

Athabasca University

LGST 249 Legal Literacy

Detailed Syllabus

Welcome to LGST 249 Legal Literacy, a three-credit course at Athabasca University. This course is designed to help make the law and its institutions more understandable and accessible to people without professional legal education. It will help those facing legal issues to learn and assert their legal rights and to learn the rights and obligations of others. This course supports efforts to make law and legal systems responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens. Legal Literacy will assist everyone to make use of the law in pursuing their legitimate interests.

Course objectives

After completing LGST 249 you should be able to

- identify the basic structures of the law and legal institutions in your jurisdiction
- describe the main elements of the legal system in your jurisdiction and how they relate to each other
- describe the most common legal processes used in your jurisdiction and identify the major steps taken in each of them
- recognize when words are being used in a different way for legal purposes and know how to find their meaning when that happens
- find laws in your jurisdiction that are relevant to your needs
- read and analyze laws and other legal materials to grasp their basic meaning
- use the results of your knowledge and research into law to assert your rights and interests

Course Outline

Unit 1 What is legal literacy?

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 1 you should be able to:

1. describe the relationship between literacy and legal literacy
2. compare and contrast legal literacy and other literacies
3. explain the relationship of legal literacy to other concepts related to law in society
4. list the objectives of legal literacy

Readings:

- 1.1 Literacy and law
- 1.2 Legal literacy
- 1.3 Other literacies
- 1.4 Related concepts
- 1.5 Legal literacy goals & objectives

Unit 2 Legal Structures

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 2 you should be able to:

1. give examples of different levels of legal concepts
2. describe how legal structures constitute the state
3. explain the concept of framing
4. describe the institutional structure of courts
5. explain the concept of jurisdiction

Readings:

- 2.1 Critical perspective
- 2.2 Conceptual structures
- 2.3 Framing
- 2.4 Institutional structures
- 2.5 Jurisdiction

Unit 3 Legal Systems

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 3 you should be able to:

1. explain what is meant by social systems and how that concept has been criticized
2. describe some features of the relationship between legal systems and society
3. describe the doctrine of precedent and explain how it affects court systems
4. list some of the functions of court and administrative systems
5. explain what is meant by alternative systems and give examples of them
6. research and describe the legal systems of a particular territorial jurisdiction

Readings:

- 3.1 Critical perspective
- 3.2 Functions of legal systems
- 3.3 Court systems
- 3.4 Administrative systems
- 3.5 Alternative systems

Unit 4 Legal Processes and Procedures

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 4 you should be able to:

1. explain some critiques of legal processes and procedures
2. list some differences between adversarial and inquisitorial processes
3. describe the main steps of a civil litigation process and explain the functions of each step
4. describe the main steps of a criminal legal process and explain the functions of each step
5. explain what is meant by an administrative justice process and describe its main features
6. research and describe a legal process in a legal jurisdiction

Readings:

- 4.1 Critical perspective
- 4.2 Civil litigation process
- 4.3 Civil procedure
- 4.4 Criminal litigation process
- 4.5 Criminal procedure
- 4.6 Administrative processes and procedures

Unit 5 Legal Language

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 5 you should be able to:

1. list some characteristics of legal language that have been criticized
2. describe some features of legal discourse
3. explain the history of legal vocabulary
4. explain the concept of plain legal language
5. list some improvements in legal language that can make it more understandable
6. give some examples of language rights

Readings:

- 5.1 Critical perspective
- 5.2 Legal discourse
- 5.3 Legal vocabulary
- 5.4 Plain legal language
- 5.5 Language rights

Unit 6 Legal Research

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 6 you should be able to:

1. explain the concepts of crown copyright and open access
2. describe the different types of legal research
3. explain the concepts of legal authority and precedent
4. describe the elements of a system of legal citation
5. list the principal research tools for finding legislation and court decisions
6. find legislation, court decisions and other materials relating to a legal issue

Readings:

- 6.1 Critical perspective
- 6.2 Types of legal research
- 6.3 Law libraries
- 6.4 Legal citation
- 6.5 Legal research strategy
- 6.6 Legal research online

Unit 7 Legal Interpretation

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 7 you should be able to:

1. explain what is meant by a conservative and a liberal approach to legal interpretation by judges
2. describe a method for reading legislation and explain the legal context in which specific legislation operates
3. explain what is meant by the modern principle of interpretation
4. describe a method for reading cases and explain the legal context in which a specific case may be considered a precedent
5. explain the concepts of reasons for decision, *obiter dicta*, and dissent
6. describe a method for reading contracts and explain the legal rights and obligations in a specific contract
7. explain the parol evidence rule and the principle of *contra proferentem* in relation to contract interpretation

Readings:

- 7.1 Critical perspective
- 7.2 Reading statutes
- 7.3 Reading cases
- 7.4 Reading contracts

Unit 8 Legal Communication

Learning objectives - After completing Unit 8 you should be able to:

1. describe the role of deductive, inductive, and analogical reasoning in legal thought
2. explain the difference between factual and legal issues
3. explain the concepts of facts, evidence, burden of proof and standard of proof
4. describe the principal types of legal issues and the methods of argument appropriate to them
5. describe the basic structure of a written argument or submission
6. list some guidelines for making an oral legal argument
7. write a basic legal submission

Readings:

- 8.1 Critical perspective
- 8.2 Legal proof
- 8.3 Legal argument
- 8.4 Legal writing
- 8.5 Legal speech

Assessment in this Course and Exam Format

To receive credit for *Legal Studies 249*, you must complete five written assignments and a final exam. The weightings for each item are as follows:

Activity	Credit Weight	Date Due
Assignment 1	10% of final grade	End of Units 1 and 2
Assignment 2	10% of final grade	End of Unit 3
Assignment 3	10% of final grade	End of Unit 4
Assignment 4	10% of final grade	End of Unit 5
Assignment 5	25% of final grade	End of Units 6, 7, and 8
Final Examination	35% of final grade	End of all Units
Total	100% of final grade	

Final Exam: The final examination is worth **35%** of your total course mark. It is a closed book exam written in person (not online) over 3 hours. By arrangement with the University it may be written anywhere in the world. Part A of the exam consists of 15 multiple choice and true/false questions covering the whole course similar to those in the self-study quizzes (2 marks each). Part B consists of 6 questions each to be answered in a paragraph that are drawn from the learning objectives listed for the units in the course (5 marks each). Part C requires you to prepare a written submission similar to Assignment 5 (40 marks). See [exam procedures](#) for information on how to book your exam and other questions you may have.

You will have up to three hours to write the final exam, although many students do not need all of that time. No notes, texts, or other aids may be taken into the examination room. Be sure to write legibly; an exam that is not legible cannot be graded. Be sure that you have submitted all other course assignments before you write the final exam.

When you feel you are ready to take the exam you may request it following the procedures outlined in the Student Information section under the heading “Procedures for Applying for and Writing Exams” and in the current Athabasca University *Calendar*. Allow at least 15 business days between submission of your request (longer if you submitted your request by postal mail) and the date on which you wish to take the exam.

Athabasca University offers excellent online resources for students who encounter problems in studying for an exam. Check the counselling resources if you experience any exam anxiety before writing the final exam. See, for example, “Mastering Exam Anxiety,” which is found online.

If you are not satisfied with your grade on the final exam, or you receive a grade below 50%, you are urged to re -study the material and write a supplemental exam. Should you write a supplemental exam, your official score for the final exam will be the higher of the two grades received.