



I. Course and Instructor

Format: *This class will be conducted entirely online.*

Instructor Information:

Name: Susan Laatsch, J.D.

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Office Hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., **Monday through Friday only**

Course Information:

Course Title: Capstone

Course Code: PAR-289-DS21

Semester: Spring, 2013

Synonym Number: 71365

Credits: 3

Prerequisite: College Level Reading; Legal Research & Writing and substantive paralegal courses strongly recommended

Meeting Times and Days: n/a

Class Location: n/a

Start Date: 01/14/13

Refund Date: 01/30/13

End Date: 05/03/13

Withdraw Date: 04/07/13

Orientation Note: Each of you will be receiving an e-mail from me that will orient you to the course.

Do not hesitate to call me if you are having trouble understanding something; I am more than willing to help you if I can. But please note two things: (1) when you call me, you are reaching me at home; please respect the office hours shown above; and (2) you can try to reach me on my cell phone, but I generally don't pay any attention to it, so you are taking your chances – and your chances aren't very good.

Computer Access:

Online courses require frequent computer use and access to the internet. It is highly recommended that students have a personal computer for use in online courses. If you need to use a computer at your local Colorado Mountain College location, you will be able to do so during open lab hours. Please check with your local site for times. Labs will not be available for Collaborate web conferencing sessions, if included as part of your course, due to the verbal interaction involved.

If you have general questions about online learning, please contact **Colorado Mountain College Online Learning** at 800-621-8559, extension 8341 or virtual@coloradomtn.edu.

No-show reporting and financial aid: If you have not completed your introductory assignment(s) in Canvas by Tuesday, January 22nd you will be reported as a no-show and dropped from the course. The resultant loss in credit hours may cause a reduction and/or cancellation of your financial aid award. Neither financial aid awards nor class reinstatement can occur after this point without significant documented extenuating circumstances. If you have questions or concerns about this please contact your campus financial aid specialist. (www.coloradomtn.edu/web/departments/financial_aid)

II. Course Description:

Emphasizes a synthesis of the information and skills that students learned throughout their paralegal studies.

This is a class that is primarily independent study. It involves your analysis of all aspects of a topic of your choosing (subject to my approval – more on that later) with the goal of preparing a detailed research memorandum.

III. Student Learning Outcomes, Competencies, and Skills:

By the end of this class, you should be able to (1) analyze a complex problem and spot the issues involved; (2) research the relevant issues efficiently; (3) be certain that what you are doing falls within ethical standards; and (4) prepare a research memorandum addressed to me of the topic you are working with. More on that below.

IV. IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction:

1. Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field most closely related to this course.
2. Developing skill in expressing oneself in writing.
3. Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.
4. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

V. Methods and Class Management:

By the nature of this course and its emphasis on writing projects, evaluation (grading) is fundamentally subjective. That said, there will be points assigned to written assignments. There will be no exams or quizzes, but expect a final project (integrating the assignments throughout the course) of no less than 20 pages. Clear and concise writing that complies with spelling and grammar rules is a skill that is vital to functioning as a successful paralegal.

By the end of this class, you should be able to (1) analyze a complex problem and spot the issues involved; (2) research the relevant issues efficiently; (3) be certain that what you are doing falls within ethical standards; and (4) prepare a brief to be submitted to an appellate court.

Because the evaluation system works with a point system, here is the grading scale:

| | | |
|--------------|---|---|
| 90+ | = | A |
| 80-89 | = | B |
| 70-79 | = | C |
| 60-69 | = | D |
| Less than 60 | = | F |

Please note that this grading scale is slightly different than the standard CMC grade format. This course is truly unique in that I don't think it lends itself to the minute type of grading where I am looking for certain specifics. Here it is concepts, analysis and comprehension, not little things. We're looking at the big picture here.

This class will be divided into four Modules. They are as follows:

Module 1: Choice of Your Topic

For this assignment, you will choose the topic that you will be working with throughout this term. It should be something that holds a special interest for you (so that you don't get bored!) and preferably something that is somewhat controversial (gay marriage, for example) so that your research will include cases/articles that deal with the issue both ways. You need to tell me, in memo format, what you want to work on, a brief description of how you intend to proceed and why this is something that interests you. If it is personal, I assure you that anything you tell me will be held in strict confidence. I will review this to determine whether it's feasible and, if it is, I will approve it so that you can proceed. If I think there's a problem, we'll discuss it.

Due Date: 11:59 p.m. Sunday, January 27

Module 2: Detailed Outline

The next step, after I have approved your topic, is to begin to do some fundamental research and prepare a detailed outline of your plan. It should include: a brief statement of the facts that are involved with your topic; some reference to the research that you have done – i.e., case names citations and a brief statement of the holding in that case and whether it supports or argues against your situation; and a tentative conclusion.

Due Date: 11:59 p.m. Sunday, February 24

Module 3: Draft Memorandum

This is the Module that contains the bulk of your work. Address this Memorandum to me and reference your topic. This Memorandum should follow roughly the outline submitted in the second Module. You should include a statement of the facts, the question presented, a detailed discussion of your research pro and con (remember that a research memo for your lawyer needs to discuss problem areas as well as those that favor your position); and a conclusion. I expect a *minimum* of 20 pages.

Due Date: 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, April 17

Module 4: Final Memorandum

After commenting on your draft Memorandum, I will return it to you with my comments, criticisms and suggestions. By incorporating those, you should be able to present a logical, concise, comprehensive and polished final research memorandum.

Due Date: 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, May 1

There will be at least one required discussion, and that will be in the first Module, where you will let your classmates know what you are thinking about choosing as your topic for study. It is a chance for them to give you their thoughts and suggestions (or criticisms) about it and provide any insight they may have on your plan. There may be additional discussions as we move along, as I see fit. We shall see.

If you are taking this class, you should have encountered me previously, and you know that I am somewhat ferocious when it comes to good written English. You do not want to bring out the tigress in me. The **Writing Rubric** for your written assignments and any essay question on any potential exam or quiz is attached as Attachment A. **This is a college level class and good writing not only contains proper spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure, but is also clear, concise and appropriate for the audience to which it is addressed. It is an essential skill for success in your future paralegal career.**

I expect your written work (not your Discussions) to be done in Word or a Word compatible program and uploaded into Canvas. I will then download it, grade it and upload a red-lined version of your work, with my comments and suggestions. **Please do not try to submit any work done in Word Perfect; it will completely lock up my computer.**

Note also that, barring extraordinary circumstances, I will *not* accept any work that is e-mailed to me.

I expect assignments to be turned in on time, i.e. by the due date shown for any given Module. Any late assignment will be graded down by what I feel is fair under the circumstances. That said, I recognize that we are all adults in this class, and sometimes life happens when we least expect it. ***In the event of a legitimate emergency, you must contact me prior to the due date of the assignment so that we can reach a plan so that may be able to submit it late.*** I am generally very understanding if you are ill, if there has been a death of someone close to you, family issues, etc., but must let me know.

Similarly, if you have planned a vacation during the duration of this class, please let me know as soon as possible. We will arrange something that will work for both of us. (I'm not opposed to taking a vacation!)

A note as to the Due Date for any Module: the Due Date is the absolute *last* date on which you can participate in a Discussion and receive credit for it, or to submit any written work. It is **not** intended to be the only date on which you discuss/submit anything for that Module. I do not want everyone's submissions all falling in on me on the last day. Beware the dozing tigress.

NOTICE:

A student judged to have engaged in academic misconduct as defined in the "Academic Policies and Requirements" section of the Colorado Mountain College Student Handbook will, at a minimum, receive a "zero" for the work in question. The student may also be removed from the class, resulting in a failing grade. All student course material may be submitted to Turnitin (or another anti-plagiarism program) at the instructor's discretion. "Academic Expectations," the "Student Code of Conduct and Judicial Process" and more information about academic misconduct can be found in the Student Handbook, online version at: www.coloradomtn.edu/File/student_handbook.pdf.

Students are responsible for course materials from assigned text(s) and reading, lectures, labs, and other assignments as required.

The instructor may alter any, or all, of this syllabus during the semester as the learning environment requires. Students will be notified of changes in the Canvas course shell.

If you have a disability protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and feel you may need classroom accommodations based on the impact of your disability, please contact the Disability Services Coordinator on your campus.

- Edwards and Steamboat Springs: Deb Farmer at 970-870-4450
- Aspen, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs (including Spring Valley), and Rifle: Dr. Anne Moll at 970-947-8256
- Breckenridge, Dillon, Leadville, and Chaffee County: Sandi Conner at 719-486-4200

Students wishing to withdraw from this course must INITIATE the course withdrawal/drop process at the site Registration Office.

This class could be cancelled one week prior to the census date if a sufficient number of students are not enrolled by that date.

VI. Grading System & Options:

Information about grading is available in the Colorado Mountain College catalog. You will receive a grade report for current semester courses at the end of each term. This grade report is mailed to your permanent mailing address. Reports are mailed approximately two weeks after the end of the academic term.

Additional information is available at:

http://catalog.coloradomtn.edu/content.php?catoid=3&navoid=620#Grading_System_and_Options_

VII. Required Course Materials

There is no traditional textbook for this course. Your “text” is the research engines that you have available to you. These include, of course, the ubiquitous Internet generally, Lexis/Nexis (available through the Virtual Library tab on the left hand side of the course home page) and, in my opinion, the most important of all – Westlaw.

As to Westlaw, there are a limited number of passwords available. **If you would like to have a Westlaw password, let me know as soon as possible so that I can get one assigned to you.**

And another note: While sources such as Wikipedia are good for general information, they are *not* acceptable in the legal realm. Use these sources sparingly and only for background on any subject.

VIII. Other Information:

Canvas

Canvas by Instructure is the online learning management system (LMS) used by Colorado Mountain College. You access Canvas via your web browser, i.e.: Mozilla/Firefox, Internet Explorer, Opera, etc. Students, faculty and staff members use the CMC Canvas site to access course announcements, documents, research links and library resources, to receive and deliver completed assignments, take tests, and to communicate with each other via email, discussion boards and chat.

For instructions on How to Access your Canvas Account, Canvas How To's, and who to contact for all your Canvas questions and support needs, please visit: www.coloradomtn.edu/web/departments/faq-for-students.

Student Email

All CMC students enrolled in a credit-based class (0.5 hour credit class or more) will be assigned a CMC student email address through Google mail (Gmail). Please allow at least 48 hours after you register for this account to be activated. For more information on your CMC student email account, please visit the Student page of the MyCMC Portal: mycmc.coloradomtn.edu.

A Few Words About Microsoft Word

Microsoft Word is the standard word processing program for the majority of CMC instructors. Students without Microsoft Word may use the free software from www.OpenOffice.org to create Word-compatible documents. The program also includes spreadsheet, presentation, drawing, and database applications. The program is available for Windows, Macintosh, or Linux operating systems. Microsoft Word is installed on computers available in computer labs at CMC locations.

Virtual Library Information

<http://library.coloradomtn.edu/content.php?pid=349163&sid=2891178>

The Virtual Library has its doors open 24/7, providing access to thousands of online journals and newspapers, books and art images, downloadable videos and audio books, career resources and practice tests.

If you need help with the Virtual Library, email reference@coloradomtn.edu or call us at 800-621-8559, extension 2926.

Colorado Mountain College Online Learning

Information is available at: www.coloradomtn.edu/online_learning/.

Attachment A

Writing Rubric

The following is what I expect:

Your work should be clear and focused. It should hold my attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich your central theme. Draw from personal experiences when appropriate.

The organization should enhance and showcase your central theme. The order, structure or presentation of information should be compelling and move me through the text.

The essay should speak to me in a way that is individual and engaging. It should be crafted in a way that reflects the purpose for writing it.

The words should convey the intended message in a precise, interesting (remember that I have to read all of these) and natural way.

The writing has an easy flow, rhythm and cadence. Sentences should be well built, with strong and varied structure.

I enjoy reading amusing assignments when it is appropriate. I like to get a good giggle from your work now and then. Just keep it clean.

The essay should demonstrate a good grasp of standard writing conventions (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, paragraphing) and effective use of them. ***I emphasize this – as I mentioned above, I am very particular about a fundamental ability to write a grammatically correct, coherent, error-free sentence!***

And a few practical tips here as well:

- Your essays will be graded on their content, but the rubric above will be applied. It doesn't help you to say the greatest thing if it's buried in some obscure place in your work.
- Use a readable font, and please use a font size that is easy to read. My eyes are not young any longer, and if I have print something out and read it using a magnifying glass (it has happened), I will not be a very happy professor. My preference is Arial, 12 point, full-justified, but that's not required. As long as I can read it easily on the computer, you will be fine (but a word to the wise)
- Almost all written assignments should be roughly 2 pages long, so use that as a general measurement –some should be longer or shorter, but that will be on an assignment-by-assignment basis.