

Student-Directed Reading Groups: Requirements and Guidelines

(February 21, 2013; updated July 11, 2013;
December 4, 2015; and
November 14, 2016)

1. Course Description

Student-directed reading groups may be on any topic relevant to law or legal studies, subject to the approval of the faculty advisor. Adjunct faculty members may not serve as a faculty advisor. Student organizers are responsible for selecting a general topic, developing a syllabus, assigning student discussion leaders for each session, and participating in the group throughout the semester. Faculty advisors, in consultation with student organizers, may establish prerequisite classes, experience, or background.

To earn the one credit for the class, students will be required to 1) attend and participate regularly throughout the semester, 2) do the weekly readings, and 3) present at least one week's topic and lead a group discussion session.

The class may have a maximum of 13 students and is also subject to the law school's minimum enrollment requirement of 5 students. Faculty sponsors are expected to attend class sessions. Student-directed reading groups are a credit/no credit class.

2. Additional Requirements for Student-Directed Reading Groups

First year students may not enroll in an SDRG; other students may take 1 SDRG per semester but no more than a total of 2 SDRGs for credit during their time at the law school.

The faculty advisor should attend all SDRG meetings, but if there is more than 1 advisor to a specific SDRG, only one need be present at any meeting. If personal attendance is not possible for a particular meeting, the advisor(s) should arrange for a podcast or other method for reviewing the meeting.

SDRGs are subject to the general law school attendance policy, but faculty advisors are encouraged to adopt a specific policy for the group or to work with the student organizers to craft an attendance policy.

Before the course is opened for registration, it also needs to be reviewed and approved by the Associate Dean of Faculty.

3. Guidelines and Suggestions for Student Organizers

Find a Professor

Speak with a professor(s) who may be interested in advising the group, find out class times that work for the professor(s), and have a discussion with the professor(s) about topics and readings. Note that adjunct faculty members are not eligible to serve as a faculty advisor without prior approval from the Associate Dean of Faculty.

Form a Student Sponsor Group

Send an announcement through Announce Account and/or post flyers for a meeting to coordinate with other students who may be interested in participating in the group.

Draft Reading Topics & Class Policies

Decide on the reading group format and put together a list of draft topics for each week of the reading group. Schedule an organizational meeting to assign topics. The first class session should be substantive, not organizational.

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Submit the SDRG Form to the Registrar

Submit the course plan and SDRG registration form to the Registrar several weeks before finals of the preceding semester so other students can incorporate the reading group into their schedules. Also note the deadline on the form itself.

Associate Dean of Faculty Approval

The Registrar will submit the course plan to the Associate Dean of Faculty for final approval before registering any students.

Set up a Course Forum

If the course will require posting readings or discussion posts on TWEN or another forum, set the website up before the course begins to jumpstart the discussion.

Distribute Readings for the First Class

Post readings for the first week of the session on the course web page and outside the bookstore.

4. Suggestions for Faculty Advisors

Faculty advisors should make some effort to determine that the group is open to other interested students (in addition to those students who are organizing the group), including students whose views or perspectives differ from those of the student organizers.

Consider requiring a draft syllabus (with or without specific readings) at the time you agree to advise the group, or, instead, work with student organizers to create readings for the first couple of sessions. The first class session should be substantive, not organizational.

Consider suggesting to student organizers that the students who are responsible for particular weeks should come up with the readings for that week.

Consider requiring students to respond in some way to the readings, with a couple of questions for each session, or a responsive paragraph, or a journal.

Also consider requiring students to post their questions or responses on the SDRG TWEN or web site before the meeting.

Consider requiring the presenter for each week to turn in something more extensive, such as an outline of discussion points or questions.

Consider requiring weekly participation to obtain credit, or work with the student organizers to craft a policy about participation and credit.

Work with the library to archive the reading group materials for future use by other SDRGs.