Grade 12 Law ISU report, essay and presentations

 For this ISU, you will examine a topic from the legal standpoint. Thus, you may have completed a report in science or geography about climate change. In those subjects, your primary focus is on why climate change is happening, its effects on the planet and its species, and possible solutions. However, for this ISU, the legal aspects are the focus. How will the law deal with climate change? Will individuals and groups sue companies responsible for climate change? What will be the burden of proof for such a suit? Its likelihood of succeeding? Could climate change make its way into the criminal code? What about effects internationally? Could low lying countries subject to sea level rise take carbon gas producing countries to court? Note: there will be still parts of your ISU that would deal with the mechanics and level of proof for climate change; however, the inclusion of that material is to only support the legal aspects of the topic. Also, the topic must be controversial now and/or becoming more controversial. Thus, defining women as people was controversial in 1920’s law but no longer is an issue. Other equality issues between the law and women still are being fought out today however…. Also, the topic may have a Canadian and/or international focus. But, carefully check out the rubric for marking the papers and presentation.

Written products:

1. You will produce a 1500-2000 word report on your topic. There is no thesis. You are to present the latest research into your topic. Outline the situation and its legal aspects today (you may need to delve into the past a bit to explain the situation, but only if necessary). The problem/conflict/controversy must be clearly identified. Also consider the stakeholders, influences, etc. that set up the situation and the effects on each one for your topic. Finally, give a brief overview of what the future should be according to the stakeholders – whether it is business as usual or a solution that requires fundamental change. However, there is to be no judgement on your part as to what viewpoint is correct (you may note popularity, such as ¾’s of civil rights advocates believe….). In short, you are producing an overview that enables the reader to understand what is going on without being influenced into a possible solution. It is crucial that your words are supported by maps, diagrams, tables and other figures that support your case. Remember, the legal aspects are the focus of your report for both the problem and the possible solutions. Thus, the law is failing to protect endangered species (problem). Greenpeace is one possible stakeholder. Its legal solutions are to take companies to court and to engage in civil disobedience. Part of the reason for their use of civil disobedience is to raise public awareness (media hype) to pressure law makers and to raise money to continue their legal actions (influences). Needless to say, you will need to give background about the number of endangered species, the trade in endangered species …..

2. You will produce a 600-800 word mini-essay and decision making chart. In this essay you will present the best possible solution to the problem you examine. The essay will revolve around a decision-making chart that you will complete and hand in with the essay. The decision making chart is a tool to assist you with clearly defining the criteria for your situation, defining the leading solutions with strengths and weaknesses and why your solution is the best. In short, your essay revolves around why is your solution the best legal solution for the problem.

Presentations:

1. Your ISU topic. For your ISU topic, you will present your solution and defend it in “court”. You will make an opening statement, answer questions from the judges, and make a closing statement. You are trying to sway this constitutional/international panel of judges to find in your favour. Unlike a Canadian court (but like courts in some other countries), the judges get to ask you and your opponents questions. You may enter ‘exhibits’, but they must be on paper or another form of media so they can be recorded as evidence …..

2. You will act as the opposing attorneys in 2 cases. You and a partner will prepare an opening statement, answer questions, and a brief closing statement. You will receive, before Christmas, a copy of 2 other students’ ISU reports and essays. For each essay, you and a partner may choose any other solution except the one advocated by the author of the report and essay. Your viewpoint must be significantly differently than the author’s viewpoint. (For example, to protect children from child labour you could give them full legal rights at 10 years of age – arguing 12 years of age would be better is not significantly different, fining or imprisoning the parents would be significantly different). You may also argue for the status quo – but be prepared to defend why it is better than a change.

 I expect some limited research besides reading your opponent’s papers. If he/she has prepared his/her case well, then you are likely to lose your case (the author should have done extensive research and chosen the strongest position to advocate). You are not to do the same level of research as the author. However, I expect that you will make a strong opponent work for his/her victory and that you will defeat someone who is not prepared ….. (see the rubric). You will work with a different partner for the second case.

3. You will act as a judge in 5 or more cases. As a judge you should ask questions for both clarification and to cross-examine the lawyers’ cases. From each panel of 5 judges, I will receive a written copy of their “Held”, “Ratio Decidendi” and, if necessary, their “Dissent” (plus reasoning for the dissent). I will mark each judge’s performance individually but the write up will be a group mark. You will receive the average of your best five performances as a judge. After you have served 5 times, you may volunteer for subsequent times as a judge if there are not enough judges. You are not expected to be a judge on the 3 days that you are a lawyer.

Rough work:

Proposal: (First come, first served as only 1 person per topic in the class)

1. Your topic stated in the title - e.g. Police shootings and racism in the US

2. A paragraph of 50-100 words. This paragraph must briefly overview your topic and explain why you are interested in it. The object is to demonstrate to me that you have done some preliminary research (2 brief sources - encyclopaedia, text book, limited web site) and have actively looked for a topic of interest to you before settling on this best choice (you don’t need to refer to the inferior topics - I’ll get the idea from how you refer to your chosen topic).

3. Works cited page.

Essential overview:

1. Again, state your topic in a title.

2. Identify the central or key issue that your topic revolves around. For instance, a science based paper may identify the key issue with endangered species as habitat loss. A law paper would identify the huge and lucrative demand for endangered species or their parts and how the legal system has failed to address this problem. (Wealthy illegal hunters or extremely expensive prices for endangered species creates a demand ….. all of which makes the present legal environment unable to protect the species).

3. A list of 20-25 questions that arise out of your reading and thinking about the topic. These questions will help to shape your research and your essay. Consider the rise in fatal shootings by US law enforcement of unarmed black men. For instance, statistically are black suspects shot more than white suspects? Why don’t police wear webcams on their uniforms? Is there a difference between the penalties for officers shooting a white versus a black (statistically)? What rules and procedures are US officers forced to follow according to the law?

Note: I will not be asking for a list of answers to these questions. The size and nature of your topic will determine the number of questions. Remember - it’s thinking I’m looking for in this assignment. Ensure you cover the topic from a variety of angles and you don’t repeat your questions simply using different words.

Research plan:

1. A list of all key words used to find books in both our library and the public library. Be thorough enough to find all sources that include more than 1 page on your topic. Hint: keep track as you go along.

2. One set of search words used to limit www.google.com 10-50 hits. In other words, I want the search words for your best and most successful search in getting information specific for your essay (what you think will be your best solution). Use quotation marks and an aspect of your topic. I just need the one set of search words that gave you 10-50 hits and the number of hits. I wish to see how well you can manipulate the Google Search Engine to get the results you need rather than a blanket search with millions of hits.

3. A list of stakeholders for your topic. For the US police shootings that list would include: ethnic groups – especially blacks, police groups, the judicial system, all levels of government, the media …..

4. A short paragraph (50-150 words) to outline how you will ensure a balance in your sources to avoid bias.

Thesis paragraph for your essay:

1. Hand in a complete thesis paragraph. Your paragraph must have a ‘hook’, thesis statement, and main arguments.

Rough copies 1:

1. Hand in your entire report and your essay. I will mark your content to ensure you have thoroughly covered the topic in your report and your argument in your essay.

Rough copies 2:

1. I check if you have complete rough copies on the day. We spend 1 period of grammar checking and examining your logic, argument ... This check is a peer check. I only look for 5 seconds to ensure you do have both rough copies. The rough copies are to be printed out on paper. Make the font normal (12+) and double space it (for corrections). You will need at least 3 people to check it from this class.

Good copy:

1. Hand in 3 copies on paper. I get all the copies but I will be distributing 2 paper copies to your two reviewers.

Deadlines: The deadlines for the good copies, rough copies, and presentations are absolute. Plan ahead, be done early, there are no excuses. For other deadlines, see me before the deadline and an extension for a stage may be arranged (or not). The request must be in writing. You’re in Grade 12 U - it’s time to get ready for next year. Enjoy the ISU but be responsible and plan ahead!

Possible topics:

climate change, endangered species, industrial pollution, GMO’s, chemical contamination, child labour, sweat shops, government surveillance, women’s rights, rights of homosexuals, war crimes, genocide, aboriginal peoples, freedom of expression and speech, refugees, child soldiers, freedom of the press/journalists, multinational corporations, tax havens and money laundering, free trade, organizations that regulate international trade and money – GATT and IMF, Shari/Islamic fundamentalist law, weapons trade, child soldiers, peace keeping, peace making, U.S. Homeland Security, terrorism, diplomatic law and protection, extradition, use of torture and degrading treatment, violence against women, death penalty & arbitrary executions, refugees, right to abortion, sex trade (children/adults forced into prostitution), workers’ rights, detention and imprisonment, Indigenous peoples, health/healthcare, armed conflict, racial discrimination, age of consent/majority (adult status),

You may propose a topic to me that is not included in the list. It must fit in with the criteria for a topic (current controversy, legal focus) and avoid topics extensively covered in class.