

**HOMELESS RIGHTS ADVOCACY SEMINAR**  
**COURSE SYLLABUS**

**Course Overview:**

How did the modern-day homelessness epidemic develop and grow in California and the United States, and what can attorneys do to help address the crises? The legal challenges that people currently experiencing homelessness face (and those who are at imminent risk of homelessness), while rooted in common areas of substantive law, are unique to them.

This two-unit Seminar explores the contours, causes, and solutions to address homelessness, with a focus on California. The Seminar is designed to examine the key role legal advocacy strategies may play in preventing and ending homelessness.

Course topics and exercises will give students a practical understanding of the role the law has played in creating and shaping the homelessness crises plaguing so many cities across the United States, as well as an examination of the advancing development of laws affecting people who are either currently experiencing homelessness or are at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

The course will examine the current state of homelessness and the systems that have been developed to address it. We will begin by exploring the foundational principles of a person-centered homeless services delivery system, and together we will develop strategies for implementing these principles in a legal practice centered on providing counsel to people who are currently experiencing homelessness.

We will also consider the unique legal challenges people currently experiencing homelessness face in obtaining housing—which is the only thing that ends homelessness. And because homeless prevention is paramount in a system where more people become homeless each year than the homeless services system can house, students in the course will also examine ways to keep people at imminent risk of homelessness from losing their housing.

Finally, to bring all the course concepts together, this semester we will pay attention to the intersectionalities of race and poverty and the role each plays in creating homelessness.

The course may fulfill the Upper Level Writing Requirement (“ULWR”).

**Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the core substantive constitutional, civil, and criminal laws regarding homelessness, particularly as such knowledge relates to providing legal counsel to members of such communities.
2. Describe, understand, and critically assess major legislation and court decisions that address homelessness at the national and local levels.
3. Describe and compare legal strategies for addressing homelessness, including litigation, policy advocacy, and community engagement.
4. Understand legal issues involved in current policy debates on homelessness (such as the criminalization of homelessness) and be able to craft and support arguments to address them.

5. Critically evaluate empirical claims and proposed legislative remedies regarding homelessness in California.

### **Grading:**

There is no final examination in this course. The grade for the course will be based primarily on a Final Paper (as well as a Draft of the Final Paper and a short presentation about the chosen topic and thesis), and overall class attendance and participation in class discussions.

Punctual class attendance and participation are required. Twenty percent (20%) of your final grade will be based on in-class participation, attendance, and timely assignment completion. Class attendance is mandatory, and attendance will be taken at each class session. If you miss more than three class meetings, you may receive a failing grade for the course.

Participation in class discussions, along with good-faith attempts to answer questions I may pose during class, are valuable components of legal education, and I strongly encourage you to volunteer your thoughts and perspectives. This course is most productive if you have thought about the material in advance and are willing to discuss it. Quality is valued over quantity for volunteer participation, and all views are welcome.

At times, this course may touch on particularly sensitive, triggering, emotionally, and/or intellectually heavy topics. I will do my best to create a space where we can hold these discussions with mutual respect, sensitivity, empathy, and decorum. I ask that all students help ensure those objectives are met.

To the extent possible, I hope to conduct this course as a discussion-style seminar, though I will use lecture and random questioning when appropriate. Participation in class discussions, along with good-faith attempts to answer questions I may pose during class, are valuable components of legal education, and I strongly encourage you to volunteer your thoughts and perspectives. I may call randomly on anyone in any class. I will strive to conduct the class discussion in as relaxed a manner as possible. The purpose is not to “test” you or record your performance in any specific sense, nor to make you feel nervous or “on stage,” but simply to stimulate your own thinking and that of your fellow classmates, and to generally make the class more interesting. I am not concerned with whether you have the “correct” answer to any given question (often there is no such thing), although if you are off-track in understanding the doctrine, I will try to steer you back on track. I mainly want to know that you’ve done the readings and are making a good-faith effort to participate and respond. If you feel you don’t do very well in response to specific questions, I encourage you to pose questions of your own and volunteer your own thoughts.

Neatness, grammar, and formatting count for all written assignments in this course. I do not care what citation style you use; but pick one and consistently stick to it. You will lose points on every written assignment in this course for typographical, spelling, grammatical, and other mechanical errors, and for unexplained variations in citation formatting.

For all assignments, please submit them via TWEN. All the assignments and the due dates for each are provided in the schedule below; you now know all the deadlines. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class session. As a professional, you are responsible for submitting all

assignments on time. The penalty for late work is a 10% reduction, per 24-hour period (or part thereof), of the total points available on each assignment.

The Grade for the course will be based on the following assignments, and weighted as indicated:

Attendance and Participation	20%
Topic/Thesis Presentation	10%
Draft of Final Paper <sup>1</sup>	10%
Final Paper Presentation	20%
Final Paper	40%

### **Course Elements:**

The course material will be presented through two primary sources—reading assignments and class discussions. We will also have a few Guest Speaker presentations, followed by Q&A sessions with the Guest Speakers.

#### ***Reading Assignments***

Because preparation for and participation in class discussions is critical for an effective classroom experience, all reading assignments must be completed timely. You should read the specific reading assignments listed for each class session prior to that class.

#### ***Class Discussions of Reading Assignments***

We will use the class sessions to discuss the reading assignments. The purpose of these discussions is to gain a deeper understanding of the readings, to provoke your thinking about the concepts covered in the readings, and to evaluate questions about the readings.

#### ***Guest Speaker Presentations***

During a few class sessions, students will have the opportunity to meet and hear from Guest Speakers. I will provide information about each Guest Speaker in advance of the Guest Speaker's visit to the class. I expect you to be familiar with the Guest Speakers when they visit, and for you to give the Guest Speakers the respect of your attention during their visits. Moreover, you are encouraged to prepare questions for the Guest Speakers.

### **Final Paper:**

A large portion of the grade for this course is based on a Final Paper, including a Draft of the paper, which will meet the Law School's writing requirement. Please note that I will adhere strictly to the guidelines the Law School has published for such assignments.

Students may choose to write about any homelessness-related issue and may approach the Final Paper from several different perspectives. More information about the Final Paper, including formatting instructions, will be distributed and discussed early in the semester.

The research paper must be the individual work of the student. You may not use generative artificial intelligence (i.e., ChatGPT, etc.) to write your paper. Doing so will result in a (0) for the course.

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<sup>1</sup> The Draft of your Final Paper should reflect the best work you can achieve without assistance from me and must be at least one-third of your overall paper length.

You will work on the paper throughout the semester. In a WSCL ULWR course, you must earn a 2.0 or higher to obtain ULWR credit.

**Topic/Thesis Presentation:**

During the seventh class session, each student will make a short presentation to the class explaining the student's topic selection and preliminary thesis. This presentation comprises 10% of the grade for this course.

At the end of the semester, each student will make an 8-10 minute presentation to the class about their Final Paper. The goal is to educate all of us to as many different topics and research as possible. This presentation comprises 20% of the grade for this course.

**Course Materials:**

Selected Supplemental Course Materials will be available on TWEN for several class sessions.

**Computer Use:**

You may use a laptop to take notes in class, but please do not access the Internet or use email during class. Such activity is extremely distracting to those around you. I reserve the right to ask you to leave class for abuse of this policy.

**Office Hours:**

You may schedule Office Hours appointments by contacting me via email.

**Class Attendance:**

You are expected to attend class. Please be advised that if you miss a class session, you should consult with another student to review their notes from the class, though someone else's notes certainly cannot substitute for the in-class experience that occurs from shared discussion of the materials.

**Class Preparation:**

You should anticipate that, on average, preparing for class (including researching for and writing your paper) will take you a minimum of 4 hours each week.

**Reasonable Accommodations:**

Western State College of Law provides accommodations to qualified students with disabilities. The Disabilities Services Office assists qualified students with disabilities in acquiring reasonable and appropriate accommodations and in supporting equal access to services, programs, and activities at Western State College of Law.

To seek reasonable accommodations, a student must contact Senior Assistant Dean Donna Espinoza, Student Services Director and Disabilities Services Coordinator: [despinoza@wsulaw.edu](mailto:despinoza@wsulaw.edu). When seeking accommodations, a student should notify Dean Espinoza of her or his specific limitations and, if known, her or his specific requested accommodations. Students who seek accommodations will be asked to supply medical documentation of the need for accommodation. Classroom accommodations are not retroactive, but are effective only upon the student sharing approved accommodations with the instructor or professor. Therefore,

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students are encouraged to request accommodations as early as feasible with Dean Espinoza to allow for time to gather necessary documentation.

If you have a concern or complaint in this regard, please notify Senior Asst. Dean Espinoza; or please notify Dean Marisa Cianciarulo at [mcianciarulo@wsulaw.edu](mailto:mcianciarulo@wsulaw.edu) or 714.459.1168. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the College of Law's "Policy Against Discrimination and Harassment."

**This schedule is a draft and may change.**

**Additional reading assignments may be added for each week of class.**

<b>Class No. &amp; Date</b>	<b>Class Coverage</b>	<b>Assignment Due/ Readings</b>
1: 8/13/25	<i>Introductions:</i> Introduction to the Course; Professor and Student Introductions  <i>An Overview of the Current Homeless Crises</i>  <i>The Brain Game</i>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> Review the 2023 LAHSA Homeless Count Presentation  Research and find 1 general article about homelessness in your hometown or state
2: 8/20/25	<i>An Overview of the Foundational Principles Underlying the Current Homeless Response System</i>  <i>Applying the Foundational Principles to Legal Advocacy in the Homeless Response System</i>  <b>ULWR: Picking A Topic</b>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> 1. Housing First Fact Sheet 2. Principles of Harm Reduction 3. NAEH Housing First Fact Sheet 4. Trauma Informed Care 5. Low Barrier 6. Lawyers As Counselors
3: 8/27/25	<i>Discussion re: Integrated Legal Advocacy Strategies: Litigation</i>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> Public Interest Advocacy Strategies, pp. 201-232
4: 9/3/25	<i>Discussion re: Integrated Legal Advocacy Strategies: Policy Advocacy, Community Engagement, and Media Advocacy</i>  <b>ULWR: Writing A Thesis Statement</b>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> Public Interest Advocacy Strategies, pp. 232-272

5: 9/10/25	<p><i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 1a): Anti-Homeless Ordinances That Ban Essential Life Activities (Sleeping, Lying, Standing, Sitting, Sleeping in Car)</i></p> <p><b>ULWR: Components of the Paper and Outlining</b></p>	<p><u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 1a)</p>
6: 9/17/25	<p><i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 1b): Anti-Homeless Ordinances That Ban Essential Life Activities (Sleeping, Lying, Standing, Sitting, Sleeping in Car)</i></p>	<p><u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 1b)</p>
7: 9/24/25	<p><i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 1c): Anti-Homeless Ordinances That Ban Essential Life Activities (Sleeping, Lying, Standing, Sitting, Sleeping in Car)</i></p> <p><b><u>Class Presentations re: Proposed Topic and Thesis Statement</u></b></p>	<p><u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 1c)</p>
8: 10/1/25	<p><i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 2a): Encampment Sweeps, Destruction of Personal Belongings, Warrantless Searches, Warrantless Property Seizure</i></p> <p><b>ULWR: Roadmaps and Citations</b></p>	<p><u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 2a)</p>

9: 10/8/25	<i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 2b): Encampment Sweeps, Destruction of Personal Belongings, Warrantless Searches, Warrantless Property Seizure</i>  <b>ULWR: The Importance of Proofreading and Editing</b>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 2b)
10: 10/15/25	<i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 3a): Panhandling, Loitering, Food Sharing</i>  <b><u>First Drafts Due</u></b>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 3a)
11: 10/29/25	<i>The Criminalization of Homelessness (Part 3b): Panhandling, Loitering, Food Sharing</i>	<u>Reading Assignment:</u> Criminalization of Homelessness Case Packet (Part 3b)
12: 11/5/25	<i>Representing the Unhoused</i>  <i>Guest Speaker Panel: TBD</i>	<u>No Reading Assignment This Week</u>
13: 11/12/25	<i>Student Presentations</i>	<u>No Reading Assignment This Week</u>
14: 11/19/25	<i>Student Presentations</i>	<u>No Reading Assignment This Week</u>
	<i>Final Paper Due on December 18</i>	