

Introduction to Law and the U.S. Legal System for High School-age Students

A William & Mary Law School Center for Legal and Court Technology Program

Presented primarily by Fredric I. Lederer, Chancellor Professor of Law and Director, Center for Legal and Court Technology, William & Mary Law School, in conjunction with the Center for Gifted Education of the William & Mary School of Education.

Introduction:

Law and the legal system are at the heart of all aspects of American life. Nearly every issue of importance ultimately becomes a legal question subject to potential hearing and resolution by our courts. Nonetheless, most civics curricula fail to provide students with the fundamental understanding of how the U.S. legal system actually works. This program is designed to remedy that. It will introduce students to how lawyers and judges interpret, create, and modify legal rules in our common-law system. It will address:

- The source of law in the Anglo-American legal systems
- The function of legislatures and courts
- The concept of legal precedent and how precedent works in theory and practice
- The interrelationship between statute (law made by our elected representatives) and case law (law based on judicial interpretations of the law).

Because law requires rigorous logical analysis, this program will also assist in furthering logical thinking and logical writing as well.

All students will receive a Center for Legal and Court Technology Certificate of Course Attendance. Those whose performance in class and on the final legal memorandum meet program expectations (at the Professor's sole discretion) will receive instead a Center for Legal and Court Technology Certificate of Successful Course Completion.

Methodology

This program consists primarily of discussion between the professor and the students using an entertaining and non-threatening version of Socratic dialog. It uses materials prepared by Professor Lederer for the introductory education of law students. Homework in the form of reading and analyzing legal cases is required.

Students will write a basic legal memorandum in order to apply their learning to solve a specific legal problem. They will be assisted by Professor Lederer and other faculty in conjunction with a number of talented William & Mary law students.

The class should consist of no more than 20 students.

Who Is Eligible to Attend?

This program is designed for bright, inquisitive, and disciplined students in the age range customarily found in the 9th through 12th grades. Students outside that age range may attend at the discretion of the professor.

Where and When will the Program Take Place?

The program will be taught primarily in the McGlothlin Courtroom at William & Mary Law School, Williamsburg. The McGlothlin Courtroom is the world's most technologically advanced trial and appellate courtroom. Aspects of its technology will be used during the course.

Program dates: July 7th - 10th, 2014

Content

Day One: Creating the Legal System

9:00-12:30

This critical introductory portion of the program will begin with the crash of a large starship on an unknown planet. There are no lawyers among the many surviving passengers, and no crew members live through the crash. The passengers are involuntary colonists who must devise their own society. Unfortunately, the population includes a number of problem colonists. Using aspects of the American law of homicide, Professor Lederer and the students develop a planetary legal system that parallels that used in the United States in order to cope with a series of ever more legally complicated killings on the Planet Bryan. By the end of this part of the program, students will understand what law is and how it is created, interpreted, and modified in the United States. The day concludes with students learning how to "brief" or analyze a court case in preparation for the remainder of the course.

Days Two and Three: The Legal System in Action – Simulated and Real

9:00-12:30

In Day One, our students learned how a common-law legal system similar to that used in the United States is supposed to work. In Days Two and Three, they will see how it actually works.

Students begin by analyzing realistic but fictional legal materials dealing with housing problems. The "client" has a problem: the client's new apartment has a cockroach infestation. The apartment manager has been very helpful, but the roaches are still in the apartment, and the insecticide has made the client ill. Can the client lawfully "break" the lease to move to someplace nicer? The class analyzes four short cases and a statute and attempts to reach a conclusion.

Students then will read and analyze a series of actual New York state court cases that were crucial in making fundamental changes in the law of whom an injured person can sue for a defect in a purchased product. Students will understand the complexity and humanity of how the process works in reality.

Students will end the day with the homework assignment of preparing a basic legal memorandum based on the cockroach problem.

Day Four – Memorandum

9:00-12:30

Students' memoranda will be critiqued by Program faculty. Experience indicates that the best way to fully understand a subject is to use the material learned.

Program Cost: \$330.00

A small number of scholarships may be available.

Registration:

To register, access <https://www.regonline.com/introtolaw>.

Website:

www.legaltechcenter.net.

Parental Observation:

Parents may sit in and observe so long as their presence does not interfere with class.

The Principal Instructor

Fred Lederer is Chancellor Professor of Law and Director, Center for Legal and Court Technology at William & Mary Law School. He helped devise and for about twenty-six years taught in the Law School's Legal Skills Program, which used the materials that make this program possible. He continues to teach a variation of this program to new William & Mary Public Policy students each year. Professor Lederer is the author of numerous books and articles and is the author or co-author of two law-related education television series produced by WHRO-TV which were seen extensively throughout the United States. He has been involved in law-related education for many years. More recently, he and the student staff of the Center for Legal and Court Technology have become known for "fractured legal fairy tale" trials conducted for younger students.

For further Information

Contact Professor Fred Lederer at (757)221-3792 or filede@wm.edu or contact CLCT at CLCT@wm.edu or (757)-221-2494.