

Community College of Rhode Island  
Criminal Justice & Legal Studies Department

# Legal Research & Writing

## Course Syllabus

**Instructor: Dr. Daniel J. Donovan**  
**Room 3081 Phone: 825-2315**  
**E-Mail: Ddonovan@ccri.edu**  
**Website: <http://www.donovanlegalstudies.com>**

### 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 three areas: (1) basic legal research tools and techniques including computer-assisted research; (2) legal research tools available for Rhode Island law; and (3) legal writing mechanics and techniques.

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 Lexis-Nexis), 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. The material on legal writing will cover basic techniques as applied to drafting memoranda.

## **Legal Research & Writing Syllabus Continued:**

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 shepardizing), 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.

Recommended Reference Book: All students will need to have a good legal dictionary for this course and other paralegal courses. It is recommended that you purchase Black's Law Dictionary, (Paperback Version), but the smaller Baron's Law Dictionary by Steven Gifis could also be used.

Legal Libraries: There are law libraries or legal collections available to students at Roger Williams University (undergraduate) in Bristol, Providence College Library, University of Rhode Island Library in Kingston, and the State Law Library at the Licht Judicial Complex on Benefit Street in Providence. It is recommended that all students make one or more trips to the State Law Library (it is open on Saturdays) and become familiar with its collection (and the extensive collection of CD-ROM research material).

Lexis-Nexis 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 Lexis-Nexis, 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. Instructions in the use of WestLaw will also be provided during the course.

WebCT Course Supplement: As part of the course, we will be using a program called WebCT, which stands for Web Course Tools. There is a website on WebCT for this course, which has an internal e-mail system, a discussion board, an assignment submission component, and a calendar. Students will be instructed on self-registration for WebCT and its use for the course.

Grading Policies: The final grade will be determined through two tests on legal research (50%), two case briefing assignments (10%), lab assignments (10%), and a two-part legal research and writing project requiring the production of a memorandum (30% combined). All tests and assignments must be completed to receive a grade for the course. The legal research and writing project is in two parts: the first entails a major research assignment on a hypothetical client problem (to be provided to the student); the second part entails writing a law office memorandum based on the legal research conducted. As part of the course, time will be set aside each week for work on the "lab" assignments and the research project in an electronic classroom.

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### Course Topics

1. Introduction to Legal Research - Chapter 1
2. Computer-Assisted Legal Research (CALR) - Chapter 2
3. Research in the Public Laws & the General Laws of Rhode Island - Chapter 3  
Researching Federal Statutory Law; United States Code - Chapter 4
4. Researching Case Law (Federal & State) - Chapters 5 & 6  
Citation of Cases; Briefing Court Decisions
5. Case Finders and Digests; R.I. Digest - Chapter 7
6. Shepard's Citations and WestLaw's KeyCite -Chapter 8
7. Code of Rhode Island Rules  
Federal Register & Code of Federal Regulations - Chapter 9
8. Research Using the Annotated Law Reports Series  
Secondary Sources: Encyclopedias and Treatises - Chapter 10

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**Course Information and Requirements**

Grading Policy: For this course, an average of 90 and above will be an "A"; 80 to 89 a "B"; 70 to 79 a "C", and 60 to 69 a "D". A grade average below "60" is a failing grade.

Attendance Policy & Grading: The instructor will take attendance for all class sessions. Attendance will be used in grading in two ways. First, if a student's grade is borderline between two grade levels, a good attendance record in that case would result in the student receiving the higher of the two grades. Second, any student who misses more than three weeks worth of the scheduled class sessions will have their final grade for the course reduced by one full grade level (for example from a "B" to a "C"), and any student who misses five weeks worth of the scheduled class sessions will receive a withdrawal for the course. Each evening class session, which meets only once a week, will be counted as two classes. If a student leaves an evening class after a break, this will be counted as one absence.

Voice Mail & E-Mail: If a student needs to get in touch with the instructor, he or she may leave a voice mail message at 825-2315. The instructor's office is in Room 3081 at the CCRI Warwick Campus. The instructor's e-mail address is: [ddonovan@ccri.edu](mailto:ddonovan@ccri.edu). Use of e-mail is encouraged as the instructor can access e-mail at home at any time.

Classroom Behavior: It is the responsibility of the instructor to protect the learning environment in the classroom from disruptive behavior for the benefit of all of the students in the class. Examples of disruptive behavior include: sleeping in class, talking between students or passing notes, excessive or chronic lateness, grandstanding, use of pagers, cell phones, or beepers (which shall be turned off or set on vibrate during class), verbal or physical threats, and derogatory language. The instructor reserves the right to ask a student to leave class due to disruptive behavior, eject a student from the course, or mark down a student's grade as may be appropriate for the circumstances in the sole discretion of the instructor.

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.