Law and Political Economy

Program of Study

Based in the Program in Law, Letters, and Society, the Law and Political Economy minor explores the interconnected ways in which power and wealth are produced, distributed, and maintained. The curriculum is interdisciplinary and grounded in the humanistic social sciences. It equips students to analyze and understand the dynamics of life in capitalist societies through courses that attend to the relationships among economic, social, political, and legal orders, and to the mutual development of the ideas, institutions, and practices that define these orders.

The Law and Political Economy minor (https://llso.uchicago.edu/lpe/) is open to all interested students in the College, including Law, Letters, and Society majors whose Focus Fields are not connected to political economy. The eligibility of these students will be determined by the Director of the minor.

Students who are majoring in the Social Sciences will find that coursework in Law and Political Economy can both broaden and deepen their understanding of the ways in which human communities organize themselves. Economics majors may be especially interested in the opportunity to study political economy in ways that differ from how they typically study it in Economics courses. The minor also allows students in Arts, Humanities, and STEM majors who are curious about economic life to pursue this interest through interdisciplinary coursework in the Social Sciences.

By the time they complete the Law and Political Economy minor, students will:

- Acquire an understanding of the historical development and transformation of economic ideas and practices, and of the roles played by legal and political institutions in these processes.
- Become familiar with the wide range of disciplinary perspectives by which political economy can be approached as an object of study.
- Learn how to analyze the interconnected ways in which power and wealth are produced, distributed, and maintained.

Program Requirements

Students who wish to complete the minor in Law and Political Economy must complete six courses:

- LLSO 28040 Introduction to Law, Letters, and Society

This course introduces major frameworks, themes, and methods in the study of law as a social, philosophical, and doctrinal object. One of the central themes of the course is the historical and contemporary role of law in establishing civil society, defining property rights, and structuring market activities. Students are strongly encouraged to take this course in their first or second year.

Students majoring in Law, Letters, and Society must take an additional elective in place of this course.

- LLSO 29065 Theories of Capitalism I and LLSO 29066 Theories of Capitalism II (formerly Early Theories of Capitalism and Twentieth-Century Theories of Capitalism)

This sequence examines diverse accounts of the forces that govern capitalist societies and the distinctive problems that emerge within them. It also considers the ways in which law has both shaped and been shaped by the development of economic life. Students are strongly encouraged to take these courses in chronological order in their second or third year.

- Students must also take three approved electives from the list provided below. Students are strongly encouraged to take these courses in their third and/or fourth year. For the sake of intellectual breadth, the three electives must be based in at least two different academic departments/programs, and if a student takes two electives in the Economics department then their third elective cannot have an ECON cross-listing. The list of approved electives is organized by department in order to facilitate the selection of an appropriate combination of courses. Courses that have an ECON cross-listing are marked with an asterisk.

The elective component of the curriculum gives students the opportunity to pursue an area of interest in depth should they wish to do so. Themes that could be explored through the approved electives include, but are not limited to: the global economy; work; the political economy of race; philosophical perspectives on political economy; wealth; and law and political economy in the United States.

Students may petition to count up to two courses not featured in the list of approved electives toward the minor. A substantial part of these courses must be devoted to exploring the relationship between economic and legal/political questions, problems, or phenomena.

The extra elective that Law, Letters, and Society majors must take can be based in any department.

Summary of Requirements

LLSO 28040	Introduction to Law, Letters, and Society	100
LLSO 29065	Theories of Capitalism I	100
LLSO 29066	Theories of Capitalism II	100
Three approved electives		300
Total Units		600

Approved Electives

Anthropology		
ANTH 21405	Neoliberalism, Self and Society	100
Committee on Environment, Geography and Urbanization		
CEGU 20154	Class, Race and Urban Space: producing the city	100
CEGU 21800	Economics and Environmental Policy	100
Comparative Human Development		
CHDV 20305	The Construction of Education Inequality: Policy and Practice	100
CHDV 24599	Historical and Contemporary Issues in U.S. Racial Health Inequality	100
CHDV 20305	The Construction of Education Inequality: Policy and Practice	100
Economics		
ECON 10000	Principles of Microeconomics	100
ECON 10200	Principles of Macroeconomics	100
ECON 15500	Introduction to Development Economics	100
ECON 16550	The Climate and Growth Challenge	100
ECON 17100	Introduction to International Trade	100
ECON 24450	Inequality and the Social Safety Net: Theory, Empirics, and Policies	100
ECON 25520	Development Economics and Data Analysis	100
ECON 27000	International Economics	100
English		
ENGL 26249	Literary Lessons for Economists? The Financial Crisis of 2008	100
ENGL 27250	Wealth, Democracy and the American Novel	100
History		
HIST 18600	United States Labor History	100
HIST 18901	Inequality, Politics, and Government in US History	100
HIST 19402	Economic History II: The Early Modern World, circa 1300-1800	100
HIST 20009	Nigeria	100
HIST 29691	Global Legal History	100
HIST 21406	Britain 1760-1880: The Origins of Fossil Capitalism	100
HIST 24306	New Histories of Chinese Labor	100
HIST 24511	Social and Economic Institutions of Chinese Socialism, 1949 to 1980	100
HIST 24518	Women and Work in Modern East Asia	100
HIST 28802	United States Labor History	100
HIST 29683	History Colloquium: Race, Slavery, and Nation	100
Human Rights		
HMRT 22210	Justice at Work	100
Law, Letters, and Society		
LLSO 28036	Karl Marx: Early Writings	100
LLSO 28038	Karl Marx: Capital, Volume I	100
LLSO 28080	From Feudalism to Capitalism. From Capitalism to Feudalism?	100
LLSO 29190	The Paris Commune	100
LLSO 29075	Neoliberalism in Europe	100
LLSO 29701	Law and Political Economy	100
LLSO 29702	Feminist Theory and Political Economy	100
LLSO 29708	Neoliberalism and its Critics	100
LLSO 29715	The Corporation in American Society	100
Public Policy		

PBPL 24901	Trade, Development and Poverty in Mexico	100
PBPL 25550	Economic Development and Policy	100
PBPL 25585	The Chinese Economy,Chinese Economy (*)	100
PBPL 25640	Labor Markets: a Global Perspective (*)	100
PBPL 28300	Health Economics and Public Policy (*)	100
PBPL 28335	Health Care Markets and Regulation (*)	100
PBPL 28528	Household Finance: Theory and Applications	100
PBPL 29404	Inequality, Household Finance, and Tax Policy: A Practicum	100
Philosophy		
PHIL 21423	Introduction to Marx	100
PHIL 22220	Marx's Capital, Volume I	100
PHIL 21499	Philosophy and Philanthropy	100
Political Science		
PLSC 22013	Adam Smith's Social and Political Thought	100
PLSC 22805	Law and Empire	100
PLSC 23501	International Political Economy	100
PLSC 25110	Empire and International Justice	100
PLSC 36206	American Political Economy and Race	100
Religious Studies		
RAME 40200	Religion and American Capitalism	100
RLST 25800	Black Ownership of Wealth: A Theological Consideration	100
Sociology		
SOCI 20258	Maverick Markets: Cultural Economy and Cultural Finance	100
SOCI 20555	The Sociology of Work	100
SOCI 20557	Sociology of Money	100
SOCI 20242	States, Markets, and Bodies	100
SOCI 20624	The Global Movement of Wealth	100
Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice		
SSAD 25630	Poverty, Work, and Family Policy	100
* Course with an ECON cross-listing		

Advising and Grading

Courses in the minor may not be double-counted with the student's major(s), other minors, or general education requirements. Courses in the minor must be taken for quality grades, and more than half of the requirements for the minor must be met by registering for courses bearing University of Chicago course numbers. Students may be given credit for required courses and approved electives that they completed before declaring their intention to pursue the minor.

Interested students should submit the Law and Political Economy Course Plan (https://llso.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2026-03/LPE%20Minor%20Course%20Plan.pdf) to the Director of the minor before the end of the spring quarter of their third year. The Director of the minor will submit the student's approved Course Plan to their College Adviser.

For a few years after the minor launches in Autumn 2026, it is possible that student demand for the required courses will exceed their enrollment limits. In this case it will be necessary to restrict temporarily the number of students who can pursue the minor as students cannot petition to substitute other courses for the required courses. However, the program will endeavor to meet student demand as quickly as possible.