

CRIMINAL TRIAL PRACTICE

Fall 2026

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(714) 501-3508 (Cell Phone)

COURSE MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION:

Thursdays: 6:30 p.m. to 9:20 p.m.

Location: Mock Trial Courtroom

OFFICE HOURS:

By appointment in-person

~or~ By Phone

~or~ Zoom

Professor Aronson can be reached at:

saronson@wsulaw.edu

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will teach you the components of a criminal trial including, but not limited to, pretrial motions, jury selection (including exercising peremptory challenges and challenges for cause), opening statement, direct and cross-examination of witnesses (including experts), marking, entering into evidence, and publishing exhibits, jury instructions, and closing argument. Each student will prepare a Trial Notebook to submit at the end of the semester. Students will conduct a full criminal jury trial on the last two class dates. There will be no final written exam.

WESTERN STATE COLLEGE OF LAW ~ GENERAL PROGRAMMATIC LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Western State College of Law's curriculum is designed so that every student achieves a level of competency prior to graduation in each of the eight Programmatic Learning Outcomes listed below:

(1) Doctrinal Knowledge

Students will demonstrate knowledge of substantive and procedural law in the core curriculum subjects, including Contracts, Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, Torts, Real Property, Business Association, Evidence, Civil Procedures, Constitutional Law, Estates, Community Property, Remedies, and Professional Responsibility.

(2) Practice Skills

Students will demonstrate the development of other law practice skills. Each student's chosen outcomes within this category will be varied based on the student's particular interests, coursework, and work experiences. They may include, but are not limited to, the following

topics: oral presentation and advocacy; interviewing; counseling; client service and business development; negotiations, mediation, arbitration, or other alternate dispute resolution methods; advanced legal research and writing (excluding purely academic papers and the first four units earned in introductory first-year legal research and writing class); applied legal writing such as drafting contracts, pleadings, other legal instruments; law practice management or the use of technology in law practice; cultural competency; collaboration or project management; financial analysis, such as accounting, budgeting project management, and valuation; cost benefit analysis in administrative agencies; use of technology, data analyses, or predictive coding; business strategy and behavior; pre-trial preparation, fact investigation, such as discovery, e-discovery, motion practice, assessing evidence, or utilizing experts; trial practice; professional civility and applied ethics; a law clinic that includes a classroom component; or a legal externship that includes a classroom component.

(3) Legal Analysis

Students will demonstrate the ability to identify the factual and legal issues implicated by a fact pattern and to appropriately use cases (including identifying the salient features of an appropriate precedent case, identifying legally significant similarities or differences between the precedent case and a fact pattern and explaining why those are legally significant) and rules (including the ability to connect legally significant facts in a fact pattern to the rule) to predict how a court would decide the issue. Students will also demonstrate the ability to identify and evaluate the public policies of a precedent case or rule and be able to evaluate how public policy can impact the application of a rule to the legal issue.

(4) Legal Research

Students will demonstrate the ability to locate relevant legal authority using a variety of book and electronic resources, and to properly cite to such legal authority.

(5) Communication

Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate both orally and in writing in a manner appropriate to a particular task to effectively convey the author or speaker's ideas. This includes audience sensitivity in written and oral communication (the ability to adopt a tone, style and level of detail appropriate to the needs, knowledge and expertise of the audience); and written communication basic proficiency (the ability to use the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, appropriate to the task and sufficient to convey effectively the author's ideas).

(6) Advocacy of Legal Argument

Students will demonstrate the ability, in both oral and written formats, to evaluate the legal, economic, and social strengths and weaknesses of a case and use case and statutory authority as well as public policy to persuade others. Making policy-based arguments includes the ability to identify and evaluate the public policies of a precedent case or rule and their implications, and be able to assert such appropriate arguments to support a particular application or distinction of a precedent case to a legal controversy or a particular resolution of the application of a rule to the legal controversy.

(7) Client Sensitivity and Cultural Competency

Students will demonstrate an awareness of clients' needs and goals, including a sensitivity to

clients' background and circumstances (including, but not limited to, socio-economic, gender, race, ethnicity, educational, disability and/or religious background(s)), the ability to make decisions that reflect an appropriate focus on those needs and goals, and awareness that cultural issues may affect the relevance of facts and application of the law.

(8) Legal Ethics

Students will demonstrate the ability to identify ethical issues in law practice contexts and make appropriate decisions to resolve such issues.

COURSE LEARNING GOALS:

Upon successful completion of the course, you should expect to achieve a level of competency in each of the following areas:

- (1) Knowledge and practical application of Criminal Trial Practice (Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, and Evidence will not be taught in this course but will be used as foundations to Trial Practice.)
- (2) Oral presentation and advocacy, pre-trial preparation, fact investigation, assessing evidence, utilizing experts, trial practice, professional civility, and applied ethics.
- (3) The ability to identify the factual and legal issues implicated by a fact pattern for a criminal trial.
- (4) The ability to locate and cite relevant legal authorities during a criminal trial.
- (5) The ability to effectively communicate both orally and in writing, to a judge and jury during a criminal trial, including the ability to apply the facts at trial to the law in order to present credible and admissible evidence to present your case in court; and to adopt a tone, style, and level of detail appropriate for the particular case and audience (judge or jury).
- (6) The ability to understand and develop a sensitivity to the backgrounds and circumstances of your audience (client, judge, jury) including, but not limited to, socio-economic, gender, race, ethnicity, educational, disability and/or religious backgrounds, and the ability to tailor communications to clients, judges, and jurors that reflect an appropriate focus on those backgrounds and circumstances.
- (7) The ability to identify ethical issues in criminal matters and make appropriate decisions to resolve those issues.

Reading Materials (Optional): *Trial Techniques and Trials*, 12th Ed. by Thomas A. Mauet and Stephen D. Easton, published by Aspen Publishing ~or~

Materials in Trial Advocacy, 10th Ed. by Thomas A. Mauet, Judge Warren Wolfson, and Stephen D. Easton, and published by Aspen Publishing.

***** NOTE: These books are expensive. I will provide most everything you need to read by actual written materials in handouts. So, please feel free to purchase or not purchase the books. This class will focus trial preparation.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Attendance and Class Participation:** Students are expected to attend all class sessions throughout the semester, prepared to participate in class trial sessions. Attendance is mandatory. Students who miss more than four class sessions are subject to administrative dismissal from the course per the WSCL Attendance Policy (reprinted in the Student Handbook). Please note that just because WSU does not discipline students until more than four (4) classes are missed, does not mean that you should miss *any* classes. Missing classes may be reflected in a student's final grade as this is almost entirely a class participation course, rather than simply lecture and note-taking. Trial Practice is a practical course and not a traditional lecture course. For this reason, complete attendance is encouraged. Remember, success in trial practice, as in actual trials, depends almost entirely upon "practice". Class participation and observing other students participate is critical to your success in this class.
2. **Preparation for Class: Students should expect to spend at least six hours per week on preparation for class exercises.**
3. **Final Exam:** There will be no written final exam. However, students will prepare a Trial Notebook during the semester that will be reviewed by the professor. The Trial Notebook will represent up to 10% of each student's final course grade. The final course grade will be made up of your participation in class discussions, participation in class exercises, the trial notebook, and your performance during the final mock criminal trial.

COURSE GRADE:

Your final grade will be made up of the following:

1. Your **participation** in class discussions. In each class, you should expect to be called upon to lead the discussion on one or more of the topics for the class each week, and to answer questions posed by the professor and other students. (10%)
2. Your **participation** in class exercises. In each class, you should expect to participate in class exercises in the role of an attorney, a witness, or a juror. Your grade will be dependent on the quality of your preparation and participation for each role in the class exercises. In each of these roles, you will be expected to openly communicate with your classmates and frequently participate in trial activities including, but not limited to, pretrial motions, jury selection, opening statements, direct examination, cross examination, and closing arguments. (10%)
3. Your **overall performance** during the final mock criminal trial. (70%)
4. Your **Trial Notebook**. (10%)
5. No individualized "extra-credit" work will be permitted.

DISABILITY SERVICES STATEMENT:

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, whose office is in Room 276. Dean Espinoza's phone number and email address are: (714) 459-1117; 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, 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 Dean Espinoza; or please notify Dean Halim Dhanidina at hdhanidina@wsulaw.edu or (714) 459-1168. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the College of Law's "Policy against Discrimination and Harassment."

COURSE SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS:

CLASS/DATE	TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT ***Professor will provide all reading material in handouts at first class session.
1. August 20, 2026	Jury Trial Overview The Courtroom Reading "Discovery" • Police Reports • Photos • Documentary Evid Developing your Theme Closing Argument Opening Statement Trial Notebooks Ethical Duties	Class Discussion / Handouts
2. August 27, 2026	Discussion of Trial Case for Final • Pretrial Motions • Jury Selection & CCP 237.1 • Evidence • Working with your Client	Read Trial Handout before Class (provided at 1st class)

3. September 3, 2026	Opening Statement ***All Students will give an Opening statement Discussion & Critique	READ HANDOUT
4. September 10, 2026	Trial Objections • Objections in General • Pretrial Objections • Objections to Testimony • 5th Amendment Rights • 6th Amendment Right to Counsel	Read Handout given to Students at 1st Class (“Objections”)
5. September 17, 2026	Courtroom Observation Week (No Class)	Use Class Trial Handout
6. September 24, 2026	Direct Examination of Witnesses • Lay Witness • Law Enforcement Witness • Expert Witness • Preparing Witnesses	Use Trial Case
7. October 1, 2026	Owning the Courtroom Opening Statement “The Story” Impeachment Objections Closing Argument The Art of Persuasion Ethics	Lecture Only Attorney, Brian Ducker
8. October 8, 2026	Cross-Examination, Impeachment, & Rehabilitation • The Art of Impeachment • Memories Refreshed • Prior Inconsistent Statements • Review Objections	Use Trial Case
9. October 15, 2026	Direct & Cross-Examination Review Exhibits and Visual Aids	

10. October 24, 2026	Jury Instructions Trial Notebook Review Closing Argument	Use Trial Case
11. October 29, 2026	Closing Argument	Use Trial Case
12. November 5, 2026	Final Trial Preparation and Review Student Questions	Use Trial Case
13. November 12, 2026	Final Trial	Use Trial Case
14. November 19, 2026	Final Trial	Use Trial Case