Learning Goals

The role of legal studies in a liberal arts curriculum was admirably stated by our University’s namesake, Louis Dembitz Brandeis, who wrote, near the end of his career, that

*The study of law should be introduced as part of a liberal education, to train and enrich the mind….I am convinced that, like history, economics, and metaphysics—and perhaps even to a greater degree than these—the law could be advantageously studied with a view to the general development of the mind.*

The Legal Studies Program takes up this pedagogical challenge from Justice Brandeis. For nearly four decades, our mission has been to advance the understanding of law throughout the liberal arts community:

- by developing critical and creative **skills** to “enrich the mind,”
- by exploring **knowledge** of legal issues that arise in diverse fields of study, and
- by offering concrete ways for liberal education to engage **social justice** issues.

As an interdepartmental program, Legal Studies considers problems and perspectives that reach across most academic disciplines and practical fields taught at Brandeis. We present law in the broad context of history, economics, politics, philosophy, literature, and the sciences; and we trace law’s impact within the fields of health, business, environment, and creative arts. The scope of legal concerns ranges from the local (states and communities), to the national, and to the global (regions and international bodies). Our program does not provide professional legal training. Rather we give undergraduates access to a venerable field of human expression, where rigorous learning combines with reflective practice. Our learning goals apply not just to students completing the LGLS minor, but to the larger number of students who take one or more courses (all open without prerequisite). Understanding how law works should help guide students in choosing professional careers, and also in forming lives of responsible citizenship.

In Legal Studies, the main University learning goals are tightly interwoven. To invoke Justice Brandeis’ core insight, learning about the law improves analytic skills. In dynamic terms, the creative elements in legal knowledge challenge conventions and require public improvement; just as legal problem-solving points back to the refinement of social and humanistic principles. The close integration of legal knowledge and skills provides a concrete framework for social advocacy, bringing real-life justice concerns to the center of liberal inquiry.
Legal Studies Program

Core skills

- Through the elaboration of legal arguments, students develop increasing clarity in written and oral communication, subject to the demands of social persuasion and institutional scrutiny.

- Through practice in applied argumentation, students learn how to mobilize (and to critique) the use of quantitative information in the common search for factual truth and effective public policy.

- Through analyzing and building legal arguments in a variety of social and cultural contexts, students gain facility in systematic critique and self-reflection about norms.

Knowledge

- Through exploring the history, diversity, and dynamics of legal systems, students supplement their disciplinary studies with attention to public actions and norms.

- Through close analysis of legal case studies, students learn to integrate knowledge of social problems with strategic alternatives for action.

- Through examining tensions within legal principles and institutions, students use knowledge to explore the effectiveness of action strategies in pursuit of justice.

Social Justice

- Through rigorous application of skills and knowledge to legal problems, students develop an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of public advocacy and persuasion.

- Students learn to put their commitments to social justice to the test of adversarial debate and judicial determination.

- In every aspect of their study of law, students learn to articulate the aspirations for human improvement that emerge from creative legal thinking.

Brandeis University’s learning goals ask students to “follow the example of Justice Brandeis.” Legal Studies courses provide some focus for this goal, including a course devoted to Louis Brandeis’ legal career and social philosophy, interpreted in the context of his times. Students in such courses develop a critical sense of what it means to “follow his example” as a formula for the pursuit of social justice. The Legal Studies Program
draws its own inspiration from Justice Brandeis’ pedagogical example, starting from his belief that the study of law can enrich the pursuit of a liberal arts education.