The Law, Societies and Justice Department offers students an opportunity to understand the complex roles of law in society. Law takes multiple forms and performs a wide array of important functions. At the same time, the work of law is shaped by numerous political, economic, social, cultural and geographic factors. Because of this, law “on the books” is not the same as law “in action.”

Students in the LSJ major develop a deep appreciation for the complex dynamics that shape the translation of law “on the books” to law “in action.”

The LSJ faculty are trained in many disciplines, including Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology and Geography. Because of this, the LSJ major is deeply interdisciplinary; students learn to view law from a range of perspectives. Part of this intellectual diversity stems from the faculty's deep commitment to comparative analysis. The roles and forms of law differ across nations and regions. Students are consistently challenged to see how different contexts influence how law is constructed, enforced and understood.

Courses in the LSJ major cover a wide variety of topics, but place significant emphasis on three primary areas: (1) the role of legal institutions in responding to concerns about crime and disorder; (2) the diversity of legal institutions across different national contexts; and (3) the significance of human rights in shaping contemporary legal discourse and institutions.

The LSJ major is not designed as a pre-law major; it is not consciously constructed to assist students in applying to law school or succeeding in a legal career. Instead, the major stresses the skills central to a liberal arts education – reading insightfully, analyzing complex situations thoughtfully, communicating clearly and effectively. Students who seek to improve these skills, and who find the role of law in society compelling, are strongly encouraged to apply to the major.
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