**ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE**

**Social Sciences Division**

**PLS 101 *–* Introduction to Law for Paralegals**

**Course Outline**

**Course Number & Name:**  PLS 101Introduction to Law for Paralegals

**Credit Hours:**  3.0 **Contact Hours:**  3.0 **Lecture:**  3.0 **Lab:** N/A **Other:**  N/A

**Pre- or Co-requisites**:  Grades of “C” or better in ENG 096 and RDG 096 or placement

**Concurrent Courses:** None

**Course Outline Revision Date:**  Fall 2010

**Course Description**: This course provides an introduction to the legal profession in general, the specific role of paralegals, and their relationship to other legal professionals. Students explore the American legal system and are introduced to federal and state courts. The course examines in detail the Code of Professional Ethics and other related standards of proper conduct.

**Course Goals:** Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. discuss and examine codes of professional conduct;
2. identify, define, describe, and explain the role of a paralegal in the legal system;
3. identify, describe, and discuss the functions and sources of law;
4. identify, define, describe, and explain classification of the law;
5. identify, define, describe, and explain the structure of the American court system;
6. identify and describe civil litigation and its alternative;
7. identify, define, and describe civil law;
8. identify, define, and describe criminal law and procedure;
9. identify, define, and describe legal ethics;
10. identify, define, and describe the process of finding and interpreting statutory law;
11. identify, define, and describe the process of finding and interpreting court opinions;
12. identify, define, and describe the process of finding the law;
13. identify, define, and describe the application of the law;
14. identify, define, describe, and explain the process of interviewing a client; and
15. describe and explain the role of computers in the law office and the case management systems.

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)**: Upon successful completion of this course, students should specifically be able to do the following:

1. Discuss and examine codes of professional conduct:

1.1 *discuss and examine judicial conduct;*

1.2 *discuss and examine attorney ethical standards;* and

1.3 *discuss and examine paralegal professionalism*

2. Identify, define, describe, and explain the role of a paralegal in the legal system:

2.1 *define and describe the roles of a paralegal;*

2.2 *define, describe, and explain the different types of a paralegal education;*

2.3 *define and describe the role of paralegal professional associations;*

2.4 *define, describe, and explain the differences between registration, certification and licensure;*

2.5 *describe and explain what paralegals do;* and

2.6 *describe and explain the organizations that paralegals work in and the role of other law office personnel*

3. Identify, describe, and discuss the functions and sources of law:

3.1 *identify, describe, and discuss the functions of law*; and

3.2 *identify, describe, and discuss the sources of law*

4. Identify, define, describe, and explain classification of the law:

4.1 *identify and describe court jurisdictions and compare and contrast federal and state law*;

4.2 *identify, describe, and compare and contrast criminal law and civil law*; and

4.3 *identify, describe, and compare and contrast substantive law and procedural law*

5. Identify, define, describe, and explain the structure of the American court system:

5.1 *compare and contrast trial courts and appellate courts*;

5.2 *compare and contrast federal and state court systems*; and

5.3 *identify, describe, and explain the role of different court personnel*

6. Identify and describe civil litigation and its alternative:

6.1 *identify, define, and describe civil procedure;*

6.2 *identify, define, and describe administrative procedure;* and

6.3 *identify, define, and describe alternative dispute resolution*

7. Identify, define, and describe civil law:

7.1 *identify, define, and describe the different classifications of torts;*

7.2 *identify, define, and describe contract law;*

7.3 *identify, define, and describe property law;* and

7.4 *identify, define, and describe applicable specialty areas of civil law*

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)** (continued):

8. Identify, define, and describe criminal law and procedure:

8.1 *define and describe criminal law;* and

8.2 *define and describe criminal procedure*

9. Identify, define, and describe legal ethics:

9.1 *identify and describe the regulation of attorneys*;

9.2 *identify and describe the regulation of paralegals*;

9.3 *identify and describe the big three ethics violations – confidentiality, conflict of interest, and the unauthorized practice of law*;

9.4 *identify and describe legal issues pertaining to money matters;*

9.5 *identify and describe overzealous legal representation*;

9.6 *identify and describe enforcement of legal and ethical restrictions and sanctions;* and

9.7 *identify, define, and describe tort law of negligence*

10. Identify, define, and describe the process of finding and interpreting statutory law:

10.1 *describe the process of locating the appropriate statute;*

10.2 *describe the format of statutes;*

10.3 *define, describe, and discuss the meaning of ambiguity in statutes;*

10.4 *identify, define, and describe the four basic steps to statutory interpretation;*

10.5 *identify, define, and describe the process of written analysis – the use of IRAC;*

10.6 *identify and describe the process of locating and interpreting administrative regulations*; and

10.7 *describe the process of locating and interpreting constitutions*

11. Identify, define, and describe the process of finding and interpreting court opinions:

11.1 *identify and describe the different types of court opinions;*

11.2 *identify and locate court opinions;*

11.3 *identify and describe the elements of a court opinion;*

11.4 *identify, describe, and prepare a case brief;* and

11.5 *define and describe the power of the courts to make new law*

12. Identify, define, and describe the process of finding the law:

12.1 *identify the legal research process;*

12.2 *identify the five steps of legal research;* and

12.3 *identify the legal research process involving federal statutes and regulations*

13. Identify, define, and describe the application of the law:

13.1 *describe and explain the process of determining the potential outcome of a client’s case;* and

13.2 *describe the format for a written analysis*

14. Identify, define, describe, and explain the process of interviewing a client:

14.1 *demonstrate effective communication skills;*

14.2 *describe the initial client interview;*

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)** (continued):

14.3 *engage in a mock client interview;* and

14.4 *describe the process for interviewing witnesses*

15. Describe and explain the role of computers in the law office and the case management systems:

15.1 *describe a conflicts check;*

15.2 *describe the process of setting up a client case file;*

15.3 *identify and describe timekeeping and billing;*

15.4 *describe law office calendaring and docket control;* and

15.5 *describe computerized litigation support programs*

**Methods of Instruction**: Instruction will consist of a combination of any of the following instructional methods: legal case reviews, lectures, group activities, role play, oral presentations, document drafting, essays, research assignments, films, cable, news and television programs, field trips, and community outreach projects.

**Outcomes Assessment:** Quiz and exam questions (if applicable) are blueprinted to course objectives. Checklist rubrics are used to evaluate non-test type assessment instruments (e.g., observation and reaction papers, oral/written presentations, debates, and projects), for the presence of course objectives. Data collected will be analyzed to provide direction for the improvement of program instruction, viability of class assignments, relevancy of assigned course materials, and evaluation of instructional time spent on specific topics.

**Course Requirements:** All students are required to:

1. Maintain regular and prompt attendance to all class sessions.
2. Complete homework assignments and quizzes (if applicable).
3. Complete all written and oral exercises (scored grading) inside and outside of class as assigned.
4. Complete the Midterm and Final Assessment Activities (e.g., paper, presentation, and/or project).
5. Voluntarily participate in class discussions, class exercises, and group projects.
6. Complete all assessment activities as scheduled.
7. Follow any specific class requirements mandated by the instructor.

**Methods of Evaluation:** Final course grades will be computed as follows:

**% of**

**Grading Components final course grade**

* Attendance/Class Participation  **15 – 25%**

Attendance points will be computed based on the ratio of the number of days attending the course during a regular semester (i.e., 28 contact days). A similar procedure will be used to determine participation points.

* **Notebook containing Course Handouts, Program Summaries** 5 – 10%

**and Table of Contents**

The notebook is a practical exercise designed to assess students’ abilities to organize large volumes of information and allows students to create a reference source of all material related to course objectives for themselves.

* Topic Sentence Outlines **5 – 10%**

Topic sentence outlines are practical exercises designed to enhance students’ reading comprehension and study skills.

* Oral Report **0 – 5%**

The brief oral report is designed to provide students with an opportunity during each class session to report on a paralegal employment position inclusive of the salary, skills required, benefits, and geographical location.

* **Legal Case Brief and PowerPoint Presentation** 15 – 20%

The PowerPoint presentation first requires students to provide an economic, historical, political, and social context for the development of law or legislation addressed in the legal case brief including the role of the paralegal in the particular case. It also provides students with the opportunity to enhance their technological skills in an academic environment.

* **New Jersey Law Diary Exercise**  0 – 5%

The NJ Law Diary exercise is designed to introduce students to the use the NJ Law Diary and Manual, which is a fundamental resource, in a law office.

* **New Jersey Practice Exercise**  0 – 5%

The NJ Practice exercise is designed to introduce students to the use of this publication, if an existing legal form is unavailable or if the area of law is not one regularly practiced by the attorney or legal organization at which the student may be employed.

* **Programs, Lectures, Seminars and/or Workshops** 5 – 10%

Internal or external relevant programs, lectures, seminars and workshops, which are related to the course objectives, are informational for the student, who will be required to prepare brief written summary of the event/program.

**Methods of Evaluation** (continued)**:**

**% of**

**Grading Components final course grade**

* **Extra Credit Opportunities**  5 – 10%
  + Voter registration – The student should provide written evidence of participation in the electoral process.
  + Notary Public – Students are encouraged to research, process, and complete a notary public application for approval to include on their resumes to enhance their marketability.
  + Membership in Paralegal Association of New Jersey (PANJ) – Students are encouraged to join the Paralegal Association of New Jersey to include on their resume to enhance their marketability.

**Note**: The instructor will determine (as appropriate) the specific component(s) appropriate for the course and provide specific weights which lie in the above-given ranges at the beginning of the semester.

**Academic Integrity:** Dishonesty disrupts the search for truth that is inherent in the learning process and so devalues the purpose and the mission of the College. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

* plagiarism – the failure to acknowledge another writer’s words or ideas or to give proper credit to sources of information;
* cheating – knowingly obtaining or giving unauthorized information on any test/exam or any other academic assignment;
* interference – any interruption of the academic process that prevents others from the proper engagement in learning or teaching; and
* fraud – any act or instance of willful deceit or trickery.

Violations of academic integrity will be dealt with by imposing appropriate sanctions. Sanctions for acts of academic dishonesty could include the resubmission of an assignment, failure of the test/exam, failure in the course, probation, suspension from the College, and even expulsion from the College.

**Student Code of Conduct:** All students are expected to conduct themselves as responsible and considerate adults who respect the rights of others. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. All students are also expected to attend and be on time for all class meetings. No cell phones or similar electronic devices are permitted in class. Please refer to the Essex County College student handbook, *Lifeline*, for more specific information about the College’s Code of Conduct and attendance requirements.

Note: Students shall conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. See National Federation of Paralegals Associations, Inc. Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Guidelines for Enforcement.

**Course Content Outline:** based on the text **Introduction to Paralegal Studies** **– A Critical Thinking Approach**, 3rd edition, by Katherine A Currier & Thomas E Eimermann; published by Aspen Publishers.

**Unit Topics to be Covered**

1 Introduction & Course Overview – Visit to the library for an introduction to Virtual Academic Library Environment (VALE); library literacy session and introduction to/overview of West law legal search engine; read the article “Introduction to the Study of Law and the Paralegal Profession” and complete a topic sentence outline of the article

2 Paralegals and the Legal System – Introduction; the definition of a paralegal; paralegal education; paralegal professional associations; registration, certification and licensure; what paralegals do; where paralegals work & law office personnel

3 Functions and Sources of Law – Introduction; defining law; functions of law; sources of law

4 Classification of the Law – Introduction; federal versus state law; criminal versus civil law; substantive versus procedural law

5 Structure of the Court System – Introduction; trial versus appellate courts; federal and state court systems; court personnel

6 Civil Litigation and Its Alternative – Introduction; civil procedure; administrative procedure; alternative dispute resolution

7 Civil Law – Introduction; torts; contracts; property; applicable specialty areas of civil law

8 Criminal Law and Procedure – Introduction; criminal law; criminal procedure

9 Legal Ethics – Regulation of attorneys; regulation of paralegals; the big three – confidentiality, conflict of interest, and the unauthorized practice of law; money matters; overzealous representation; enforcement; tort law of negligence

10 Finding and Interpreting Statutory Law – Introduction; locating the appropriate statute; the format of statutes; ambiguity in statutes; the four basic steps to statutory interpretation; the case of the unhappy customer; written analysis – the use of IRAC; locating and interpreting administrative regulations; locating and interpreting constitutions

11 Finding and Interpreting Court Opinions – Introduction; types of court opinions; locating court opinions; the elements of a court opinion; case briefing; the power of the courts to make new law

**Unit Topics to be Covered**

12 Finding the Law – Introduction; overview of the researching process; the five steps of legal research; research involving federal statutes and regulations; computer-assisted research; the interrelationship of researching materials

13 Applying the Law – Introduction; predicting the outcome in the client’s case; a note on logic; the format for a written analysis; **Homework – Case Brief Exercise**

14 Interviewing – Introduction; communication skills; the initial client interview; interviewing witnesses; **Assessment Activities – Role Play an Interview**

15 Evidence and Investigations – Introduction; rules of evidence; investigation

16 Computers and Case Management – Introduction; performing a conflicts check; setting up a client case file; timekeeping and billing; calendaring and docket control; computerized litigation support programs

Note**:** In PLS 101, the instructor must cover the 16 units listed above minimally in any reasonable order throughout the duration of the semester/term. In addition, the instructor must provide economic, historic, political, and social context for the relevant aspects of the legal process. Suggested assessment activities to be performed at midterm and at the conclusion of the course are listed below.

Suggested Midterm Assessment Activities – Prepare topic sentence outlines of each chapter of the first half of the textbook; answer questions about the film “Erin Brockovich” that provide an overview of the course material covered to date; visit the municipal, superior and federal district courts for the court observation and prepare a reaction paper; visit the municipal, town council or freeholder meeting to observe the legislative lawmaking process; complete the NJ Law Diary exercise; complete NJ Practice exercises

**Suggested Final Assessment Activities** – Prepare topic sentence outlines of each chapter of the last half of the textbook; research economic, historical, social, and political background of a legal case for the creation or development of the relevant law, statute or regulation and present findings; prepare a legal case brief, including the role of the paralegal working the case if applicable, in PowerPoint format