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Title
Sample Student Project Assignments for Public Health Law Seminar

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SAMPLE STUDENT PROJECT ASSIGNMENTS FOR

PUBLIC HEALTH LAW SEMINAR

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DESIGNED FOR USE WITH
PUBLIC HEALTH LAW: POWER, DUTY, RESTRAINT (3D ED.)

Two-credit vs. Three-credit Option

Students may enroll in this course for either two or three credits. The reading assignments for class discussions will be identical for the two groups. The student project requirements will differ between the two groups, as described below. Students may satisfy the Upper Level Writing Requirement through the 3-credit option, but not the 2-credit option.

Grading, Evaluation and Project Requirements – Three-credit Option

For three-credit students, evaluation will be based on the quality of class participation (30%) as well as a project consisting of a 1-page memo, a 3-5 page memo, an in-class presentation, and a final paper of 30 double-spaced pages (70%). Students enrolled for three-credits have the option of using the final project to satisfy their upper level writing requirement. Students opting to do so are responsible for filing the appropriate paperwork with the registrar's office upon completion of the project.

Students enrolled in the course for 3 credits (including those seeking to fulfill the ULWR) will work on individual, intensive research projects throughout the semester. Each project will require (1) submission of a very brief (one short paragraph) proposal; (2) submission of a 3-page memo identifying the public health problem you have chosen to address and developing a model of potential sites for intervention; (3) an in-class presentation; and (4) a paper of 30 double-spaced pages that includes the material presented in class and integrates feedback received from your classmates during the presentation.

The key substance of the completed project will be your recommendation of a proposed health promotion or protection strategy (or a combination of strategies if you adequately justify the importance of combining approaches in a simultaneous effort) that is facilitated or supported using legal tools. Although you are not required to fully engage in role-playing for these projects, it might be helpful to think of yourself as an attorney/advocate who has been engaged (for example, by a governmental or nongovernmental organization representing the interests of a particular constituency) to recommend a course of action to address a particular public health problem within a particular population. You need not have every detail worked out, but you must propose and justify a basic plan of attack using identified law and policy tools at identified points of intervention and thoroughly addressing the legal issues raised by your proposal,

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especially with regard to the authority of the governmental actors you are asking to take action and any restraints on that authority (e.g., in light of individual rights, federalism, separation of powers concerns).

Each student will research a particular population affected by particular public health problem. Specificity is key here. Think in terms of identifying a very specific "who", "what," and "where." For example, rather than addressing "natural disasters," a better project would focus on "better protecting the low-income population on the South Carolina coast from the public health impacts of hurricanes." Rather than addressing "asthma," a better project would focus on "reducing asthma morbidity and mortality among children in urban Los Angeles." Rather than addressing "HIV," a better project would focus on "reducing HIV transmission among young adult residents of Washington, DC."

Students will initially focus on characterizing the impact of a particular public health threat on a particular population as a means of justifying the prioritization of your chosen problem and identifying potential sites for intervention with law and policy tools. As the semester continues, you will take on the role of a legal advocate for your chosen population and examine and evaluate various law and policy options that are available to prevent and/or ameliorate the impact of your identified public health threat.

The project has four parts:

(1) During the sixth week of the semester, students will submit a brief memo via email (1 page) identifying the population and public health threat that will be the subject of your project. Following submission of this memo, we will meet to discuss the suitability of your topic for the project and identify research strategies. Especially because these projects are a bit unorthodox, topic choice can make or break the experience for students. For the proposal, it is only necessary to have identified the basic focus of the project. It is not necessary at this stage to have identified potential health promotion strategies, though it may be helpful to think ahead about what sorts of strategies might be available to get a sense for whether the chosen topic will be workable.

(2) During the ninth week of the semester, students will submit longer memo (3-5 double-spaced pages) via email identifying both qualitative and quantitative measures (to the extent that this information is available) of the burden and/or risk of the health threat at issue and an explanation of the causal pathways by which that threat affects the population at issue. This portion of the project will require research of the scientific literature on your chosen issue. If scientific studies of your particular population are not available (which is often the case), you extrapolate from studies of similar populations. The focus of this memo will be on justifying the prioritization of your chosen problem and identifying potential sites for intervention. Memos should

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be thoroughly researched, well written and properly referenced. Any consistent reference style (Bluebook, MLA, Chicago) will be accepted. The diversity of your references is often a strong indication of how thorough your research was. The school's honor code applies to matters of plagiarism. Short extensions may be available without penalty if you contact me in advance of the deadline. Otherwise, late submissions will be penalized. Following submission of the second memo, we will meet to discuss feedback and strategies for identifying potential interventions.

(3) During the last two weeks of the semester, each three-credit student will give a presentation describing the background covered in the first two memos and evaluating potential health promotion strategies for applying identified law and policy tools at identified points of intervention. It is not necessary to have fully worked out a conclusion as to which strategy is best at this point. Presentations should focus on discussing the perceived pros and cons of various health promotion approaches and law and policy tools with an eye toward using feedback from classmates to produce a final report. Students might think of the presentation as an opportunity to present research and ideas to the class and get feedback before firming up recommendations. In terms of role-playing, the presentation should be like a meeting with a legal team to discuss research findings and initial thoughts on strategy. A good rule of thumb is that the presentation should offer three distinct strategies – for example, calling on a state agency to take action within its existing mandate, calling on the state legislature to adopt new legislation (and proposing the basic contours of that legislation), or calling on the state attorney general to file suit against identified defendants in her/his parens patriae capacity. Following your presentation, we will meet to discuss feedback and next steps for preparing your written report.

(4) At the end of the semester, students will submit a final written report via email. The main focus of the report will be on presenting and justifying a chosen health promotion strategy. It should briefly cover the same areas outlined above (identifying the public health threat and justifying its prioritization; identifying causal pathways by which the problem affects your chosen population and pointing to specific points of intervention; and evaluating the pros and cons of potential strategies for using law and policy tools to address the problem). The majority of the paper, however, should focus on describing your recommended strategy, justifying it in terms of the pros and cons of various approaches (with regard to effectiveness, ethical considerations, political feasibility, and any other considerations you identify), and thoroughly addressing matters of the relevant legal authority of identified actors and potential legal challenges by identified stakeholders. A combination of strategies should be used only where there is a clear need for a combined, simultaneous approach. Otherwise, your recommendation should identify the single most important legal

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strategy at this time. The paper should be responsive to issues raised during and after the presentation through feedback and questions from the professor and your peers. In grading the papers, I will strongly consider whether you've addressed any problems noted in my feedback regarding your presentation as well as any issues raised by your fellow students during the presentation. Papers should be thoroughly researched, well written and properly referenced. Any consistent reference style (Bluebook, MLA, Chicago) will be accepted. The diversity of your references is often a strong indication of how thorough your research was.

Grading, Evaluation, and Project Requirements – Two-credit Option

For two-credit students, evaluation will be based on the quality of class participation (30%) as well as a project consisting of a 1-page topic selection memo and a final paper of 20 double-spaced pages on a current public health law controversy of your choosing (70%).

The two-credit project has two parts:

(1) Three weeks prior to the end of the semester**,** you must submit a brief memo via email (1 page) not only identifying the topic of your final paper, but also outlining a tentative thesis statement describing the argument you will make. I strongly recommend that you aim for specificity in selecting a topic and crafting an argument. For example, a paper on religious exemptions for mandatory vaccination laws is too broad. A better choice would be a paper arguing that the religious exemption in a particular state's mandatory vaccination law is vulnerable to constitutional challenge. Similarly, a paper on preventing childhood obesity is too broad. A better choice would be a paper arguing that a shared use policy protecting school districts from tort liability if they keep their sports and recreational facilities open to the public outside of school hours should be adopted in a particular state. Specificity will allow you to engage deeply with the law of a particular jurisdiction and to assess the available evidence regarding the effectiveness of a specific intervention.

(2) At the end of the semester, you will submit a final paper of 20 double-spaced pages via email. Papers should be thoroughly researched, well written and properly referenced. This is an interdisciplinary course and the paper will require interdisciplinary research. In addition to citing appropriate legal sources (cases, statutes, ordinances, regulations, law review articles, etc.), I also expect you to cite scientific journal articles, where appropriate, to support your assertions regarding, e.g., risk and protective factors, causal pathways, and the effectiveness of interventions. Any consistent reference style (Bluebook, MLA, Chicago) will be accepted. The diversity of your references is often a strong indication of how thorough your research was.

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