

Current Legal Issues (*Justice & Social Change*)

Sociology 536-01

Rhode Island College, Spring 2026

Gaige 301

Prerequisite: Graduate Status

Instructor Information

Dr. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur

marthur@ric.edu (preferred) or 401.456.8681 (be sure to leave a callback number & when to call). I respond to emails and calls Mondays through Friday afternoons, and occasionally on Sundays.

Student Meetings: Drop-in availability immediately after class most weeks. You can also book an appointment at <https://calendly.com/mmlarthur> (in person in Gaige 351 or by phone or Zoom) or let me know if you need an alternate time I have not made available to book. Other drop in hours as posted.

This course is scheduled in a **hybrid modality**. We will meet in person approximately 8 times during the semester on Thursdays from 6-7:50 pm. You will be asked to meet with me outside of scheduled class time; these meetings may occur via Zoom or in-person depending on availability. You will need to have reliable Internet access on a computer or tablet and to check your email regularly.

Course Description

This course will provide an examination of how social change happens, with a primary focus on the courts, legislation, and social movements. Students will practice applying theoretical and empirical models to a particular topic area of interest as they enhance their academic reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Materials

Rosenberg, Gerald N. **2023**. *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* **3rd Edition**. University of Chicago Press, 9780226312477. **Note: 3rd edition required specifically.**

Sharp, Gene. **2010**. *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework*. The Albert Einstein Institution, 1880813092. **Will be made available electronically for free.**

Additional reading materials will be made available via Blackboard.

The Rosenberg text is available on hard-copy reserve at Adams Library for a 24-hour loan. Please coordinate with your classmates if you will be using the reserve copy to ensure everyone who needs it has access.

****TO PROTECT THE HEALTH & SAFETY OF ALL MEMBERS OF THE CLASS, PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING COVID/FLU SYMPTOMS OR HAVE BEEN EXPOSED. ****

THIS SYLLABUS IS TENTATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Course Requirements

- **Reading and viewing.** This course will require significant reading and viewing. You are expected to complete all reading and viewing assignments prior to the submission of any discussion board posts and prior to discussion in class.
- **Semester-Long Project.** Early in the semester, you will choose an area or topic around which social change has occurred or is occurring. Throughout the semester, you will use the area or topic to explore the ideas we are developing in the course. There will be four preliminary stages in which you work through ideas relevant to each section of the course. This will require additional outside reading beyond that assigned on the syllabus in most weeks of the semester as well as some additional Blackboard check-in assignments, not all of which are indicated on the syllabus. At the end of the semester, you will bring your work throughout the course together into a final paper outlining the causes, processes, and potentially impact of social change in relation to your area or topic. **(50%)**
- **Course Participation.** As this course has both in-person and asynchronous elements, your course participation will be assessed in both formats. You are expected to come to class (or to Blackboard) having completed assigned readings, prepared to discuss both assigned readings and your own course project as relevant. In-person participation consists of engagement in in-person course discussion. Asynchronous participation consists of engagement in course discussion boards and other online activities as assigned (include a data analysis assignment), including peer feedback. Such participation, whether in person or asynchronous, should be engaged, informed, and respectful. You will also be expected to meet with the professor outside of scheduled class time at least twice during the semester. **(30%)**
- **Discussion Facilitation/Presentations.** Twice during the semester you will be expected to lead part of a class session, including presenting material and guiding discussion. Depending on the class size, one of these sessions may be done with a partner. More details will be provided later. In addition, twice during the semester, you will be expected to facilitate a discussion board for an asynchronous component of the course, including posting discussion questions that draw on assigned readings, managing the discussion, and posting a synthesis and summary at the end of the discussion period. **(20%)**

Note: federal guidelines expect students to complete three hours of work (including both in-class and out-of-class time) for every credit hour earned (to see this definition, search for “credit hour” at <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-600/subpart-A/section-600.2>).

Course Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to meet learning outcomes of the Justice Studies MA (see <https://www.ric.edu/academics/graduate-degree-programs/justice-studies-ma> and click on “Program/Learning Goals” for more details):

1. Articulate knowledge of the major issues facing the justice system locally, nationally and globally, as well as new research findings in the field, and
2. Communicate professionally and knowledgeably in oral and written formats on a variety of academic and justice-related topics.

Course Schedule

Class meeting days are indicated on the schedule. All assignments and readings are due Monday evenings, with a no-excuse-needed extension until Tuesday morning. Responses to classmates' discussion board posts are due no later than 1 pm on Thursdays (no extension for responses). While these are not listed here, weeks in which class does not meet may also require short lecture videos or memos posted to Blackboard.

January 22: Introduction to Justice and Social Change

Class meets

- ☐ Read entire syllabus
- ☐ Complete introductory discussion board post (Discussion Board #1)
- ☐ Arthur, "What is Social Change?"

January 29: What is Social Change? What is Resistance?

- ☐ Project stage 1: Topic Proposal and Background
- ☐ Rosenberg, "Introduction," 1-12
- ☐ Scott, "Behind the Official Story"
- ☐ Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works"
- ☐ Earl, "Young People and Social Movements"
- ☐ Discussion Board #2
- ☐ Sign-up sheet

February 5: Social Movements I

Class meets

- ☐ McAdam, "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency"
- ☐ Amenta, "The Political Consequences of Social Movements"
- ☐ Benford, "Framing Processes and Social Movements"
- ☐ McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism"
- ☐ Discussion Board #3

February 12: Social Movements II

- ☐ Jasper, "Recruiting Stranger and Friends"
- ☐ McVeigh, "Who Protests in America"
- ☐ Evans, "The Mediation Model"
- ☐ Polletta, "Three Misconceptions About Social Movements"
- ☐ Griffin, "Learning from the 2018 Together for Yes Campaign"
- ☐ Discussion Board #4

February 19: Legislative Change

Class Meets—guest speaker Rhode Island State Representative Karen Alzate

- ☐ Campbell, "The Emergence of Penal Extremism in California"
- ☐ Hall, "State Elections, Policy Choices, and Accountability"
- ☐ Costain, "Public Opinion"
- ☐ Additional reading TBA
- ☐ Transcribe and annotate oral history
- ☐ Discussion Board #5

February 26: Lobbying and Interest Groups

- ☐ Burstein, “Interest Organizations, Information, and Policy Innovation...”
- ☐ McKay, “Policy Consequences of Revolving-Door Lobbying”
- ☐ Meyer, “Institutionalizing Dissent”
- ☐ Laurison, “Producing Politics” podcast on New Books Network
- ☐ Discussion Board #6
- ☐ Project stage 2: Social Movements

March 5: Organizing

Class Meets—guest speaker Jordan Banick, organizer and scholar of organizing

- ☐ Lukes, “Power: A Radical View”
- ☐ Reagan, “Coalition Politics”
- ☐ McAlevey, “Mobilizing is not Organizing”
- ☐ Additional reading TBA
- ☐ Oral history code development
- ☐ Discussion Board #7

March 12: Spring Break

- ☐ Code oral histories

March 19: Change in Organizations

Class Meets

- ☐ Arthur, “Social Movements in Organizations”
- ☐ DiMaggio and Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited”
- ☐ Arthur, “Metamemesis”
- ☐ Meyerson, “The Tempered Radical”
- ☐ Discussion Board #8
- ☐ Project stage 3: Legislatures, Lobbying, and Organizing

March 26: Change and Courts I

- ☐ Rosenberg, “The Dynamic and Constrained Court,” 13-50
- ☐ McCann, “Law and Social Movements”
- ☐ Bustos, “Movement Lawyering in the Time of the Climate Crisis”
- ☐ Adams Library, “Legal Research”
- ☐ Oral history code development assignment
- ☐ Individual meeting with the professor
- ☐ Discussion Board #9

April 2: Change and Courts II

- ☐ *You will be assigned to one of the following three reading groups:*
 - a) Rosenberg, “Civil Rights,” 51-254 & at least one of Atwater or Lassiter videos
 - b) Rosenberg, “Abortion and Women’s Rights,” 255-450 & at least one of Morrison or Griswold videos
 - c) Rosenberg, “Marriage Equality,” 451-558; Abeyratne, *Courts and LGBTQ+ Rights in an Age of Judicial Retrenchment*, 11-98; & Obergefell video
- ☐ Class leader preparation assignment
- ☐ *Optional:* read other sections of Rosenberg, including chapters from the 2nd edition on the environment, apportionment, and criminal law, and/or watch other Rule of Law videos

April 9: Change in Courts III

Class Meets

- ☐ Rosenberg, "Conclusion," 559-74
- ☐ Rosenberg, "Ideological Preferences and Hollow Hopes"
- ☐ Swedlow, "Reason for Hope?"
- ☐ Discussion Board #10
- ☐ Come to class prepared to lead the portion of class on your assigned section of Rosenberg

April 16: Revolution and Regime Change

- ☐ Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, entire
- ☐ Skopic, "The Great British Political Prank"
- ☐ Additional reading TBA
- ☐ Discussion Board #11
- ☐ Project stage 4: Courts

April 23: Change in and From Culture

Class Meets (field trip to The Womxn Project, 301 Harris Ave, Unit C, Providence)

- ☐ Amenta and Polletta, "The Cultural Impacts of Social Movements"
- ☐ Protest music playlist
- ☐ Duncombe, "A Theory of Change for Artistic Activism"
- ☐ Einwohner, "After the March"
- ☐ Additional reading TBA
- ☐ Discussion Board #12
- ☐ Protest music assignment

April 30: Considering Social Change

- ☐ Reading TBA based on student interests
- ☐ Work on final project
- ☐ Individual meeting with the professor
- ☐ Final discussion board

May 7: Final Lessons

Class Meets

- ☐ Come prepared to teach a section of class on your topic
- ☐ Reading TBA

Course Policies

Course Technology: Students are expected to check their RIC email addresses and Blackboard frequently, at least a couple of times per week, and to have sufficient Internet access to complete readings & assignments via Blackboard. If you primarily use another email account, you must forward your RIC email, as I do use email to disseminate important information about the course. If you are not able to access email or Blackboard, you should seek assistance from User Support Services right away (<https://our.ric.edu/departments-directory/user-support-services> or 456-8803).

Academic Integrity: All students enrolling in this course are expected to abide by the Rhode Island College guidelines on academic honesty. More information about academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism, as well as RIC policies, can be found at <https://library.ric.edu/proethics/>. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to:

- Using AI writing systems, including text editors like Grammarly and chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude, and turning in the results as if they are your own work.
- Plagiarizing written work, including copying some or all of your work from a book, a website, or another student's paper. Think about how you would feel if someone passed off your hard work as their own.
- Using sources without proper attribution. Remember that all claims in a paper that did not spring fully formed from your own head need attribution, regardless of whether or not they are paraphrased, and all direct quotes should appear in quotation marks. If you are unsure how to document sources, please see me or check the links in Blackboard.
- Turning in research reports that are fabricated or which do not accurately represent the research activities in which you engaged.
- Turning in work completed for other classes without prior permission.
- Working together with other students or seeking help from professionals or peers on assignments which prohibit such activities.
- Destroying course materials or preventing other students from achieving fully in this course.

Cheating successfully is often harder than you think, and you might as well just put your effort into doing the assignment legitimately. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe, and include receiving a 0 on the assignment for the first minor offense, receiving an F for the class for a repeated offense, and report to the Academic Integrity Committee at RIC for all offenses. If you feel the urge to engage in academic dishonesty, stop and think about what you are doing, and then come see me so we can work out a plan together to ensure your success in the course.

Extensions, Absences, and Attendance: Please make every effort to attend all scheduled class sessions. Class sessions will not be recorded and group activities cannot be made up. However, we can work out a plan for alternative assignments if you become ill, face quarantine, or otherwise will miss more than a class or two. If you need an extension, instructions for requesting one are available in Blackboard.

Unless otherwise noted, assignments are due in Blackboard at specific times as indicated in Blackboard; you can request an extension for eligible assignments using the link in Blackboard. Assignments **must** be saved in *.rtf, *.doc, or *.docx (preferred). Blackboard does log your submissions; you can return to an assignment yourself to see if you have submitted it correctly, and I am happy to show you how to do this so that you will not need to email me to see if I have received your work.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities should be sure that they are registered with the Center for Disability Access in order to ensure access to the full range of services available at Rhode Island College. Information about these services and about registration is available at <https://our.ric.edu/departments-directory/center-disability-access>--if you have a disability that requires or would benefit from accommodations to ensure you have equal access to success in this course, it is your responsibility to come and speak with me as early as possible in the semester so that we can develop a plan together. All reasonable accommodations will be made.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment: Rhode Island College and its faculty are committed to creating a safe and open learning environment for all students. The College prohibits all forms of discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. RIC encourages all members of the community to seek support from, and report to, the Office of Institutional Equity. You may contact the Office at 401-456-8218, or learn more about college policies by visiting the <https://our.ric.edu/departments-directory/office-institutional-equity>. If you have experienced, witnessed, and/or received information about a potential violation, you can submit an incident report at that site. Incident reports are routed to the Director of Institutional Equity / Title IX Coordinator, and will initiate outreach from the Director to the individual(s) who have experienced harm.

All faculty and staff are now mandatory reporters. This means that if we learn about something that might be sex discrimination (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, pregnancy discrimination, LGBTQ discrimination), then we must report what we know to the Title IX Office. Usually, reports will only leave a record of concern, but sometimes, a report can be escalated into an investigation without a victim's consent. Mandatory reporters are expected to share information learned in all settings, including during class activities, assignments, office hours, and outside of class. **Please be thoughtful about what you disclose to me.**

Pregnancy Modifications: Rhode Island College prohibits differential treatment or discrimination against students based on their current, potential, or past parental, family, marital status, or pregnancy or related condition. Students experiencing pregnancy or related conditions may meet with the Title IX Coordinator to discuss reasonable modifications. The College's Pregnancy Policy is available at <https://our.ric.edu/pregnancy> and students can meet with the Title IX Coordinator to discuss reasonable modifications by initiating a request at that site. College policy requires all employees, upon receipt of a disclosure of pregnancy or related condition from a student, to refer that student to the Title IX Coordinator.

Basic Wellness Needs: To learn effectively, you must have basic security: a roof over your head along with a reliable place to sleep and enough food to eat. If you're having trouble with any of those things, please contact Learning for Life (l4info@ric.edu, or phone 401-456-6320). Students dealing with heightened feelings of sadness or hopelessness, thoughts of harm or suicide, or increased anxiety may schedule an appointment at the Counseling Center (401-456-8094). Students in distress can call 401-456-4673 (HOPE) to confidentially speak with licensed clinician 24/7 at no cost. If you are experiencing a financial emergency, the FAST Fund provides small grants, outside of the RIC financial aid system. Learn more or apply at <https://fastfundric.wixsite.com/fast>.

Academic Freedom

As college students, you are here to learn not just facts, but how to think critically think and reason. In many of the classrooms you'll enter, your preconceived notions, and sometimes deeply held beliefs, will be challenged. We ask you to embrace the opportunity to hone your own ideas and strengthen your opinions both outside and inside the classroom.

Academic freedom is the principle that supports a welcoming academic environment where open inquiry, critical analysis and intellectual growth are possible, and respectful debate is valued. By ensuring the right to express thoughts, challenge assumptions and pursue knowledge freely, academic freedom not only enriches individual growth but also upholds the integrity of higher education as a site of innovation and discovery. In this course, it is mutually agreed (by both instructor and student) that we support these principles of academic freedom.

Similar to how First Amendment protections allow us to question the orthodox and test the controversial, academic freedom allows professors and researchers to conduct their studies without fearing negative consequences based on their findings. While you may question your professors, and in fact sometimes may be encouraged to do so, professors maintain the right to determine the content of class lessons and the flow of classroom discussion. Curiosity and a healthy amount of skepticism are key components of learning, but respecting your professors as leaders of the classroom environment is also critical. Classrooms are not public forums, such as public sidewalks or greenspaces; they are spaces where discussion is curated by your professor based on relevance to the topic at hand.

Public Speaking Support: The Academic Success Center (ASC) offers public speaking and presentation practice tutoring where 50-minute appointments can be booked on the Writing Lab schedule. Tutors can support students on outlines, visual aids, delivery techniques, and strategies to ease presentation anxiety. All tutoring schedules can be viewed, links to book, and additional resources can be found on the [Tutoring at ASC](#) page. Email tutoring@ric.edu with any questions.

Writing Lab: Everyone, even excellent students, benefits from having another set of eyes on their writing, so visit the **Writing Lab** early often to help develop your ideas, organize your writing, and improve your drafts: <https://our.ric.edu/departments-directory/division-student-success/student-services/academic-success-center/writing-lab>.

If you would like more information about the resources available at RIC or help navigating them, you can ask me at any time this semester. You do not need to tell me why you are asking to get help, whether for a friend, another student, or yourself.