

PLSC 476: Empirical Legal Studies

Fall 2025

As noted on the syllabus, 40 percent (400 possible points) of your grade in the course will comprise either (a) a course project / paper, or (b) a take-home final examination. **Course enrollees are required to indicate to the instructor (in person or via e-mail) which option they choose by 11:59 p.m. ET on Thursday, November 20, 2025.**

Final Examination Guidelines

The final examination will be a take-home, essay-format exam. The general structure of the exam will involve using data to investigate and answer a series of questions about one or more legal / judicial topics. Exam answers will be structured as essays. The exam format will also involve some level of choice of topics (e.g., “answer one of the three possible questions in Part I, and one of the three possible questions in Part II”).

The exam will be distributed electronically on December 11, 2025 (the last regularly-scheduled day of the course). Exam answers will be due (also electronically) no later than 6:00 p.m. ET on **December 17, 2025**.

Course Paper Guidelines

In lieu of a final exam, course enrollees may opt to write a research paper. The goals of the paper, in rough rank order of their importance, are:

- To demonstrate your understanding of the core content of the course, and in particular on some aspect of law and the legal system;
- To demonstrate your mastery of the analytical approaches covered in the course; and
- To address a (potentially novel) aspect of legal studies in an empirical fashion.

The general form of the paper will be akin to that of a “research note,” as are commonly published in some social science journals. The total length of the paper should not exceed 5000 words of text (that’s about 15 pages), but feel free to include as many references, tables and figures as you deem necessary. While you are welcome to collect your own data for the project, time and effort constraints will very likely make doing so infeasible, and you are encouraged to use existing data for the project; among other times, our class meeting on September 18, 2025 will discuss sources for such data.

Students choosing to write papers will be required to submit those papers – along with the code and data necessary to replicate the analyses therein – no later than 6:00 p.m. ET on **December 17, 2025**.