LL4290V Legal Research: Method & Design

Course Instructor: Professor Alec Stone Sweet

Description:

The seminar is designed to prepare students to undertake original, primary research in law.

Major topics and questions to be covered include:
- how to write a good literature review and prospectus;
- why one must have a method, or, how are “methods” and “data collection” related?;
- what is research design?;
- how to avoid, or manage, the problem of “selection bias.”

A major component of the seminar, students will assess a variety of published papers, as well as research projects presented by the faculty.

Objectives:

The seminar will introduce basic issues of qualitative research design to advanced undergraduates and graduate students. It provides an overview of the essential features of any good research project, as well as a check-list of common problems to try to avoid. Students will become familiar with basic approaches to qualitative and comparative methods, which they will apply experientially in two ways. First, they will read and critique research papers written by faculty members, who will be invited to present works-in-progress to the group. Second, they will develop their own research project, in the form of a literature review and prospectus. This course will be especially beneficial to students who plan to undertake the University Research Opportunities Programme/Directed Research (DR).

Syllabus:

1. Developing a research project.

Covering the topics of “what makes a topic interesting?,” how to write a good literature review, and how to take the first steps in designing a project.

2. What is “research design” and why does it matter?

- Surveying the basics of designing research, focusing on the relationship between theory, data collection, and analysis in legal research.

3. Case selection.

- Considering the question of how to select a case, or construct a comparative case study, as well as different justifications for case selection, as a function of research design.

4. Evaluating research.
- Applying criteria for assessing research to published research and works-in-progress presented by faculty.

**Illustrative Reading List:**

University of Wisconsin, Madison, “The Literature Review.”

University of Toronto, ”The Literature Review: A Few Tips on Conducting It.”

NYU, “What is Research Design”?  

A. Stone Sweet, “Handout: Research Design”  

A. Stone Sweet, “Handout: Case Selection and Selection Bias”  

A. Stone Sweet: “Packet: How to Write a Good Research Proposal and Prospectus.”


**Mode of Assessment:**

Class Participation – 30%;  
Research Project (6,000 word report) – 70%