

**Course Syllabus**  
**The Death Penalty: Human Biology, Law and Policy**  
**Human Biology 96Q (Sophomore Seminar)**  
**and**  
**Human Biology 166**  
**Spring Quarter 2006**  
**William F. Abrams**

The sciences of human biology play a critical role in determining the guilt or innocence of a person accused of a capital crime, and whether there are mitigating circumstances against imposing the death penalty on a guilty defendant. These sciences are also central to policy arguments both in favor and against the death penalty. This course will examine the history, policy and application of the death penalty in the United States, particularly with respect to the impact of science and forensic investigation on how capital punishment is applied, contemporary views on the death penalty, and how policy is made. We will use several real cases on which I have served as counsel to consider the process and policy of the death penalty in America, and will also consider perspectives, scholarly research, and legal precedent in our analysis.

Students will be asked to examine and challenge the various sides of the issues involved in the death penalty. Students should gain from the course the ability to intellectually dissect an emotional and polarizing issue, appreciate the different competing viewpoints, and arrive at their own well-reasoned conclusions – whatever those conclusions may be. *The course will not be taught from any preconceived belief or with any political or philosophical agenda, except to involve students in a rigorous intellectual challenge of policy and philosophy.*

The requirements for the course are:

- Completion of assigned reading;
- In-class final examination;
- An original paper synthesizing the experience and knowledge acquired during the course with the student's analysis of a selected capital punishment issue (**due Friday, June 2, 2006**);
- Active class participation.

Expectations and details on the paper will be provided separately.

## **Spring Quarter Reading List**

A Course Reader is available from Field Copy & Printing, 650-323-3155, [fcpl@aol.com](mailto:fcpl@aol.com). Field will have the Readers available for purchase during the first day of class, and by arrangement. In addition to the materials in the Reader, I will provide you materials on Coursework. These materials will include cases, articles and breaking news items related to capital punishment and are required reading.

## **Contact Information and Office Hours**

William F. Abrams  
[wabrams@stanford.edu](mailto:wabrams@stanford.edu)  
Office: Bldg. 100, Room 102M  
650-725-9546 (Stanford office)  
650-233-4668 (Pillsbury Winthrop phone)  
Office hours: Sunday, 4-5:30 p.m.  
Monday, 6:00 to 6:45 p.m.  
And by appointment

I will add Office Hours as the quarter approaches the last few weeks of the term.

## **Weekly Schedule**

I will issue a weekly schedule of readings that contain page numbers in the Reader for each class when the Reader is provided by the printer.

A word on the readings: they appear formidable, and indeed are challenging. Many of the materials, however, are heavy on statistics or contain dissenting opinions from cases that I provide you for your reference and consideration of context, and without the expectation that you will read such items with exactitude. I will inform you in class and on Coursework which of the materials require your discerning thought, and which may be skimmed or are for deep reference. Some items are designated as such below.

Our last class is on Monday, May 29, which is Memorial Day. Although it is a holiday, I would like to hold class on that day, particularly given that class is at the end of the day. I will provide ice cream sundaes as a stimulus/bribe to encourage attendance. The class will be an in-depth review for the final examination. We will schedule a class on Sunday, May 21 at 7:00 p.m. to make up for the first week of the quarter, during which Monday classes are not held. This will go to approximately 9 p.m. and is mandatory. Significant refreshments will be provided for this occasion, too.