Names of all four students who watched the film and participated in its discussion, alphabetically by last name:

1) 
2) 
3) [Sign your initials next to your name only]
4) 

Submit this form stapled to the front of your two-page essay. By doing so you indicate that you participated in the discussion of the film and wrote the attached essay on your own. No essay will be accepted without this form. More forms are available from the Legal Studies office, 102 Gordon Hall or on-line at the 250 web page.