

**Syllabus and General Class Information for Colloquium**  
**University of Houston Law Center**  
**Spring 2023**  
**Professor Lonny Hoffman**

For the Spring 2023 semester, half of our class meetings will be in person; the other half will be virtual. Details as to specific dates are below. And students may elect to take this course Pass/Fail.

**Course Description**

The Colloquium is an attempt to create a cooperative scholarly enterprise in which students and faculty from other schools work collaboratively. Each week, the invited faculty speaker presents a work in progress to the class. Prior to class, students read the paper and come prepared to discuss and critique it. Students benefit from being exposed to scholarly analytic treatment and discussion of a subject in ways that few other, if any, law school classes provide.

We have a terrific lineup of speakers this semester (see list on last page). They range from established luminaries of the legal academy to a number of up and coming early-career stars. Although their topics will vary, all speakers will bring original and engaging perspectives.

We meet as a group on Mondays from 12:00-2:00 pm. Whenever students want to meet to discuss a presenter's paper, I will also hold individual or smaller group sessions with students on Fridays from 10:00-11:00 am.

**Course Requirements/Grading**

Each week, students will submit brief summaries (no more than two pages, double-spaced) of the presented papers. These short submissions should show me that (1) you read the paper carefully and (2) have begun to think of questions or issues that it raises that you might ask or bring up in class. They are due prior to the speaker's presentation and are worth, collectively, 50% of the final class grade.

In addition to the short summary papers, students will write one long paper (of at least nine pages, double-spaced) that's due at the end of the semester [exact date TBD]. The long paper is worth 40% of the final class grade. The longer paper must present an original thesis that touches on at least two of the presenters' papers. The long paper offers an opportunity that does not come along frequently enough in law school. More commonly in law school, we ask students to regurgitate something back to us: *Give us the relevant facts; give us the holding; summarize the relevant authorities.* With the long paper, I am inviting you to think creatively; to come up with original ideas and points and then present those thoughts in a short, persuasive work. Think of these papers like a great book review. A great book review is worth reading because you learn something from reading it, even if you don't go on to read the book.

Here are some good rules of thumb to keep in mind as you write these papers.

1. I want you to use two or more of the presenters' papers in building your own thesis but try not to spend too long merely summarizing the arguments that others have made. That is the kind of traditional regurgitation work that you are usually asked to do. I would rather see you do more original analysis; summarizing someone else's work is just not nearly as original or interesting.
2. Have your paper be about some original idea that you come up with after having read and thought about the presenters' work. It can be about their subjects, but it could also be about something else that their papers sparked, such as their methodological approach or what their framing choices in terms of their own arguments' construction say about the field, broadly.
3. Be careful not to take on too much with your thesis. Don't try to talk about some idea that is so big that you cannot adequately address it. If you do that, you run the risk of not being able to delve deeply into what you really want to say; the net result is a less persuasive work.
4. If you are going to ask critical questions of the presenters' work, you might think about framing them along one of these lines (though you should not try to address many or all of these in the same paper):
  - Are there flaws in the argument or methodology that warrant discussion?
  - Are there unjustified or incompletely defended assumptions in the argument?
  - Would changing any of the author's assumptions change the prescriptive arguments advanced?
  - Are there issues that the author does not address, or perspectives the authors did not consider, that should have been taken into account?
5. Finally, be sure to turn in a well-proofed copy: no typos, misspellings, etc. These are avoidable mistakes.

The website, [www.jotwell.com](http://www.jotwell.com), is another good source to consult as examples of the kind of what I am looking for. Finally, a last way to get a sense of what I'm looking for in the long paper is to read some prior student submissions. They are available through a link on my home page (<http://www.law.uh.edu/faculty/main.asp?PID=179>). The obvious limitation here is that you are not reading the underlying work on which the student paper is based. That important caveat notwithstanding, seeing prior student work is likely to be very helpful to give you a sense about my expectations.

I will provide a more detailed grading matrix for how these papers will be evaluated but here are the broad categories now that will be taken into account: (1) originality of thesis/argument; (2) persuasiveness and writing quality; (3) organization/flow of argument; and (4) overall quality of work submitted.

### **Class Participation/Discussion (Your Questions/Comments)**

This is one of my favorite things about the class; the dynamic is very positive and quite unlike what happens in most law school classrooms. Very often in law school, it seems to me, we say something to this effect: *We really want you to think and act and talk like a lawyer, but to do so you must think this specific way, and talk that exact way.* I'm sure there are benefits to this kind of indoctrination training, but there are also costs. In teaching this class, I try to emphasize the value of independent thinking, however quirky and different and colorful it may be.

There is not any exact prescription for what kind of questions you should ask (or comments you should offer). Obviously, be respectful, but that does not mean you can't disagree with or challenge the speaker. In terms of my expectations, I like to see people engaged in the discussion. That's the main thing; and it should go without saying (but I'll say it anyway) that quality is what matters, not quantity. Try not to ask a bunch of anodyne questions (*What was your argument in Part I? I really can't recall*). It is far better to ask one very good question that shows you have thought about the work and have something to say or ask that furthers the discussion along.

Class participation is worth the remaining 10% of your final class grade.

### **Attendance and Participation.**

For Spring 2023, we currently have nine Monday speakers. You should, of course, try to attend for all of these talks, but in any event you are expected to attend at least eight of them. I may lower a final grade or take other appropriate disciplinary action (up to entering a failing grade) if it is determined that a student is absent from more than two of the Monday talks. I count a student as absent if they are not in class for at least 75% of the scheduled class session.

My expectation as to virtual class attendance is that all students join with video. If you know in advance that there's some reasonable reason why you do not want (or cannot) join with video, I expect you'll notify me in advance. Of course, there may be technical glitches from time to time; I understand that. But if it does, I do expect that you'll do your best to correct the problem before our next class. If you need help with any technical issues, let me know or reach out to our IT team by emailing them at [lawcomputerhelp@central.uh.edu](mailto:lawcomputerhelp@central.uh.edu) or calling (713) 743-2260.

### **Recording of Class.**

All presentations that are virtual will be recorded through Zoom. These recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Center for Students with DisABILITIES.

## **Academic Support**

There are lots of academic support options at UHLC. Three of the best, I think, are:

1. The Legal Writing Center (which can help on writing and studying generally). Go to: <http://www.law.uh.edu/lrw/legal-writing.asp>.
2. Talking with your professors and the teaching assistants assigned to your classes. That's what we are here for.
3. Joining a student organization. Can be both enriching for law school and a good source of academic support. For a list, go to <http://www.law.uh.edu/organizations/homepage.asp>. If you have trouble linking to a group, Kristan Withers, the Law Center's liaison for the student organizations, may be able to help. Her email is [kdwither@central.uh.edu](mailto:kdwither@central.uh.edu).

## **Other Support**

At the Law Center, in the broader university, and through the State Bar, there are a number of different sources of support if you need it.

1. Of course, you are always welcome to come see me. But, if you'd rather talk to someone else, Dean Monica Mensah in Student Services is another resource. She's been helping students for many years. Her office is located in the Office of Student Services, across from the student commons. Her email is [memensah@uh.edu](mailto:memensah@uh.edu); her phone is (713) 743-6247.
2. The university's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to the demands of a professional program, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling (713) 743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. Their webpage can be accessed here: [http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html).
3. Finally, the State Bar has an amazing group called Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (web address is <https://www.tlaphelps.org/>). TLAP "provides confidential help for lawyers, law students and judges who have problems with substance abuse and/or mental health issues." Students can call (24 hours a day/7 days a week) to get help with mental health and substance abuse issues. The number is (800) 343-8527.

### **Chosen Names and Preferred Pronouns**

In my classroom, you certainly have the right to be addressed by your preferred name and pronoun, and that includes any non-binary pronouns. Rosters do not list gender or pronouns so if you have specific preferences, please just let me know.

### **Accessibility and Accommodations.**

UHLC is committed to ensuring that all students enjoy equal access and full participation. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on a disability (including any chronic or temporary medical or mental health condition), please feel free to reach out to me so that we may discuss options. If you require any support services, you may contact Ms. Samantha Ary, Academic Records Coordinator. Ms. Ary is located in room 44A TU-II in the Office of Student Services suite, and she can be reached at [sary@central.uh.edu](mailto:sary@central.uh.edu) or (713) 743-7466. Requests for accommodation that involve graded assignments must be directed to Ms. Ary and should be made as soon as possible to allow adequate time to document and to process the request. If you observe religious or cultural holidays that will coincide with synchronous class sessions or conferences, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we may make arrangements.

### **Diversity and Inclusion.**

This is an inclusive learning space; all are welcome. If you feel like your class performance is impacted in any way by your experiences inside or outside of class, please reach out to me. I want to be a resource for you. If you feel more comfortable speaking with someone besides me, Monica Mensah, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Student Services, is an excellent resource (contact info above). You can also bring any issues negatively impacting UHLC's openness to diversity and inclusion to the Law Center's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. You can contact the committee directly at [UHLCD&I@uh.edu](mailto:UHLCD&I@uh.edu).

### **Anti-Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Policies.**

UHLC and the University of Houston are committed to maintaining and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from discrimination and sexual misconduct. If you have experienced an incident of discrimination or sexual misconduct, a confidential reporting process is available to you. For more information, please refer to the University System's Anti-Discrimination Policy, available at [https://uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/\\_docs/sam/01/1d7.pdf](https://uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/_docs/sam/01/1d7.pdf), and Sexual Misconduct Policy, available at [https://uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/\\_docs/sam/01/1d8.pdf](https://uhsystem.edu/compliance-ethics/_docs/sam/01/1d8.pdf)

Please be aware that under the sexual misconduct policy, faculty and other University employees are required to report to the University any information received regarding sexual misconduct as defined in the policy. Due to this reporting requirement, faculty members and other employees are not a confidential resource. The reporting obligations under the sexual misconduct policy extends to alleged conduct by University employees and students.

### **Contact Information and Office Hours**

My office is in the faculty suites on the third floor of the new law building. Everyone is welcome to come by during my office hours (Mondays from 1:30-2:30 pm) or, if you prefer, you can always call or email in advance to schedule an appointment at another convenient time. My office phone is (713) 743-5206; my email is [lhoffman@uh.edu](mailto:lhoffman@uh.edu). My assistant is Jessica Rodriguez. Her phone is (713) 743-6407; her email is [jestrad2@central.uh.edu](mailto:jestrad2@central.uh.edu).

### **Spring 2023 Schedule of Speakers:**

January 30	Aman Gebru (UH) [in person]
February 6	Sheldon Evans (St Johns) [virtual]
February 13	Sarah Haan (Washington & Lee) [virtual]
February 20	Darrell Miller (Duke) [in person]
February 27	Franita Tolson (USC) [virtual]
March 6	Spencer Weber Waller (Loyola-Chicago) [in person]
March 20	Mila Sohoni (San Diego) [in person]
March 27	Matt Lawrence (Emory) [in person]
April 3	Dalie Jimenez (UCI) [virtual]
April 10	<del>Radhika Rao (Hastings) [virtual]</del>