

The First Year

The School of Law offers a unique introductory program to help first year students master the technical aspects of the law as a basis for understanding its theory and substance. The program provides students with an essential foundation for exploring the political, commercial, and social dimensions of our legal institutions.

The first-year program is different from others in the country in several major respects. First, in addition to the traditional, required first-year courses in Contracts, Property, Torts, Civil Procedure, Criminal Procedure, and Constitutional Law, all entering students take a course entitled Elements: The Theory and Craft of American Law. Unlike most first-year courses, which concentrate on specific substantive fields of law, Elements focuses explicitly on legal institutions, the theories underlying them, the process of legal reasoning and the ways in which the law evolves. Students assume the roles of judge, counsel for plaintiff, and counsel for defendant to analyze how differing statements of facts and legal issues shape the development of a case and, ultimately, legal doctrine.

Second, the first-year curriculum includes an intensive program in legal research and writing. This program provides rigorous exercises in applied analysis and basic technical skills. Instructors work with students in small groups teaching them to perform effective research, state facts, formulate legal issues, and present reasoned arguments integrating fact and law. Students also receive intensive instruction in effective writing, a skill that is of critical importance in the legal profession.

Finally, two additional features of the first-year program are important to note: class size and electives. Unlike at many other schools, courses are taught in groups of fewer than 100 students, and one first-semester course in each section is taught in a class of fewer than 50 students. In the spring, an elective is available for first-year students.

All first-year students are required to take the courses listed below, plus an elective.

Civil Procedure I is an introduction to the process of civil litigation, emphasizing questions of jurisdiction, pleadings, discovery, remedies, and appellate review.

Contracts examines the purpose and scope of the legal protection accorded agreements. The course focuses on problems of contract formation and interpretation, remedies for breach of contract, the offer and acceptance of a contract, the effect of changed circumstances, and more complicated questions, such as contracts that are impossible to perform.

Criminal Procedure is an introduction to the criminal process with special emphasis on constitutional issues. It covers equal protection of the law, arrest, interrogation, search and seizure, and the right to counsel.

Elements, described in more detail above, is an intensive study of selected materials aimed at developing an understanding of the theory and practice of American law.

Legal Research and Writing I and II enable each first-year student to work closely with an instructor to develop skills in legal research, writing, and analysis, as well as brief-writing and oral argument.

Property focuses on basic principles governing private and public control over tangible and intangible resources, especially land. The course addresses concepts and policies concerning property and special concepts concerning real estate, such as estates in land, future interests, and the rule

against perpetuities. The course also studies real estate transactions, recording, methods of title assurance, easements, covenants, and land use controls.

Torts considers the issues involved in assessing whether the law should require a person to compensate another for harm intentionally or unintentionally inflicted. It analyzes the public policy positions implicit in the legal concepts that courts use in tort cases, as well as the ways in which social problems and the law of torts interact.

U.S. Constitutional Law I is a study of the American constitutional system, concentrating on the idea of judicial review, relationships among the three branches of government, and allocations of responsibility between federal and state governments.

Electives

In addition to these courses, second-semester students will choose an elective from a list of five courses for first-year students. These courses deal with regulatory issues, statutory law, other matters of public law and process, and conceptual perspectives not generally available in the traditional first-year program.

The following are representative of the elective course offerings:

Analysis of Evidence
Civil Procedure II
Environmental Law
European Community Law
Housing Discrimination
Labor & Employment Law
Legislation
Public Interest Law
Substantive Criminal Law

Typical First-Year Program Schedule

First Semester		Second Semester	
Course	Cr Hours	Course	Cr Hours
Contracts	(4)	Property	(4)
Torts	(4)	Criminal Proc	(3)
Elements	(3)	Con Law I	(4)
Civil Proc I	(3)	Elective	(3)
Legal Research	(2)	Legal Research	(2)
& Writing I	_____	& Writing II	_____