Summary

The representation of Law and lawyers within popular culture is one of the most important, but underappreciated, dimensions of the legal profession, of practice, and of the practical negotiation of legal ethics.

The dissemination of judicial procedure and dispute resolution through popular culture and the mass media is one of the primary means of both enforcing and challenging the legitimacy of Law and its practitioners within the broader community.

Cinema, along with television, is one of the leading arenas for the formulation of the social consensus concerning the nature of Law and lawyers, often artistically re-staging the processes of legal reasoning and dispute resolution so as to both critique and affirm the legitimacy of legal culture. This unit will examine all of these issues through a critical analysis and discussion of a number of the seminal ‘texts’ within both the literature and cinema of Law.

Unit outcomes

- Employing an inter-disciplinary approach the unit will examine the representation of law and lawyers within popular culture, primarily through their respective depictions in the ‘mass media’ form of both literature (popular and elitist) and cinema.

- The primary sources of literature and cinema will be used as an alternative, or ‘non-academic’, means for a critical and reflective consideration of outstanding issues in more formally academic domains of legal scholarship, including legal ethics and the philosophy of law.

- The unit will consider a number of important facets of critical legal scholarship, most importantly the ‘law and literature’ movement, which tries to both explain and critique law in terms of the various literary techniques of dramatic narrative.

- The unit will offer a wider and more sophisticated understanding of the nature and value of inter-disciplinary approaches, such as cultural studies, to the development of legal scholarship than is offered in traditional ‘black letter’ law courses.