University of Gdańsk

Subject card

Subject name and code	WPiA - From Jesus Christ to O.J. Simpson - famous trials, PG_00179133		
Field of study	Criminology		
Date of commencement of studies	October 2025	Academic year of realisation of subject	2025/2026
Education level	Bachelor's studies	Subject group	
Mode of study	full-time studies	Mode of delivery	e-learning
Year of study	1	Language of instruction	Polish Polish
Semester of study	1	ECTS credits	2.0
Learning profile	academic	Assessment form	credit
Conducting unit	Department of History of Law -> Faculty of Law and Administration -> Rector		
Name and surname of lecturer (lecturers)	Subject supervisor	dr Jacek Wałdoch	
	Teachers	dr Jacek Wałdoch	

Lesson types

Lesson type	Lecture	Tutorial	Laboratory	Project	Seminar	SUM
Number of study hours	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	30
E-learning hours included: 30.0						

Learning activity and number of study hours

Learning activity	Participation in didactic classes included in study plan	Participation in consultation hours	Self-study	SUM
Number of study hours	30	0.0	20.0	50

Subject objectives

The aim of the course is to familiarize students with the most important and symbolic court trials in the history of the world - from ancient times to the present - and their impact on the development of law, legal culture and social awareness. The course aims to show how specific court proceedings reflected the civilizational, political and moral changes of their eras, as well as how they shaped standards of justice, human rights and mechanisms of judicial power.
The course develops the ability to analyze trials in the context of their social, political and legal background, as well as critically evaluate the actions of the participants in the proceedings - judges, defendants, defense attorneys and public opinion.

Learning outcomes

Course outcome	Subject outcome	Method of verification
	Knows the historical, social and legal context of selected court cases that were significant for the development of the institution of law and the administration of justice. Understands how well-known court cases reflected the values, conflicts and tensions characteristic of a given era. Has knowledge of the evolution of procedural principles (such as the presumption of innocence, public proceedings, the right to defense) throughout history.	[SK2] presentation/project/paper/ report

Subject contents	Introduction: Trial as a Social and Cultural Phenomenon The Function of the Trial in History Trial as a Tool of Justice, Repression, and Spectacle The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth Religious, Political, and Legal Context The Role of the Sanhedrin, Pontius Pilate, and Roman Law The Legacy of the Trial in the Legal Culture of the West The Trial of Socrates Athenian Democracy and Freedom of Speech and Philosophy The Accusation of Impiety and the Demoralization of Youth The Defense of the Philosopher as a Manifesto of Civic Attitude The Trial of Joan of Arc The Clash of Faith, Politics, and Church Law The Role of the Inquisition and the Trials for Heresy Rehabilitation and Its Significance for Collective Consciousness The Trial of Galileo Science and the Doctrine of the Church Mechanisms of Censorship and Thought Control Significance for Freedom of Scientific Research Witch Trials (e.g. Salem, Würzburg) Social Hysteria and construction of the other Evidence law and forced confessions Mechanisms of social exclusion and fear The trial of Alfred Dreyfus Anti-Semitism, nationalism and manipulation of evidence The power of public opinion and the role of the media (Zolas Jaccuse!) Consequences for the justice system The Nuremberg trials International justice and the settlement of war crimes New legal categories: crimes against humanity Controversies: revenge or justice? The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem The concept of the banality of evil (Hannah Arendt) Law and collective memory The problem of jurisdiction and legality The trial of Nelson Mandela (Rivonia Trial) The fight against apartheid and the legal mechanisms of oppression The defense speech as a manifesto of freedom The role of the court in non-democratic systems The case of O.J. Simpson The Trial as a Media Spectacle Racism, Prejudice, and Public Opinion The Crisis of Trust in the Justice System Summary: The Trial as a Mirror of the Era What Do Historical Trials Teach Us About the Nature of Law and Justice? Can a Trial Be Fair in a Divided Society?
Prerequisites and co-requisites	
Assessment methods and criteria	

Subject passing criteria	Passing threshold	Percentage of the final grade
quality	51.0%	100.0%

Recommended reading	Basic literature	-
	Supplementary literature	-
	eResources addresses	
Example issues/ example questions/ tasks being completed	-	
Work placement	Not applicable	

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