

**COURSE SYLLABUS  
HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM**

**PARALEGAL TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM**

**LGLA 1303- LEGAL RESEARCH**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides a working knowledge of the fundamentals of effective legal research. Topics include law library techniques; computer assisted legal research, briefs, and legal memoranda. As well as written material in the assigned textbook.

**PREREQUISITES**

None

**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The overall academic objectives of the course are to develop the student's analytical legal research skills and to increase the student's judicial opinion reading comprehension. There will be limited exposure to the legal writing skills this semester for at this stage in the program, it is essential that a student develop his/her knowledge of the law library and expand his/her skills in both judicial and statutory comprehension. In addition lectures will also focus on the ethical standards applicable in the profession of legal assistants. A handout will be given to the student prior to the class discussion.

The beginning Legal Research I course will assist the student in developing the ability to read and analyze judicial opinions; study the legal profession, its ethics that apply to the legal assistant; to convey concepts basic to the common law system, such as the function of the appellate courts, stare decisis and dictum; to convey the concept of authority in legal writing; to begin "in depth" study of legal research and familiarization of the law library. 3 Semester hours (3 hour lecture per week).

**SCANS (Secretary's Commission Addressing Necessary Skills) OBJECTIVES**

The Department of Labor has identified skills set that U.S. employers want most in entry level employees. It is our commitment to prepare every student with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in today's dynamic environment. Toward this end the following skill will be included in this course:

## Definitions of Competencies Skills

### Resources

- 1 Allocates time – Selects relevant, goal-related activities, ranks them in order of importance, allocates time to activities, and understands, prepares, and follows schedules. Competent performance in allocating time includes properly identifying tasks to be completed; ranking tasks in order of importance; developing and following an effective, workable schedule based on accurate estimates of such things as importance of tasks, time to complete tasks, time available for completion and tasks deadlines; avoiding wasting time; and accurately evaluating and adjusting a schedule. The tasks assigned will be case briefs.

### INFORMATION

- 1 Acquires and Evaluates Information- Identifies need for data, obtains them from existing sources or creates them, and evaluates their relevance and accuracy. Competently performing the task of acquiring data and evaluating information includes posing analytic questions to determine specific information needs; selecting possible information and evaluating its appropriateness; and determining when new information must be created. This skill is important in computerized legal research.
- 2 Uses Computer to Process Information- For legal research, uses computers to acquire, organize, analyze, and communicate information. Competently using computers to process information includes entering, modifying, retrieving, storing, and verifying data and other information; choosing format for display (e.g., line graphs, bar graphs, tables, pie charts, narrative), and ensuring the accurate conversion of information into the chosen format. The use of West Law will confirm this skill.

### INTERPERSONAL

- 1 Works With Cultural Diversity- Works well with men and women and with a variety of ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds. Demonstrating competence in working with cultural diversity involves understanding one's own culture and those of others and how they differ; respecting the rights of others while helping them make cultural adjustments where necessary; basing impressions on individual performance, not on stereotypes; and understanding concerns of members of other ethnic and gender groups. Law environment Basic skill needed in this.

### SYSTEMS

- 1 Understands Systems-Knows how social organizational, and technological systems work and operates effectively within them. Demonstrating competence in understanding systems involves knowing how a system's structures relates to goals; responding to the demands of

the system' organization; knowing the right people to ask for information and where to get resources; and functioning within the formal and informal codes of the social' organizational system. Basic us of Legal Research techniques on the law office.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

- 1 Selects Technology- Judges which set of procedures, books, or machines including computers and their programs, will produce the desired results in legal research. Demonstrating competence in selecting technology includes determining desired outcomes and applicable constraints; visualizing the necessary methods and applicable technology; evaluating specifications; and judging which book or machine will produce the desired results.

## **FOUNDATION SKILLS**

### **BASIC SKILLS**

- 1 Reading- Locates, understands, and interprets written information in prose and documents-including manuals, graphs, and schedules- to perform tasks; learns from text by determining the main idea or essential message; identifies relevant details, facts, and judges the accuracy, appropriateness, style, and plausibility of reports, proposals, or theories contained in legal research.
- 2 Writing-Communicates through ideas, information, and messages in writing; records information completely and accurately; composes and creates documents such as briefs and memorandum.

### **THINKING SKILLS**

- 1 Creative Thinking- Uses imagination freely, combines ideas or information in new ways, makes connection between seemingly unrelated ideas, and reshapes goals in ways that reveal new possibilities in research.
- 2 Decision Making- Specific goals and constraints, generates alternatives, considers risks and evaluates and chooses best alternative, as to how to research a problem.

### **PERSONAL QUALITIES**

- 1 Responsibility- Exerts a high level of effort and perseverance toward goal attainment; works hard to become excellent at doing tasks by setting high standards, paying attention to details, working well and displaying a high level of concentration even when assigned an unpleasant task; and displays high standards of attendance, punctuality, enthusiasm, vitality, and optimism in approaching and completing tasks as assigned.
- 2 Self Esteem- Believes in own self-worth and maintains a positive view of self; demonstrates knowledge of own skills and abilities; is aware of impact on others; and knows own

emotional capacity and needs and how to address them.

- 3 Social- Demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy and politeness in new and on-going group settings; asserts self in familiar and unfamiliar social situations; relates well to others; responds appropriately as the situation requires; and takes an interest in what others say and do.
- 4 Self Management- Assesses own knowledge, skills and abilities accurately, sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; monitors progress toward goal attainment and motivates self through goal achievement; exhibits self-control and responds to feedback unemotionally and non-defensively; and is a “self-starter”.
- 5 Integrity/Honesty- Can be trusted; recognizes when faced with making a decision or exhibiting behavior that may break with commonly-held personal or societal values; understands the impact of violating these beliefs and codes on an organization, self, and other; and chooses an ethical course of action.

## **INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

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The Colorado College, Bachelor of Arts (Political Science), 1978  
Texas Tech University School of Law, Doctor of Jurisprudence, 1982

Mr. Frye was admitted to practice law in the State of Texas in November, 1982, and has practiced law continuously since. He is admitted to practice before the United States Supreme Court, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the Northern, Eastern and Southern Districts of the United States District Courts in Texas. Mr. Frye has handled contested matters all over the state of Texas, with clients and cases in New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

Mr. Frye has received the highest rating from his peers in the legal community, “AV,” in the Martindale-Hubble Legal Directory. His article, “The One Minute Lawyer,” appeared in the Texas Bar Journal and he has been a lecturer at various Texas colleges and universities on legal subjects. He is currently a practicing attorney and an adjunct instructor in Paralegal Studies at Houston Community College. His firm’s website may be accessed at <http://www.lindemanfrye.com>.

## **TEXTS AND/OR REFERENCES**

REFERENCES: Texas Rules of Form: Tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) Edition  
The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation: Seventeenth (17<sup>th</sup>) Edition

MAIN TEXT: Legal Research and Writing for Paralegals: [Latest Edition] , Deborah E. Douchoux

**These books are required for the class. The two reference books must be obtained sometime before the ninth class session. The Main Texas should be obtained before the second class session.**

## **LAB REQUIREMENTS (if any)**

To be assigned as needed by instructor. There will be one WestLaw lab (during class time) for a basic introduction to the WestLaw research system. Date TBA. And, there will be a mandatory guided tour/visit to the Harris County Law Library. Date TBA.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students who require accommodations for disabilities are encouraged to report to Room 102 SJAC, or call (713) 719-6164 to make necessary arrangements. Faculty is only authorized to provide accommodations requested by the Disability Support Services Office.

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY/SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY**

Houston Community College System students are responsible for conducting themselves with honor and integrity in fulfilling course requirements. “Scholastic Dishonesty” includes, but is not limited to: cheating on a test; plagiarism; and collusion.

Cheating on a test includes:

- 1 Copying from another student’s test paper.
- 2 Using materials not authorized by the person giving the test.
- 3 Collaborating with another student during a test without authority
- 4 Knowingly using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or part, the contents of an unadministered test.
- 5 Bribing another person to obtain a test that is to be administered

Plagiarism means the appropriation of another’s work and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one’s own written work offered for credit.

Collusion means the unauthorized collaboration with another person on preparing written work offered for credit.

Due to the stringent level of ethics of financial institution employees a student guilty of scholastic dishonesty may receive a grade of “F” for the course. Students who wish to appeal the penalty should notify the instructional supervisor within thirty working days of the incident. A standing committee appointed by the Dean of Instruction will convene to sustain, reduce, or reverse the penalty. The committee will be composed of two students, two faculty members, and one instructional administrator. A majority vote will decide the appeal.

A recommendation for suspension or expulsion will be referred to the Dean of Students for disposition under Section 203.

**IN THIS CLASS, UNLESS YOU ARE ASSIGNED TO A JOINT ASSIGNMENT WITH ANOTHER STUDENT, YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO CONSULT ANOTHER PERSON WHEN ANSWERING EXAM OR QUIZ QUESTIONS. YOU ARE ALLOWED TO COLLABORATE ON HOMEWORK AND TO CONSULT THIRD PARTIES ON HOMEWORK.**

### **ATTENDANCE AND WITHDRAWAL POLICIES**

A student may be dropped from a course for excessive absences after the student has accumulated absences in excess of 12.5% of the hours of instructions. For this class that would equate to 7 ½ hours of instruction, or five (5) absences.

### **DROPPING:**

The State of Texas has begun to impose penalties on students who drop courses excessively. For example, if you repeat the same course more than twice, you have to pay extra tuition. In 2007, the Texas Legislature passed a law limiting students to no more than **six** total course withdrawals throughout their academic career in obtaining a baccalaureate degree.

To help students avoid having to drop/withdraw from any class, HCC has instituted an Early Alert process by which your instructor will “alert” you and HCCS Student Services of the chance you might fail a class because of excessive absences and/or poor academic performance. You should visit an HCC counselor or HCC Online Student Services to learn about what, if any, HCC interventions might be offered to assist you – tutoring, child care, financial aid, job performance, etc, - to stay in class and improve your academic performance.

You **MUST** visit a counselor or online student services prior to withdrawing (dropping) the class and this must be done prior to **A DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED** to receive a “W” on your transcript. After that deadline, you will receive the grade you are making in the class which will more than likely be an “F”.

Weeks:

Two – Six	Instructors initiate “Early Alert” process – to let students know they may be in danger of failing the course and informing them of actions they need to take.
Seven – Ten	Students Services should send Instructors a report on actions taken or not by students.
Week Twelve	Drop Deadline – TBA
Week Sixteen	Grade Assignment

### **INCOMPLETE**

The grade of “I” (incomplete) is conditional. A student receiving an “I” must arrange with the instructor to complete the course work by the end of the following term (excluding summer). After the deadline, the “I” becomes an “F”. All “I’s” must be changed to grades prior to graduation.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Each student is expected to have read the assigned materials before it is to be discussed in class. In addition, the students are expected to define all terms assigned by the instructor (definitions can be found in Black’s or Ballentine’s Law Dictionary) and be prepared to discuss any and/or all definitions requested by the instructor. There will be assignments given, a midterm exam and final exam.

### **GRADING POLICIES**

An accumulative point system will be utilized to determine the final grade the student will receive for the course. The student’s grade will be determined by adding the total points achieved during the semester from examinations, class presentations, homework, assignments, and class participation.

### **NUMERICAL GRADES RELATED TO LETTER GRADES**

Grades will be awarded in accordance with the number of points earned by the student. The following guide for points-to-grade will be utilized to determine the final assessment.

<b>Total Points Accumulated</b>	<b>Grade Earned</b>
100 to 90	A
89 to 80	B
79 to 70	C

69 to 60  
Below 60 Points

D  
F

### **ASSIGNMENT POLICY**

All required work must be turned in on time in order that the student may benefit from the corrections and study for future examinations. Assigned outside work is DUE ON THE CLASS PERIOD ASSIGNED; unless the instructor clears the circumstances with the student. REGARDLESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCE, LATE WORK MAY BE ASSESSED PENALTY POINTS (for grading purposes) BY THE INSTRUCTOR; this subject will be a matter of instruction discretion.

### **EXAMINATION POLICY**

The instructor will administer all major examinations covering course content materials during the semester. A comprehensive final examination will be administrated at the end of the semester in accordance with the College Final Examination Schedule, which is published in the semester bulletin. All students are required to take a final course examination as a prerequisite to successful course completion.

### **MAKE UP TEST**

Instructor will announce times and dates to make up examination.

### **DISCRIMINATION POLICY**

The Houston Community College System seeks to provide equal educational opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, origin, sex, age, or disability. This policy extends to employment, admission, and all programs and activities supported by the college.

### **DEGREE PLAN**

Students are encouraged to file a degree plan with a Counselor or the Business Technology Department for the certificate and/or degree plan. Please ask your instructor for Degree Plan information or contact the Business Technology Department at 713-718-7808 for information about filing a degree plan.

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Students who are requesting special testing accommodations must first contact the appropriate (most convenient) DSS office for assistance each semester:

### **DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES OFFICES:**

System: 713.718.5165

Central: 713.718.6164 – *also for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and Students Outside of the HCC District service areas.*

Northwest: 713.718.5422

Northeast: 713.718.8420

Southeast: 713.718.7218

Southwest: 713.718.7909

## **COURSE CALENDAR WITH READING ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Summary of Important Information, Events and Classwork Schedule**

#### *Reading Assignments*

You will be reading ALL of the chapters assigned. The following is to give you a “road map” of the order in which you will read and we will cover the chapters and subject matters, with some highlighted “hints” on subjects which merit your special attention. Also, some major assignments are listed, with more details to be announced at the time the assignment is made.

Chapter 13 – Overview of the Research Process – *Delivered Via Email – Legal Research Summary Handout; “Ten Tips” p. 558 Figure 13-3*

Chapter 1 – Finding the Law

*Learning the Language of the Law – Worksheet Homework – Definitions  
Brief Outline of Civil and Criminal Cases*

*Figure 1-2 Figure 5-2*

Chapter 12 – E-Research: Legal Research Using the Internet – *Learning Google, Google Scholar,  
and “Boolean Search Techniques” Online; Section B – Glossary of Terms*

Chapter 2 – The Federal and State Court Systems – *Figure 2-1 Figure 2-3 Figure 2-5*

Chapter 3 – Statutory Law – *Vernon’s and the “Black Statutes”  
Figure 3-3 Figure 3-4 Figure 3-8*

Chapter 4 – Case Law and Judicial Opinions – *Figure 4-3 Figure 4-4 Figure 4-5 Figure 4-8 Figure 9-2*

Chapter 14 – Back to Basics – Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation

*Briefing a Case:* You will brief and prepare Case Briefs on six cases:

Marbury v. Madison	Gideon v. Wainwright
Brown v. Board of Education	Mapp v. Ohio
Roe v. Wade	Arizona v. Gant

Chapter 5 – The Use of Digests, Annotated law Reports and *Words and Phrases* – *Figure 5-2  
Figure 7-9*

Chapter 6 – Encyclopedias, Periodicals, Treatises and Restatements

Chapter 7 – Miscellaneous Secondary Authorities

Chapter 8 – Legal Citation Form – *The Uniform System of Citation (the “Bluebook”);  
Review Section I “Quick Reference for Citations”*

Chapter 9 – Updating and Validating Your Research

Chapter 10 – Special Research Issues – *Figure 10-8*

Chapter 11 – The Digital Library – *Westlaw*

**As noted above, you will also be required to attend the “field trip” to the Harris County Law Library and the Westlaw Training Class.**