

## **Course Description**

### **PLA2003 | Fundamentals of Law | 3.00 credits**

This course provides students with an overview of the American legal system. It explores the basic concepts of law in society including the different sources of law. The federal, state and county court systems are examined along with judicial interpretation of the law. The course also covers the distinctions between procedural and substantive law, civil versus criminal and a court of equity and a court of law. The roles of paralegals are discussed with an emphasis given in their professional relationships, functions, career opportunities and ethical obligations. Prerequisite: ENC1101; Corequisites: LCO0999 and PLA2931

### **Course Competencies:**

**Competency 1:** The student will understand the structure of the legal system in the United States by:

1. Identifying the role of law in society
2. Describing the historical development of law in the U.S. and explain the meaning of common law and stare decisis
3. Identifying the various schools of legal thought and their present-day significance
4. Explaining the law's different foundations, such as constitutional, statutory, judicial, and administrative sources
5. Distinguishing the differences between procedural and substantive law
6. Describing the remedies provided by a court of law and a court of equity
7. Distinguishing the difference between the three-tier court system for the federal and state court systems.
8. Analyzing the structure of the local court system
9. Explaining the jurisdictional limits in federal and state courts
10. Distinguishing between civil and criminal proceedings and their different burdens of proof
11. Discussing the roles of judges, attorneys, and paralegals

**Competency 2:** The student will understand the boundaries and dynamics of the paralegal career field by:

1. Explaining the duties and responsibilities that can be delegated to paralegals within various specialty fields of law
2. Describing the confidential nature of the legal profession and the ethical standards required of lawyers and paralegals
3. Explaining the difference between a generalist and specialist paralegal program
4. Describing the importance of systems, forms, and checklists in paralegal employment
5. Identifying potential areas of employment in both the public and private sectors
6. Identifying and discuss paralegal associations, licensing issues, certification programs, and other support networks and mechanisms
7. Analyzing and applying the different Codes of Ethics for the ABA, NALA, and NFPA to real-life hypothetical scenarios involving paralegals' ethical responsibilities
8. Comparing the titles used to describe paralegals
9. Listing the two significant national paralegal associations and explain the distinctions between them
10. Describing the paralegal job market and current trends

**Competency 3:** The student will develop critical thinking and legal analysis skills by:

1. Discussing legal research and writing principles
2. Identifying the different parts of a legal case, including the citation of the case
3. Analyzing and deciphering judicial interpretation of case law
4. Explaining the case briefing method, including summarizing the facts in a case, the legal issues before the court, the conclusion, and legal analysis of a judicial opinion
5. Demonstrating the fundamental principles of judicial interpretation, including statutory interpretation, stare decisis, and basic legal terminology
6. Demonstrating how to identify, classify, and summarize legal facts and issues

7. Preparing case briefs utilizing legal analysis and critical thinking skills

**Competency 4:** The student will understand the primary areas of law practice and the role of the paralegal in such areas by:

1. Explaining the role of the paralegal in the following practice areas: criminal law, torts, family law, real estate, contracts, estates and trusts, corporate law, bankruptcy, litigation, and administrative law
2. Describing the litigation process
3. Explaining the different steps in litigation
4. Identifying alternative dispute mechanisms and their role in the legal system

**Competency 5:** The student will understand the procedure for interviewing a client by:

1. Identifying the background information needed before the interview
2. Developing a checklist for the interview
3. Discussing what questions to ask
4. Explaining how to ask the questions
5. Exercising proficiency in conducting the interview

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Communicate effectively using listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
- Formulate strategies to locate, evaluate, and apply information
- Create strategies that can be used to fulfill personal, civic, and social responsibilities