This seminar course examines the tradition of classical Hindu law, known as Dharmaśāstra, and its place in the legal, religious, social, and political history of India and South Asia. The first part of this course will introduce students to the complex and fascinating history of this legal tradition from its beginnings prior to the Common Era up to roughly the eighteenth century. In the second part, we will investigate a set of broad questions concerning such things as the nature of scriptural authority, jurisprudential commentary, the role of customary law, and the relationship between law and the state. Throughout the course, special emphasis will be placed on the close reading of primary sources.

Required Texts
Lingat, Robert. *The Classical Law of India.* [available on classesv2]
Olivelle, J. Patrick. *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India.*
Selected articles and other readings. [available on classesv2]

Grading and Requirements
Class Attendance/Performance 50%: Students are expected to attend all classes and actively participate in class discussions. They are also required to write a 1–2 page critique of the week’s readings and to email it to me no later than noon on the Saturday before class. The classes meeting on January 11 and 15 and April 19 are exempt from this requirement.
Final Paper 50%: Students are required to write a research page (approximately 20 pages in length), on which they will give a short presentation in class on April 26. The paper, however, will not be due until noon on the day of the scheduled final.

Class Schedule

Jan. 11: Introduction to the Class and Classical Hindu Law.

Jan. 15: An Overview of Ancient Indian History.

Feb. 1: The Dharmasūtras of Āpastamba and Gautama.
Patrick Olivelle, Dharmasūtras, pp. xxi–126 (Introduction & the Dharmasūtras of Āpastamba and Gautama).

Feb. 8: The Dharmasūtras of Baudhāyana and Vāsiṣṭha.
Patrick Olivelle, Dharmasūtras, pp. 127–326 (The Dharmasūtras of Baudhāyana and Vāsiṣṭha).

Feb. 15: The Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya.


Mar. 1: The Manu Smṛti, Part II.

SPRING RECESSES!

NOTE: We will spend the last portion of this class discussing final paper topics and scheduling individual times to meet.

Mar. 29: Commentaries, Digests, and Traditional Hermeneutics.
Donald Davis Jr., The Spirit of Hindu Law, pp. 47–69 (Chapter Two: “Hermeneutics and ethics”).
Apr. 5: The Relationship between Dharmaśāstra and Custom/Social Practice.

Apr. 12: The Relationship between Dharmaśāstra and Royal Authority.

Apr. 19: Class Presentations on Final Research Paper

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE BY NOON ON THE DAY SCHEDULED FOR THE FINAL.