

The French Civil Code, also known as the Napoleonic Code (1804), represents a compromise between the ideas of the French Revolution (such as the right to divorce) and the need for social stability following years of turmoil (for example, through reaffirmation of the marriage bond, although no longer through an obligatory religious ceremony, and a firm commitment of the state to property rights). Two centuries later, more than half of the articles in the Civil Code have not changed, but family law is being completely transformed. And the law of torts and contracts, although still expressed in the original form, is being interpreted in new ways under the influence of case law.

Along with common law, the system of civil law (or “Romano-Germanic law”) is one of the world’s great legal systems, owing much to French law. French law has provided the inspiration and basis for the legal systems of numerous countries. Students who choose to study law in France may do so in order to discover the roots of their own legal systems or, if they come from a common law country, become familiar with the basic tenets of the civil law system. Legal education in France emphasizes critical analysis and thought, which explains the importance accorded to questions of method and form. Over time the letter of the law is altered and eventually replaced. To do so well, it is necessary to know the law thoroughly, to be able to critique it and so to understand the significance and contributions of new measures.

The study of law is necessarily multidisciplinary: geopolitics, international relations, economics, and history— all are necessary parts of the education of a lawyer.

ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES

What do international students need to know about studying law in France?

Other than a good command of French (and English) and a willingness to put in several years of study (it is only at the second-year master’s level, the fifth year of higher education, that students begin to specialize), students must demonstrate a high capacity for work in a very selective curriculum. The first two years of undergraduate studies in law involve the same curriculum everywhere in France.

At the upper undergraduate and graduate levels universities offer specialized curricula that reflect each institution’s history and geography, including the principal economic activities of the region.

Corporate law, tax law, family law, and environmental law—all are expanding rapidly, due in part to the consolidation and expansion of the European Union. Legal education in France gives students a window on the important and fast evolving law of Europe, a union of 25 countries and the world’s largest market.

► Websites

- Programs Taught in English
<http://www.campusfrance.org>
- Portal on law in the francophone world
<http://portail.droit.francophonie.org>
- Francophone virtual school of law
<http://www.unjf.fr/>
- Virtual school of law of the University of Lyon
<http://fdv.univ-lyon3.fr/moodle/>
- OHADA (Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa), presentation on OHADA’s annotated IDEF code
<http://www.institut-idef.org/-Code-OHADA-annotate-.html>

► Keywords

business, insurance, communication, litigation, administrative law, canon law, civil law, comparative law, constitutional law, environmental law, international law on economic matters, tax law, international law, international criminal law, Roman law, rural law, labor law, economic law, human rights, European law, public finance, history of law, real estate, patents and trademarks, intellectual property, human resources, health, administration, political science, criminology, legal theory, urban studies.



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