

Community College of Rhode Island
Criminal Justice & Legal Studies Department

Legal Research & Writing

Online Course Syllabus

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Required Text

Legal Research in Rhode Island
By: Daniel J. Donovan, J.D.
Fourth Edition - 2004

Course Summary

This course on Legal Research and Writing (Laws 2090) is a required course for Paralegal Studies Majors. Students are required to have completed Laws 1080 (Introduction to Paralegal Studies) plus 24 credit hours of course work as a prerequisite for the course or to have the permission of the instructor. The course covers legal research tools and techniques including computer-assisted research, and legal research tools available for Federal and Rhode Island law.

The material on basic legal research will cover: the use of primary legal sources (constitutions, statutes, court decisions, and regulations); the use of digests and finding aids in locating relevant court decisions; the use of secondary legal sources (encyclopedias, periodicals, treatises, and annotations); the use of citators such as Shepard's Citations and WestLaw's KeyCite; and instruction in briefing court decisions. The coverage on computer-assisted legal research will include instruction concerning on-line legal research services (WestLaw and LexisNexis), and the use of other computer resources on the Internet. The material on legal research in Rhode Island will include instruction in using the Public Laws of Rhode Island, the General Laws of Rhode Island, Rhode Island court decision reports, and Rhode Island Administrative Agency Regulations, as well as providing information on computer research aids specifically for Rhode Island.

Course Objectives: The objective of the course is to equip the student with the information and skills needed to assist an attorney in a law firm or law department in basic legal research (finding and briefing cases; locating applicable statutes and regulations, and using citators), to provide specific information on Rhode Island legal research materials, and to provide the knowledge and skills that will enable the student working as a paralegal to prepare preliminary drafts of memoranda for the attorney to review and revise.

LexisNexis and WestLaw: These services are the two primary on-line legal research services available to law firms. CCRI has a subscription to the Academic edition of LexisNexis, which is not only available in the libraries, but can also be accessed from home so long as the student has a CCRI student ID that has been activated at the library. Student registered for this class will also be given a WestLaw password to use for the semester. Instructions in the use of WestLaw will also be provided during the course.

Blackboard Learn: As part of the course, we will be using a learning management system called Blackboard Learn. There is a website on Blackboard for this course, which has an e-mail system, a discussion board, video tutors, audio lecture files, a glossary, online tests, and an assignment submission component. Students will be instructed on the use of the tools available in Blackboard that we will be using.

Organization of the Online Course: The online version of Legal Research has been organized into five units consisting of two chapters from the textbook for each unit. Each unit has its own audio files, assignments, and tests. Some units also have video tutors.

Grading Policies: The final grade will be determined based upon the following:

Unit Tests: Five tests (one for each unit) worth 50 points each	-	250 points
Research Assignments: Five assignments worth 20 points each	-	100 points
Final Legal Research Project (during the last 5 weeks)	-	100 points
Legal Memorandum written based on Final Project	-	<u>50 points</u>
Total Possible Points (divide by 5 for grade average)		500 points

About the Instructor: Professor Daniel J. Donovan holds a law degree (Juris Doctor) from Rutgers Law School in New Jersey. Prior to law school, he received a degree in political science from Villanova University in Pennsylvania. He was admitted to practice as a lawyer in Rhode Island in 1972. He was involved in continuing legal education for lawyers for 12 years and authored several books and pamphlets for lawyers including "Title Searching in Rhode Island" and "R.I. Landlord & Tenant Law". Your instructor has taught at CCRI full time since 1989 teaching business law, paralegal studies, and law enforcement courses, and had previously taught part-time at CCRI and other colleges. Your instructor is the author of five textbooks: Legal Research in Rhode Island, Survey of the Law of Property & Estates, Civil Procedure for R.I. Paralegals, Survey of RI Law of Torts, and Introduction to Paralegal Studies.

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Online Course Organization

UNIT I: Introduction

Introduction to Legal Research - Chapter 1
Computer-Assisted Legal Research (CALR) - Chapter 2

UNIT II: Statutory Law

Researching Rhode Island Statutes – Chapter 3
Researching Federal Statutes – Chapter 4

UNIT III: Case Law

Rhode Island Court Decisions – Chapter 5
Federal Court Decisions – Chapter 6

UNIT IV: Digests and Citators

Digests & Case Finding Tools - Chapter 7
Shepard's Citations & West's KeyCite – Chapter 8

Unit V: Regulations and Secondary Legal Materials

Federal & State Administrative Regulations – Chapter 9
A.L.R., Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, and Treatises - Chapter 10