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A Student's Guide to International and Comparative Law Studies at Washington University Law

Introduction

In this age of globalization, all lawyers will need skills to address transnational problems, whether they are practicing family or immigration law in a small town or joining a large law firm in a major metropolitan area. However, students thinking they would like to specialize in international and comparative law will need to take specialized courses and possibly fieldwork that will support their chosen professional path.

International legal studies are often separated into “private” and “public” tracks; “private” meaning private, often commercial, transactions between individuals or business entities, public referring to relations between states and public interest work such as human rights advocacy or international criminal law. This guide suggests coursework suited to each of these tracks but with the caveat that the distinction is somewhat artificial. For example, lawyers working on investor/state arbitrations (generally considered part of “private” international law) typically have many issues of treaty interpretation to address prior to resolution of the substantive dispute (that is, questions of “public” international law).

How are International and Comparative Law Studies Related?

Comparative Law is different than international law. Courses in comparative or foreign law are very important to a student's international legal education, but focus not on international legal regimes, but on the different legal systems found in the world today. All students wishing to specialize in either private or public international law should also take a course in comparative law; they may also wish to take courses in foreign law when offered (such as Chinese or European Union law, for example), or comparative specialized courses. The basic course in comparative law is typically offered every year; other courses (such as comparative antitrust law, for example).

What International and Comparative Courses are offered at Washington University School of Law?

Washington University Law offers a set of “core” courses in public and private international law (and comparative law) every year. In addition, there are many specialty courses offered every other year, many weekend courses offered each year (and students can sometimes petition to have a particular specialty course added).

Suggested Courses for Students wishing to specialize in international and comparative law

Core Courses

Public International Law (recommended for all students)

Comparative Law (recommended for all students)

International Criminal Law and/or International Human Rights (for public interest work)

International Business Transactions (private international law track)

Foreign Relations Law

Additional Offerings Depending Upon Availability and Interest

International and Comparative ADR

Intellectual Property Law or International Intellectual Property Law

Comparative Antitrust Law

International Tax

International Courts and Tribunals

Comparative Constitutional Law

War Crimes Seminar

European Union Law or other foreign law courses (i.e., Chinese Law)

Selected Problems in Human Rights in Europe Seminar

International Commercial Arbitration, Investor-State Arbitration, International Climate Change or other specialty courses offered during the weekends

Immigration Law

International Money Laundering

Jessup International Moot Court

Global Studies Law Review

Study or Field Work Abroad

Through the **International Justice and Conflict Resolution Field Placement** and the fourteen **international exchange programs** Washington University Law has with foreign law schools, students wishing to further deepen their international and comparative law education or work abroad have the opportunity to do so. The International Justice and Conflict Resolution Field Placement is available for a limited number of students, and requires students to have taken courses in international law as prerequisites, so students wishing to participate need to be mindful of the prerequisites when planning their studies. The exchange programs are administered by Program Coordinator for International and Graduate Programs, Rachael Johnson.

There is now, in addition, a year-long program for French-speaking students allowing them to spend a **year studying at the Sorbonne**, upon completion of which they will receive a degree from the Sorbonne and a Washington University Law J.D.

Are there other courses I should take?

All lawyers practicing international law are first and foremost lawyers trained in **U.S. law**. For the student planning to enter private practice, courses in corporations, tax, federal jurisdiction, or administrative law are very helpful. All students will also benefit from courses in litigation, negotiation, ADR, evidence, conflicts of law and other “general” courses that will help deepen

their understanding of U.S. law. For the students planning to enter government service or public interest jobs, there are many courses – in immigration law, government lawyering and clinics that will help to round out their professional education. Advanced courses in legal research, seminars to improve writing skills and moot court competitions to improve oral advocacy skills may also be useful.

Students who plan to practice abroad or who know that they will be working with a particular area of the world or immigrant community in the United States should also **study foreign languages**. The Sorbonne program requires proficiency in a foreign language, but it is a good idea to work on languages even outside the requirements of those programs as they open doors to wonderful professional opportunities. The Harris Institute now sponsors French, Spanish and Chinese language tables.

Finally, students should consider taking courses that simply appeal to them and courses that offer interesting perspectives such as jurisprudence and legal history. The well-educated lawyer is a successful lawyer!

Still Have Questions?

Many faculty members can offer advice or specifics on opportunities in their respective areas of expertise or the courses they teach. These include Professors Collins, DeGeest, Garlicki, Law, Rosenzweig, Sadat, Tamanaha, Tokarz and Waters as well as many of our adjunct faculty who specialize in one or more areas of international and comparative law.

The Associate Dean for International Programs Michael Koby may also be of assistance.