

THE FIELD

Legal studies takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of law and society within a liberal arts framework. Legal studies explores the myriad ways in which law is connected with other disciplines pertinent to an understanding of society. Legal studies is education about law, whereas law school is education in law. In fact, as a discipline, legal studies is based on the assumption that “law is too important to be left to lawyers.” The critical, social scientific approach of the program encourages students to investigate and develop their attitudes toward law and justice within the context of a growing literature of legal studies and related disciplines. Legal studies also examines law and society from the perspective of other cultures.

There is no minor available in legal studies.

THE MAJOR

The legal studies major requires 37-47 credits. Students must take Introduction to Legal Studies (LEGAL 250), seven courses at the 200–400 level (including an Integrative Experience), Legal Research and Writing (LEGAL 450), three law-related liberal arts courses, and nine credits’ worth of Global Law and Society work. The major is allied with law and law-related faculty from the other colleges of the Five College Consortium, where UMass Amherst students may also take courses.

LETTERS OF SPECIALIZATION

The legal studies program provides students with the opportunity to earn letters of specialization in comparative and international law; conflict resolution; constitutional law; data analytics for politics, policy, and legal studies; and/or law and social justice. Students who complete letters of specialization take focused coursework within the area covered by the letter, honing career-relevant skills. Letters of specialization can be cited as a credential on résumés, personal statements, and in letters of recommendation.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Undergraduate Research Engagement Program (UREP) is designed to partner advanced undergraduate legal studies majors with faculty for hands-on, one-on-one research experiences. The UREP offers a new model for undergraduate education in the social sciences by training students to work collaboratively with faculty to develop studies with real-world significance and to carry them out with practical, readily transferable skills that will provide them with a crucial edge in the job market. Students who gain sophisticated research skills will be highly sought after by potential employers: They will understand how to conduct research; how to choose and use the appropriate qualitative or quantitative methods to carry out studies; how to work collaboratively toward a common goal; and how to write effectively in order to convey their findings to the public.

HONORS

Legal studies encourages students to approach faculty regarding honors courses and other honors work.

STUDY ABROAD AND INTERNSHIPS

Legal studies encourages studying abroad to expand cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly global legal community. Students should contact the International Programs Office (413-545-2710, umass.edu/ipo) and consult with their academic advisor. Internships are a very useful experience and students are encouraged to work with the legal studies internship coordinator. More information is available on the legal studies website.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

A clear understanding of the role of law in society is increasingly important to a wide array of careers in the public and private sectors. Legal studies helps students become informed, active, well-rounded critical thinkers about law and society. Society is increasingly dominated by law and legal consciousness, and legal literacy is important for many careers. For example, legal studies graduates pursue careers in the justice system and other public and nonprofit agencies, work as mental health advocates, legislative aides, mediators, and teachers. Legal studies graduates also pursue careers in the business and corporate worlds. Over 20 percent of legal studies graduates go on to law schools, including some of the most prestigious schools in the country. Legal studies is useful preparation for graduate work in such fields as political science, psychology, history, anthropology, natural sciences, journalism, economics, and sociology.

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

The social and behavioral sciences focus on behavior and organization from cultural, social, and biological perspectives, examining people as both social and individual beings. Undergraduates in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences study culture, society, and individual and social interaction processes and learn methods by which knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences is created. Students are guided by the SBS Pathways approach, integrating their academic, experiential, and professional pathways. They anchor their knowledge in at least one discipline, but are encouraged to expand this knowledge through various broadening experiences inside and outside the classroom.

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