

**RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE**  
**ACADEMIC COURSE OUTLINE**  
**LEGAL RESEARCH & WRITING LEGL-121**  
**(REVISED)**

**I. Basic Course Information**

- A. Course Number and Title:           LEGL 121   LEGAL RESEARCH & WRITING
- B. New or Modified Course:           Modified
- C. Date of Proposal:                    Semester: Spring     Year: 2021
- D. Effective Term:                      Fall 2021
- E. Sponsoring Department:            Business & Public Service
- F. Semester Credit Hours:             3.0
- G. Weekly Contact Hours:             Lecture: 3.0  
  Laboratory: 0.0  
  Out of class student work per week: 12.0
- H. Prerequisites/Corequisites:        Role of the Paralegal LEGL-101 and  
  English I ENGL-111  
  **(These pre-requisites are for AAS students only – No  
pre-requisites for Certificate students)**
- I. Laboratory Fees:                      None
- J. Name and Telephone Number or E-Mail Address of Department Chair and Divisional Dean at time of approval:   Tracy Rimple, Chair   [Tracy.Rimple@raritanval.edu](mailto:Tracy.Rimple@raritanval.edu)  
  Patrice Marks, Dean   [Patrice.Marks@raritanval.edu](mailto:Patrice.Marks@raritanval.edu)

**II. Catalog Description**

*Prerequisite: Role of the Paralegal LEGL-101 and English I ENGL-111. These prerequisites are for AAS students only; no prerequisites for Certificate students.* This course involves the in-depth study of legal research and writing, stressing the acquisition of those skills required in a law office engaged in the general practice of law. The course will include utilization of the law library as well as the introduction, transition to and use of computer-based legal research through LEXIS and other legal internet sources.

**III. Statement of Course Need**

- A. This class is a required course for both the Paralegal Studies A.A.S. Degree and the Paralegal Studies Certificate. It is designed to provide students with the skills needed to be competent legal researchers, as well as the ability to write and draft appropriate legal documents. The ability to do both legal research and legal writing are essential tools for those seeking careers in the paralegal field.

- B. This course has no lab component.
- C. This course will transfer into any school with a Paralegal Studies four year degree, which includes Montclair, Thomas Edison, and St. Elizabeth College in New Jersey. It will also transfer to any four-year institution offering an ABA approved paralegal program of study.

#### IV. Place of Course in College Curriculum

- A. Free Elective.
- B. This course meets a program requirement for both the Paralegal Studies AAS Degree and the Paralegal Studies Certificate.
- C. To see course transferability: a) for New Jersey schools, go to the NJ Transfer website, [www.njtransfer.org](http://www.njtransfer.org); b) for all other colleges and universities, go to the individual websites.

#### V. Outline of Course Content

The course is divided into three basic units. The first unit concentrates on legal writing and citation, the second unit on research skills necessary to find the law, and the final unit on utilization of LEXIS and other computer based research tools.

#### UNIT I LEGAL WRITING

- A. Writing in Plain English
  - 1. Active v. Passive Voice
  - 2. Distinguishing Negative Authority
  - 3. Predicate v. Persuasive Writing
- B. Sources of the Law
  - 1. Primary Sources of the Law
  - 2. Secondary Sources of the Law
- C. Court System
  - 1. Federal System
  - 2. New Jersey Court System
- D. Understanding Cases
  - 1. Precedent and Stare Decisis
  - 2. Case of First Impression
  - 3. Parts of Cases
  - 4. Opinions
  - 5. Anatomy of a Case
  - 6. Case Briefing Format & Drafting
  - 7. Citations
    - a. Harvard Blue Book
    - b. Caselaw, Statutes & Regulations
    - c. Secondary Authority
- E. Understanding Statutes (3 hours)
  - 1. Legislative Process
  - 2. Use of Annotated Statutes
- F. Legal Memorandum (2 hours)
  - 1. Parts of a Memo
  - 2. Organization of Work
  - 3. Updating & Validating Research

## **UNIT II LEGAL RESEARCH**

- A. Context of Legal Research
- B. Characteristics of Primary and Secondary Authority
- C. Court Reporters
  - 1. Publication of Decisions
  - 2. Components of Case
  - 3. U.S. Supreme Court Cases/Reporters
  - 4. Lower Federal Court Case/Reporters
  - 5. State Court Cases/Reporters
- D. Shepardizing & Case Verification and Updating
- E. Finding Cases
  - 1. Digests
  - 2. Annotated Reporters
- F. Statutes
  - 1. Federal Statutes
  - 2. New Jersey Statutes
  - 3. Local Laws
  - 4. Interpreting Statutes
- G. Administrative and Executive Publications
  - 1. Federal Regulations
    - a. Federal register
    - b. Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.)
  - 2. New Jersey Regulations
    - a. New Jersey Register
    - b. New Jersey Administrative code (N.J.A.C.)
- H. Court Rules and Practice
  - 1. Federal Rules
  - 2. New Jersey Rules
  - 3. Secondary Sources on Federal Rules
  - 4. Practice/Form Books
- I. Legal Periodicals
  - 1. Types of Legal Periodicals
  - 2. Finding Legal Periodicals
- J. Encyclopedias, Restatements and Treatises
- K. Dictionaries and Directories
  - 1. Legal Dictionaries
  - 2. Attorney Directories

## **UNIT III COMPUTER BASED RESEARCH**

- A. LEXIS
  - 1. Orientation and Operation
  - 2. Retrieving a Document
    - a. Knowing the citation
    - b. Knowing name of parties
  - 3. Searching for Materials
    - a. Choosing a library and file
    - b. Developing a search request

- c. Choosing a display format
- d. Modifying the search
- e. Changing libraries
- f. Star paging
- g. Printing
- h. Focus feature
- 4. Validating your Research Findings
  - a. AUTO-CITE
  - b. Shepard's citation service
  - c. LEXCITE feature

**B. Other Computer & Web Sources**

- 1. Validity & Legitimacy
- 2. Currency

**VI. General Education and Course Learning Outcomes**

**A. General Education Learning Outcomes:**

**At the completion of the course, students will be able to:**

- 1. Produce written work that reflects critical and creative thought. (GE NJ 1)
- 2. Develop the ability to communicate clearly and logically, utilizing both verbal and written skills, in the researching and drafting of legal documents. (GE NJ 1)
- 3. Use technology and computer-based legal research tools to research, analyze and produce legal documents. (GE NJ 4, GE IL)
- 4. Recognize, analyze and evaluate ethical issues in legal research and writing situations. (GE-NJ ER\*)

\*Embedded Critical Thinking

**B. Course Learning Outcomes:**

At completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1. Identify the different sources of law.
- 2. Analyze legal principles, cases and problems through assigned exercises.
- 3. Differentiate between legal sources including American Law Reports, West Digest System and Key Numbers, statutes and related materials, citators, legislative history materials, administrative and executive publications, loose-leaf services, legal encyclopedias, treatises, restatements and periodical literature.
- 4. Identify legal issues, distinguishing questions of law from questions of fact.
- 5. Analyze and interpret case law and statutes.
- 6. Locate the law governing a particular legal problem.
- 7. Shepardize cases and statutes.
- 8. Use the Blue Book.
- 9. Apply the capabilities of computerized legal research, such as Lexis and Westlaw.
- 10. Assess the credibility and accuracy of various internet sources for legal research.

11. Brief legal cases.
12. Write a clear and concise legal memorandum exploring the strengths and weaknesses of various positions.
13. Discuss the ethical considerations related to legal work product done by the paralegal under the delegation and supervision of an attorney.

### **C. Assessment Instruments**

1. Examinations
2. Short Legal Research & Writing Assignments
3. Case Briefing Assignments
4. Research & Writing of Memorandum of Law based on fact patterns.

## **VII. Grade Determinants**

- A. Examinations
- B. Short Research & Writing Assignments
- C. Case Brief Assignments
- D. Memorandum of Law Assignment

Methods for teaching and learning:

- A. lecture/discussion
- B. Lexis computer-based research instruction
- C. in-class group work on research and writing assignments

## **VIII. Texts and Materials**

- A. Textbook: Hames, *Legal Research Analysis & Writing* (Current Edition); Pearson Publications
- B. Access to Lexis Computer-based legal research
- C. Internet and Web-based legal resources

(Please Note: The course outline is intended only as a guide to course content and resources. Do not purchase textbooks based on this outline. The RVCC Bookstore is the sole resource for the most up-to-date information about textbooks.)

## **IX. Resources**

This course will require access to the internet and the RVCC Law Library collection.

