

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### PLGL 223: LEGAL RESEARCH

(3 semester hours)

Online Course

Live Lecture: Tuesday, 7:20 – 10:00 PM

**Instructor:** Professor April Pitts  
**Office Location:** SS 163  
**Office Hours:** Professor Pitts is available by email or phone M – F, during normal business hours. (If an email is sent after 5 pm on a Friday, I will respond the following Monday.)  
**Office Phone:** 903-886-5310 (Let it ring 4 times and your call will be forwarded to my cell phone.)  
**Email:** April.Pitts@tamuc.edu

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### Required Texts

William H. Putman, *Legal Research, Analysis, and Writing*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (ISBN-13: 9780357619445)  
*Bluebook: Uniform System of Citation*, Harvard, 21<sup>st</sup> ed.

### Course Description

This course is designed to aid the beginning student in acquiring and enhancing legal research skills. Topics covered include the techniques of legal research and writing, sources of the law and how each can be found; case analysis, legal citation, and legal bibliography; and ethical obligations of the paralegal in legal research.

### Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to enable the student to:

- Understand and apply legal analysis to specific situations;
- Research case law and statutory law;
- Utilize Westlaw and other resources as a research tools;
- Understand and apply general legal citation rules;
- Draft an office legal memorandum; trial and appellate court briefs; and various types of correspondence.

### Attendance Policy

Attendance at the live lectures is required. If you miss more than 2 classes I reserve the right to drop you from the course.

You are expected to know how to navigate and use the D2L platform by utilizing the trainings made available to you by the University. You are expected to attend and participate in the online live lectures each week. Live lectures are conducted using Zoom. You must prepare for the class

discussion by reading ALL of the material assigned prior to class. If you have a scheduling conflict at the time of the live lectures, please contact me as soon as possible. Recordings of the lectures will be posted each week.

## Grading Policy

**Lectures and Discussion:** This class will be taught using the Socratic Method as well as lecture. You may be called on at any time and are expected to be fully prepared to discuss the assigned reading material during the live lectures and in the online discussions.

**Assignments:** You are also responsible for completing the assignments listed in this syllabus. The assignments may be found within the chapters of the textbook and in handouts I will provide to you. If the assignment is a group assignment, you will be responsible for choosing your group members. A group may consist of 2 to 3 people. Your assignments will be reviewed, graded and returned to you.

All assignments MUST HAVE A COVER PAGE indicating the following: your name, class, chapter and name of the assignment (as it appears in the syllabus), and date the assignment is due. **A DEDUCTION OF 10 POINTS will be assessed to all assignments turned in without a cover page.** You will submit your assignments in the drop box provided to you in the D2L platform.

Case briefs, take-home exams, homework assignments, and any other written work must be submitted before the deadline provided to you. All written work will be graded not only on content, but also on writing style, **including punctuation and grammar.** You are expected to submit case briefs, homework, and take home exams on time. Exceptions will be granted only under the most EXTREME, verifiable circumstances.

You will be required to submit a take-home memorandum during finals week. Any collaboration with other students with regards to the research or substance of the memo will result in a failing grade on the memo.

**Midterm Exam:** The examination will primarily consist of multiple choice, true/false, definition, and short answer questions. Any collaboration with other students with regards to the substance of the exams will result in a failing grade.

Your grade will be calculated according to the following formula:

Attendance/Participation	10 points
Weekly Assignments	30 points
Midterm Exam	20 points
Final Memorandum	30 points
Citation Exam	<u>10 points</u>
<b>Total</b>	100 points

Grade Distribution is as follows:

A = 90-99	C = 70-79	F = 64 and below
B = 80-89	D = 65-69	

*(No extra credit work will be allowed unless given as a bonus to the entire class.)*

## Technology Requirements LMS

All course sections offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce have a corresponding course shell in the myLeo Online Learning Management System (LMS). Below are technical requirements

LMS Requirements:

<https://community.brightspace.com/s/article/Brightspace-Platform-Requirements>

LMS Browser Support:

[https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser\\_support.htm](https://documentation.brightspace.com/EN/brightspace/requirements/all/browser_support.htm)

## Access and Navigation

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or [helpdesk@tamuc.edu](mailto:helpdesk@tamuc.edu).

**Note:** Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

## Communication

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact your Instructor.

## Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace (D2L), please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here:

<https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

## Classroom Etiquette

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct) You are expected to exhibit respect for the instructor and fellow students at all times. Failure to adhere to these policies may result in removal from the online course.

Please be respectful of others' opinions even if you do not agree with them. I look forward to reading a variety of thoughts and opinions and I want you to express yourselves, but please be respectful! Remember all caps means you are yelling.

## **Disability Statement**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring accommodation, please contact:

**Office of Student Disability Resources and Services**  
**Texas A&M University – Commerce**  
**Gee Library**  
**Room 132**  
**Phone: (903)886-5150 or (903)886-5835**  
**Fax: (903)468-8148**  
[StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu](mailto:StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu)

## **Nondiscrimination Statement**

Texas A&M University - Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

## **COVID-19 Statement**

Texas A&M-Commerce recommends the use of face-coverings in all instructional and research classrooms/laboratories.

## **Campus Carry Statement**

Texas Senate Bill - 11 (Government Code 411.2031, et al.) authorizes the carrying of a concealed handgun in Texas A&M University-Commerce buildings only by persons who have been issued and are in possession of a Texas License to Carry a Handgun. Qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are also permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and A&M-Commerce Rule 34.06.02.R1, license holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations. For a list of locations, please refer to <http://www.tamuc.edu/aboutUs/policiesProceduresStandardsStatements/rulesProcedures/34SafetyOfEmployeesAndStudents/34.06.02.R1.pdf> (and/or consult your event organizer). Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses. Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or call 9-1-1.

## Plagiarism Statement

“Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

### According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

1. to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
2. to use (another's production) without crediting the source
3. to commit literary theft
4. to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

### But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

### All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism. If you have retained the essential idea of an original source, and have not cited it, then no matter how drastically you may have altered its context or presentation, you have still plagiarized.” ([www.plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org))

**If you plagiarize, you will receive a ZERO for the assignment in question. I also reserve the right to give you an F in the course or administratively drop you from the course. The matter will be referred to the Office of the Dean of the College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts and/or the Provost.**

*As Instructor, I reserve the right to amend, modify, or alter this syllabus as the situation may require.*

### Tentative Course Reading Assignments

#### Week 1      First Week of Classes

Our class lectures are on Tuesdays. The first day of classes for the semester begin on a Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup>. So, we do not have class this week.

#### Week 2

01/16      First Day of Our Class: Course Overview

#### Week 3

01/23      Chapter 1: Introduction to Legal Principles and Authorities  
Chapter 2: Introduction to Legal Research and Analysis  
Assignments Due:

- Ch. 2 Exercises

#### Week 4

01/30      Chapter 7: Computers and Legal Research  
Chapter 8: Commercial Internet Research  
Assignments Due:

- Ch. 7 Exercises
- Ch. 8 Exercises

#### Week 5

02/06      Chapter 3: Constitutions, Statutes, Administrative Law, and Court Rules – Research and Analysis  
Assignments Due:

- Ch. 3 Exercises

#### Week 6

02/13      Chapter 4: Case Law – Research and Briefing  
Assignments Due:

- Ch. 4 Exercises

#### Week 7

02/20      Chapter 5: Secondary Authority and Other Research Sources – Encyclopedias, Treatises, Annotated Law Reports, Digests, Shepard's  
Assignments Due:

- Ch. 5 Exercises

Chapter 6: Secondary Authority – Periodicals, Restatements, Uniform Laws, Dictionaries, Legislative History, and Other Secondary Authorities

**Week 8**

02/27      **Midterm Exam**

**Week 9**

03/05      Legal Citation

Assignments Due:

- Legal Citation Exercises 1-10 (This set of assignments will be provided to under this week in the course.)

**Week 10**

03/12      **No Class – Spring Break**

**Week 11**

03/19      Chapter 9: Legal Analysis – Key Facts  
Chapter 10: Legal Analysis – Issue Identification

Assignments Due:

- Ch. 9 Exercise
- Ch. 10 Exercise

**Week 12**

03/26      Chapter 11: Legal Analysis – Stating the Issue  
Chapter 12: Case Law Analysis – Is a Case on Point?  
Chapter 13: Counteranalysis

Assignments Due:

- Ch. 11 Exercise
- Ch. 12 Exercise
- Ch. 13 Exercise

**Week 13**

04/02      Chapter 15: The Writing Process for Effective Legal Writing  
Chapter 16: Office Legal Memorandum: Issues and Facts

Assignments Due:

- First Draft of Final Memo Fact Statement
- First Draft of Final Memo Issue

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**Week 14**

04/09 Chapter 17: Office Legal Memorandum: Analysis to Conclusion

**Week 15**

04/16 Individual Memo Appointments with Professor Pitts

**Week 16**

04/23 **Citation Exam**

**Week 17**

04/30 No class. Work on final memos.

**Week 18**

05/07 **Final Memo Due by 11:59 PM**