

# University of North Texas at Dallas

## FALL 2015

## SYLLABUS

### CJUS 4800D: SPECIAL PROBLEMS: RESEARCH IN LEGAL ISSUES (3 Hrs)

School of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Department of Criminal Justice

#### **INSTRUCTOR:**

*Gretchen Hackard, J.D., M.S.*

*Founders Hall (DAL2) 317*

*972-338-1840*

[Gretchen.hackard@untdallas.edu](mailto:Gretchen.hackard@untdallas.edu)

Office Hours: MW 1-3:45 and by appointment

Virtual Office Hours: TR 1-2 and by appointment

#### **Contacting Dr. Hackard:**

For course-related questions and information (e.g., grades, questions about an assignment or exam, etc.), you must use Blackboard to contact me. Course-related messages that are sent to my general UNT Dallas email address will not be answered.

For non-course information (e.g., career information, pre law advising, internship opportunities, etc.), you may use Blackboard messaging or the email address in my contact information above.

I do not check phone messages remotely, so if you call and leave a message, it is possible I will not get it for a few days.

**Classroom Location: Founders Hall (DAL2) 240**

**Class Meeting Days & Times: T 7:00-9:50 PM**

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#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

SPECIAL PROBLEMS: Research in Legal Issues.

Prerequisites: None

Co-requisites: None

Required Text: *None, but students must have internet access*

Recommended Text and References: as assigned

#### **Course Goals or Overview:**

This course is intended to help students develop an understanding of types of authorities they may encounter in legal research, as well as develop skills to critically evaluate those sources. Students will be challenged to develop critical thinking skills that include an understanding of inductive and deductive reasoning and logical fallacies. Students will be assigned tasks that are designed to fine-tune their close reading, logic, and argument skills.

**Learning Objectives/Outcomes:** At the end of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Identify and locate primary vs. secondary source materials in legal research
2. Recognize the distinctions between “controlling” authorities and “persuasive” authorities

3. Critically evaluate source materials to apply to or distinguish from new circumstances
4. Demonstrate understanding of critical thinking concepts such as deductive and inductive reasoning and logical fallacies
5. Demonstrate general improvement in logic and analytical abilities

To accomplish these objectives, the class will incorporate a combination of readings/case studies, videos, logic games and puzzles, journals, writing exercises, quizzes, in-class group work, and a pre- and post-test to evaluate improvement during the semester.

### Course Outline

This schedule is approximate and is subject to change by the instructor. Any changes to this schedule will be communicated in class and via announcements or messages in Blackboard.

TIMELINE	TOPICS
Weeks 1-4 (through 9/14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to course</li> <li>• Introduction to understanding legal research (as compared to academic research)</li> <li>• Basic review of court system</li> <li>• Understanding Attention vs. Judgment</li> <li>• Understanding Opinion vs. Fact</li> <li>• Understanding Primary vs. Secondary authorities</li> <li>• Understanding Controlling vs. Persuasive authorities</li> </ul>
	QUIZ 1
Weeks 5-10 (through 10/27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduction to Deductive and Inductive Reasoning</li> <li>○ Introduction to Logical Fallacies</li> <li>○ Careful Reading</li> <li>○ Understanding Structure of Legal Opinions/Case Law</li> <li>○ Validating Authorities</li> </ul>
	QUIZ 2
Weeks 11-16 (through 12/8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding "Evidence"</li> <li>▪ Application to specific case (building arguments, distinguishing similar but opposing cases, using supporting validated authorities)</li> </ul>
	QUIZ 3

### Course Evaluation Methods

This course will utilize the following instruments to determine student grades and proficiency of the learning outcomes for the course.

- Pre-test/post-test – ungraded, but used to assist in determining whether learning outcomes in logic and analytical abilities were achieved
- Weekly journal entries
- Quizzes (given online)
- Short writing assignments
- Final paper
- Self-assessment

#### Grading Matrix:

Weekly Journals – 15%  
 3 quizzes – 15% each (45% total)  
 Short writing assignments – 10%  
 Final paper – 20%  
 Self-assessment – 10%

**Grade Determination:**

- A = 90% or better
- B = 80 – 89%
- C = 70 – 79%
- D = 60 – 69%
- F = less than 60%

**Incompletes:**

*Pursuant to University policy, incompletes will not be given unless ALL of the following conditions have been met:*

- (1) the student has completed 3/4 of the class*
- (2) the student is currently passing the course, and*
- (3) the request for an incomplete is pursuant to a University-recognized reason (medical emergency or military deployment).*

**JOURNALS:**

Each week, you will be assigned a video or problem in Blackboard. After you review the video or problem, write in your journal about what you observed or learned. What kinds of things are challenging you this week? How was the outside material helpful to your understanding? In what ways are you learning to think differently or take different approaches to new situations? You are encouraged to go beyond these questions!

**SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:**

During the class you will be given several short writing assignments to apply the concepts that are being learned. You may be asked to “brief” a court case, to present opposing arguments, to locate helpful sources, or other similar applications. These assignments are designed to be about a page in length, if not shorter. Grading is based on demonstrated understanding of what is being asked of you (e.g., if I ask you to brief a case, you are able to do so; if I ask you to locate helpful sources, you are able to weed out unhelpful ones). Some of the assignments will be given for you to complete in class; others will be due the following week.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT:**

Because “critical thinking is thinking that assesses itself” ([criticalthinking.org](http://criticalthinking.org)), one measure of determining progress is whether YOU believe you are making progress. When you rely on grades that are given to you, you do not develop your own sense of learning improvement. Consider whether over the course of the semester you have learned to communicate more clearly, listen more intently, read more carefully, ask questions more pointedly, and work with others more openly. At the end of the semester, you should be prepared to argue your case in writing, using some of the strategies learned in class, for the grade you think you deserve in the class. This will be due on December 8.

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**Students with Disabilities (ADA Compliance):**

*The University of North Texas Dallas faculty is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students' with documented disabilities are responsible for informing faculty of their needs for reasonable accommodations and providing written authorized documentation. Grades assigned before an accommodation is provided will not be changed as accommodations are not retroactive. For more information, you may visit the Student Life Office, Suite 200, Founders Hall (Building 2).*

**Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness Policy:**

*The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SETE to be an important part of your participation in this class.*

**Academic Integrity:**

*Academic integrity is a hallmark of higher education. You are expected to abide by the University's code of Academic Integrity policy. Any person suspected of academic dishonesty (i.e., cheating or plagiarism) will be handled in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. Refer to the Student Code of Academic Integrity for complete provisions of this code. In addition, all academic work submitted for this class, including exams, papers, and written assignments should include the following statement:*

**On my honor, I have not given, nor received, nor witnessed any unauthorized assistance that violates the UNTD Academic Integrity Policy.**

**Bad Weather Policy:**

*On those days that present severe weather and driving conditions, a decision may be made to close the campus. In case of inclement weather, call the UNT Dallas main voicemail number (972) 780-3600 or search postings on the campus website [www.untDallas.edu](http://www.untDallas.edu). Students are encouraged to update their Jag Alert contact information, so they will receive this information automatically.*

**Diversity/Tolerance Policy:**

*Students are encouraged to contribute their perspectives and insights to class discussions. However, offensive & inappropriate language (swearing) and remarks offensive to others of particular nationalities, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, religious groups, genders, or other ascribed statuses will not be tolerated. Disruptions which violate the Code of Student Conduct will be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities as the instructor deems appropriate.*

**Use of Blackboard:**

*If you are contacting me about course-related questions or information, you must use Blackboard messaging. In addition, I utilize Blackboard extensively to communicate announcements, provide additional readings of interest, facilitate discussion topics, email individual students, and for other reasons as may be appropriate during the semester. It is your responsibility to check Blackboard regularly throughout the semester.*

**Use of Cell Phones, Laptops & other Electronic Gadgets in the Classroom:**

*I do not prohibit the use of electronics in the classroom as a general rule. I trust that most students are using these devices to further their education and for educational purposes during class. However, if it comes to my attention that these devices are creating a distraction to yourself or to other students, I reserve the right to change this policy by communicating such a change in class and through Blackboard.*

**Food & Drink in the Classroom:**

*I do not prohibit food or drink the classroom during classes, but as a courtesy to your fellow test takers, please do not bring food or drink during exams. If this becomes a distraction, I reserve the right to change this policy by communicating such a change in class and through Blackboard.*

**Disruptions:**

*I reserve the right to ask anyone who is creating a disruption during class to leave the room. Please be respectful of your fellow students. Come to class on time and stay until class ends. Students constantly coming into and leaving the classroom during class create a distracting environment for the other students as well as the instructor. While classroom questions and discussion are encouraged and assessed, continually interrupting lectures with commentary may also be disruptive.*



**Legal Questions:**

*In my capacity as the instructor of record for this course, it would create a potential conflict of interest if I were to render legal opinions regarding specific circumstances. As such, if you have specific questions of a legal nature, please seek appropriate legal advice. For those meeting certain qualifications, the Dallas Volunteer Attorney Program is a good way to get affordable help (<http://dallasvolunteerattorneyprogram.org/>). Alternatively, you can get referrals from the Dallas Bar Association (if you have a legal issue that arises within Dallas County - <http://www.dallasbar.org/lawyerreferralservice>) or through the State Bar of Texas referral service for legal issues arising outside of Dallas County (<http://www.texasbar.com>). There are also clinical programs and law libraries at the courthouse and SMU and Texas A&M University law schools that might have resources available to assist you. Once the clinical programs are up and running at the UNT Dallas College of Law, I expect they will be available as well.*