

GEORGETOWN LAW

First Year Curriculum: Curriculum B

Every year, one section of entering Georgetown Law students participate in Curriculum B. Developed by a committee of Georgetown faculty members led by Professor Louis M. Seidman and charged by the Dean with comprehensively rethinking the first year of law school, Curriculum B offers an innovative and integrated approach to the study of law. The curriculum has been offered since 1991.

The curriculum is designed to respond to three important changes in legal practice and theory in the years since the standard curriculum was developed. Curriculum B emphasizes different material that is organized in a manner that promotes the coordination and integration of the various classes.

First, the emergence of the regulatory state and of pervasive regulation in most areas of the common law has transformed the nature of legal practice. Today, many legal problems are national or international in scope, rather than merely local. Often, Congress or a regulatory agency, rather than a court, determines the underlying rules.

Second, the traditional doctrinal boundaries between common law subjects like torts, contracts, and property have broken down. Common law rules in all three areas are increasingly seen to present common problems of incentives, distribution, and social control.

Third, other disciplines -- especially economics, philosophy, history, and political science -- have had an important influence on the manner in which modern lawyers think about and practice the law.

Curriculum B addresses each of these changes. Exposure to the important common-law principles comes in a context that emphasizes the connection between different areas of law and other disciplines. More emphasis is placed on the emergence of the regulatory state and on the impact government regulation has on legal theory and practice. Most significantly, the faculty make a concerted effort to integrate their various offerings and to teach students the ways in which seemingly unconnected legal problems pose common, recurring issues. The curriculum focuses on the "big picture"--not just the "what" of law, but also on the "why."

Students in Curriculum B take the same number of credits as Curriculum A students, and the courses are subject to the same faculty-recommended grading curve. One major difference between the curricula is that Curriculum B students have a fall seminar in legal theory, rather than an elective. During Georgetown's experience with Curriculum B, graduates from the program have been studied to determine how they have done in their upper-class courses and in the job market. We have determined that their upper-class grades are comparable with those of other students and that they have been equally successful in finding employment after law school.

A brief description of the course offerings in Curriculum B follows:

Bargain, Exchange, and Liability. 6 credits. This course explores the ways in which the law can regulate relationships between individuals. The first half of the course examines the legal doctrines applicable to relationships between individuals. The second half examines the greater range of instruments for regulation that are available when the parties know one another and thus are in position to define their relationship by contract. The course examines the ways in which these two areas intersect. It covers many of the issues discussed in traditional torts and contracts courses.

Democracy and Coercion. 4 credits. This course examines two conflicting postulates accepted by many Americans: a belief in democracy and a belief in individualism. Materials drawn from constitutional law, criminal procedure, political philosophy, and a variety of other sources are used to explore the relationship between these two postulates.

Government Processes. 4 credits. This course examines the various instruments the legal system has to deal with social problems: contract, tort, criminal law, and administrative regulation. The course uses the problem of environmental harm or work place injury as the vehicle for examining these instruments.

Legal Justice Seminar. 3 credits. This course, which meets in small sections of 15 students and a professor, examines different modes of twentieth- and twenty-first century American legal thought, including legal formalism, legal realism, law and economics, rights theory, feminist theory, and critical race theory. Other courses in the curriculum make use of these legal theories in examining contemporary legal problems.

Legal Practice: Writing and Analysis. 4 credits. This course introduces students to the analytic and rhetorical skills used by lawyers in practice. Students receive training in legal research, planning, legal writing, and oral argument.

Legal Process and Society. 5 credits. This course introduces students to the procedures formally followed in legal disputes, including civil lawsuits, criminal prosecution, and some administrative proceedings, with an emphasis on civil litigation. Much of the material discussed is drawn from the traditional civil procedure course. There is some introduction to the social scientific study of law and legal institutions.

Property in Time. 4 credits. This course takes up topics from the conventional property course. Students will learn about the doctrinal rules of property in light of the history of American legal thought and the expanding law and economics literature.