

## **PROCEDURES FOR COURT** **FIELD OBSERVATIONS**

You are required to submit a paper, four to six pages in length, in which you will detail your observations made in court over at least three hours. Generally you may just drop into a court and observe, however, if you wish to see a particular type of case or court proceeding, you should call first. You will be expected to observe at least two different kinds of hearings, not just sit in on a trial. The types of hearings you will be able to observe will be discussed in class. The court clerk should be able to advise you of the time and location of various cases being heard that week. Any calls to the clerks are part of your observations and should be noted. It is not necessary to call ahead. There are hearings from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with a break from noon to 1:30 p.m..

The paper is not simply a report of what you observe, you are expected to compare and contrast your experiences and an observation in the court rooms with the descriptions included in the assigned text and lectures and with your preexisting beliefs about what happens.

The paper should underscore the difficulties of victims, witnesses and defendants: i.e., the general public, to navigate the intricacies of the criminal courts. For example, if you have trouble finding a court room, imagine how it must be for a poor, undereducated victim, witness or defendant, and include that observation in your paper. Likewise, take notice of the proceedings you do not understand, and remember that you are upper division Justice Studies students, and make a case for what it must be like for the more ignorant parties.

It is recommended that you visit the courts in small groups, both to share the experience and to feel less abashed at asking questions. You may also attend a “court tour” with Dan Peak instead of going on your own. Court tours will be conducted on Friday mornings beginning at 8:30 AM at the Criminal Court 200 West Hedding Street. The group will meet outside the courthouse for a brief overview before the tour. A sign-up sheet will be handed out in class. There will be three such tours. They are on Friday mornings, because there is a greater opportunity to observe a number of different kinds of hearings. You are not limited to the courts noted below. If you live in Santa Cruz or San Mateo Counties, by all means attend those courts. If you regularly appear in court as part of your job, feel free to write about that instead of making a separate court visit.

You should make every effort to talk to people in the court house. Keep in mind that you will be asked or you may volunteer that you are a San Jose State University student taking Dan Peak’s class. Therefore, please dress appropriately – neat and clean, slacks and button-up shirt or coat and tie if you have same – do not embarrass yourself and me with dirty, sacred (holey) jeans and a tee shirt. Thank you very much.



San José State  
UNIVERSITY

JS 103

Dan Peak, Lecturer

### **FEDERAL COURTS**

United States Court of Appeals – Ninth Circuit  
Marathon Plaza, South Tower  
303 Second Street Suite 600  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
(415) 396-9666

United States District Ct. (Northern Calif.)  
Federal Building  
280 South First Street  
San Jose, CA 95113

### **STATE COURTS**

California Supreme Court (oral arguments are  
not heard in SF regularly – be sure to call first)  
Marathon Plaza, South Tower  
303 Second Street Room 8023  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
(415) 396-9400

Calif. Court of Appeals – 6<sup>th</sup> District  
333 West Santa Clara St. Room 1060  
San Jose, CA 95113  
(408) 277-1004

### **SANTA CLARA COUNTY COURTS**

#### **SUPERIOR COURT**

***There are quite a few, check your local phone book under “Government Pages” for the one closest to you. Here are a few:***

Criminal Court  
200 West Hedding Street  
San Jose, CA 95110  
(408) 299-2974

Juvenile court (*Observations on case  
by case basis – call to inquire*)  
840 Guadalupe Parkway  
San Jose, CA 95110  
(408) 299-7397

Terraine Courthouse (Drug Courts)  
115 Terraine Street  
San Jose, CA 95113

Santa Clara Court Facility  
1095 Homestead Road  
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Sunnyvale-Cupertino Court Facility  
605 West El Camino Real  
Sunnyvale, CA 94087

Gilroy-Morgan Hill Court Facility  
7350 Rosanna Street  
Gilroy, CA 95020

Palo Alto Branch Court  
270 Grant Ave. Room 202  
Palo Alto, CA 94306

## Summary of Instructions for Court Observation Paper

The paper should be four to six pages, and must include:

- Name and location of the court(s) in which you made your observations
- Nature of the proceedings (arraignment, trial, sentencing...). Take note: Inaccurate statements of the type of proceedings will result in deduction. This class is mostly about court proceedings, you should make every effort to understand what you are viewing. For example, a common error is to call a pre-trial proceeding like preliminary examination a “trial.” A hearing is a hearing – a trial is a proceeding culminating in a determination of guilt or innocence.
- Members of the courtroom workgroup present during the proceeding. Include names, if possible, and description of the role each member played in court during this (these) proceedings. Compare your observations with the descriptions in the text and lectures.
- A complete description of what you observed – Describe the setting, facilities, and people present, both in the audience and in the arena. Compare the defense attorneys and the prosecutors and the judge, including manner of dress, attitude and demeanor.
- Describe the proceedings and outcome of the case(s). If you didn’t hear end of a case, what do you expect the outcome will be, based on what you observed?
- Compare your actual observations with what you anticipated seeing. Remember, the paper is not simply a report of what you observe, you are expected to compare and contrast your experiences and an observation in the court rooms with the descriptions included in the assigned text and lectures and with your preexisting beliefs about what happens.
- Make detailed notes. You will not remember much of this after a few days. Check with me if you have questions about what you saw.