COURSE NAME: The Death Penalty in the Modern World

CATALOG NUMBER: 8713C

PROFESSOR: Sean O’Brien

ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITES: None

DESIRABLE PREREQUISITES: Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure 1 & 2, International Human Rights Law, Seminar on the Supreme Court, Seminar in Famous Trials

COURSE BOOKS: Materials will be prepared by Professor O’Brien and posted on his webpage

METHOD OF GRADING & APPRAISAL OF STUDENT FOR GRADE: Pass/fail essay paper related to one of the five areas described in the course content. 1,000 word limit

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF COURSE: Students will learn about the death penalty from historical, constitutional, and human rights perspectives, with an emphasis on capital punishment practices in American courts.

COURSE CONTENT:
1. A historical perspective on the death penalty. What role has it played in societies throughout history?

2. A Constitutional perspective on the death penalty. What constitutional principles govern the use of the death penalty?

3. The practical application of the death penalty in America. What does America’s system of capital punishment look like today?

4. Capital punishment and human dignity: The touchstone of post-Furman capital jurisprudence is the human dignity of the accused. What is human dignity? Does consideration of the victim’s circumstances facilitate or impede the quest for a fair outcome? What kind of evidence sheds light on the human dignity of the accused?

5. The future of capital punishment: Where will the 21st Century take us in the Capital Punishment debate? Reform or abolition?

RELEVANCY OF COURSE FOR CAREER PURPOSES: This course would be useful to any student contemplating a career in criminal justice, civil rights or social welfare.