

GATEWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Course Proposal Form

Course Title: Introduction to Legal Studies Department: Social Studies

Course Rationale: The *Introduction to Legal Studies* course provides students with a foundational understanding of the legal system, its principles, and its role in society. Law shapes how individuals and institutions interact, governs rights and responsibilities, and maintains social order. This course aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills to critically analyze legal issues, understand the sources of law, and appreciate the impact of law on everyday life.

By exploring key legal concepts, processes, and terminology, students develop analytical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and effective communication skills essential for engaging with legal matters. This course also fosters awareness of ethical considerations and the importance of justice in diverse social contexts. Ultimately, *Introduction to Legal Studies* prepares students for further studies in law-related fields and informed citizenship in a complex, law-governed world

PLEASE SELECT: ☒ New Course * ☐ Revised Course

If this course is replacing an existing course in the curriculum, please indicate below:

Course Name: _____

Course Number: _____

Course Offering Information

Please Select: Full Year Course * Semester Course

If semester course, when will it be offered: Fall and Spring

Projected Number of Sections to be Offered: 1 per semester

COURSE DESIGN (Please Complete All Fields for Each Unit of Study)

UNIT OBJECTIVES (Essential Learning/ Understanding) What will students understand and/or be able to do as a result of the unit? <i>Indicate any and all applicable State Standards/Anchors.</i>	KNOWLEDGE and SKILL What is the key knowledge and skill needed to develop the desired unit objectives?	PREREQUISITE REQUIREMENTS If there are no prerequisite requirements indicate "NA". If another course is a necessary prerequisite, be sure to list the course name/level.	ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE What evidence will be collected to determine whether or not the understandings have been developed, the knowledge and skill attained, and the State Standards met? <i>(Example: Performance Task, Project, etc.)</i>	LEARNING ACTIVITIES Briefly describe the sequence of learning activities and teaching for each unit.
Understand the key functions and role of law in society.	See attached document	NA	See attached document	See attached document
Recognize various sources of law, including statutes, case law, and administrative regulations.	See attached document		See attached document	See attached document

Gain foundational knowledge of the U.S. legal system and its institutions.	See attached document		See attached document	See attached document
Comprehend core areas of law such as constitutional law, criminal law, civil law, and torts.	See attached document		See attached document	See attached document
Develop critical thinking and analytical skills through case studies and legal problem-solving exercises.	See attached document		See attached document	See attached document

Standard - 5.1.12.A Analyze the sources, purposes, functions of law, and how the rule of law protects individual rights and promotes the common good Standard - 5.1.12.C Evaluate the application of the principles and ideals in contemporary civic life. Liberty / Freedom Democracy Justice Equality Standard - 5.1.12.E Analyze and assess the rights of people as written in the PA Constitution and the US Constitution. Standard - 5.2.12.B				
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Examine the causes of
conflicts in society and
evaluate techniques to
address those conflicts

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Is this course able to be facilitated/implemented with existing staff? ☒ Yes * ☐ No

If no, explicitly indicate staffing needs below:

Would this course require additional resources (staff, textbooks, supplies, equipment, technology, etc.)? Yes * ☒ No

If “Yes” please complete the cost projection template below.

COST PROJECTION TEMPLATE

TYPE OF RESOURCE REQUESTED <i>Example: Staff, supplies, textbooks, equipment, technology, etc.</i> <i>*If this course requires additional staff, please indicate full-time or half-time status.</i>	RATIONALE FOR REQUESTED RESOURCE	PROJECTED COST ASSOCIATED WITH RESOURCE
GRAND TOTAL		0

Please indicate any members from the existing staff that could possibly facilitate the teaching of this course:

STAFF MEMBER	DEPARTMENT
Any Social Studies certified teacher	Social Studies

COURSE EVALUATION

METHOD OF EVALUATION	PERSON(S) COMPLETING EVALUATION	METHOD OF COMMUNICATION <i>How will the evaluation results be communicated with the School Board?</i>

**Please include any other pertinent information that may impact the adoption of this course/
course revision:**

Introduction to Legal Studies

This curriculum balances foundational knowledge with practical and contemporary issues in the legal field. It also provides a mix of lectures, readings, and active learning through case studies and discussions.

Course Objectives:

- Understand the key functions and role of law in society.
- Recognize various sources of law, including statutes, case law, and administrative regulations.
- Gain foundational knowledge of the U.S. legal system and its institutions.
- Comprehend core areas of law such as constitutional law, criminal law, civil law, and torts.
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills through case studies and legal problem-solving exercises.

PA State Standards:

Standard - 5.1.12.A

Analyze the sources, purposes, functions of law, and how the **rule of law** protects **individual rights** and promotes the **common good**

Standard - 5.1.12.C

Evaluate the application of the principles and ideals in contemporary civic life.

- Liberty / Freedom
- Democracy
- Justice
- Equality

Standard - 5.1.12.E

Analyze and assess the rights of people as written in the PA Constitution and the US Constitution.

Standard - 5.2.12.B

Examine the causes of conflicts in society and evaluate techniques to address those conflicts

Weekly Breakdown:

Week 1: Introduction to Legal Studies

- Overview of the course
- What is law? Understanding its role in society.
- Legal systems: Common Law vs. Civil Law.

Objective: To help students distinguish between civil and criminal cases by analyzing real-world examples.

Activity: Case Summaries

Case summaries of both civil and criminal cases (can be taken from textbooks, news, or public databases).

Process: Students will be divided into small groups and each will be assigned a group case. Students will be asked to identify whether the case is civil or criminal and will analyze the key elements of each case. For criminal cases: Identify the crime (e.g., theft, assault), the defendant's rights, and potential punishments (e.g., fines, imprisonment). For civil cases: Identify the dispute (e.g., breach of contract, personal injury), the parties involved, the standard of proof (preponderance of the evidence vs. beyond a reasonable doubt), and potential remedies (e.g., monetary damages, injunctions).

Assessment: After analysis, each group presents their case to the class, explaining why it is civil or criminal and detailing the legal issues involved.

Week 2: The Legal Profession

- Overview of careers in law: Lawyer, judge, paralegal, legal assistant.
- The process of becoming a lawyer: Law school and bar exam.
- Specializations within the legal profession.

Objective: To help students understand the variety of legal specializations, the roles associated with each, and the skills required for each type of legal practice. This activity will provide an interactive and practical way for students to explore the diverse career paths available within the legal profession

Activity: Legal Career Day

Process: Students will receive a research sheet featuring brief descriptions of various legal specializations (e.g., corporate law, criminal law, family law, environmental law, intellectual property law, etc.) Students will then choose from the following:

Corporate Law: Focus on business law, mergers and acquisitions, and corporate governance.

Criminal Law: Prosecution or defense of individuals charged with crimes.

Family Law: Matters relating to divorce, child custody, adoption, and other family-related legal issues.

Environmental Law: Protecting the environment through regulations on pollution, conservation, and sustainable development.

Intellectual Property Law: Protecting patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets.

Real Estate Law: Legal issues surrounding property ownership, leasing, zoning, and real estate transactions.

Immigration Law: Helping individuals navigate visa applications, asylum claims, deportation defense, and citizenship.

Labor and Employment Law: Addressing workplace disputes, employee rights, and labor unions.

Once a specialized field has been chosen, students will conduct research answering the following:

Overview of the specialization: What does the lawyer in this area do?

Educational Requirements: Specific courses, certifications, or additional degrees that may be necessary.

Skills Needed: What specific skills (e.g., negotiation, analytical thinking, communication) are important for this area of law?

Potential Career Paths and Opportunities: The type of employers or clients, career growth, and common industries that require this specialization.

Challenges and Rewards: What are the challenges of working in this area, and what are the rewards?

Assessment: students will create a career fair “booth” station around the room which other students will visit to learn about the various areas of the legal field.

Week 3: Sources of Law

- Constitutions, statutes, regulations, and case law.
- The role of precedent (stare decisis) in common law.
- Administrative law and regulations.

Objective: To help students understand and identify the primary sources of law (e.g., constitutions, statutes, case law, administrative regulations, and customary law) and how they interact in a legal system. The activity will encourage students to analyze real-world examples and understand the hierarchy of legal authority

Activity: Case Scenario Application: "Which Source of Law Applies?"

Process: Students will be given a series of real-world case scenarios. These scenarios will illustrate a legal issue where multiple sources of law might apply. The goal is for students to identify which sources of law should be prioritized.

Assessment: Students will be asked to find their own real-life case and write a paragraph describing which source of law would apply and explain why. A short quiz will be given to students in which they are given real-world case scenarios in which they identify which source of law would be prioritized.

Week 4: The U.S. Legal System: Structure and Function

- The federal and state court systems.
- The role of judges, lawyers, and paralegals.
- The concept of judicial review.
- The role of the executive and legislative branches in lawmaking.

Objective: To help students grasp the structure of the U.S. legal system, including the roles and functions of its various components: the federal and state court systems, the legislative process, executive authority, and how they work together to maintain the rule of law.

Activity: Role Call

Process: Each student will receive a role card identifying one of the various roles present in a courtroom proceeding. Teacher will present the responsibilities and expectations of a random role to the class. The student with the correct matching role card will come to the front of the room. They will then pull another role card from the pile and read the role aloud. The student who matches that role will then come forward until all students roles have been called.

Assessment: Interview. Students will be assigned a partner who they will interview about their job details and responsibilities. They will then create a fictional “Help Wanted” advertisement for that position.

Week 5: Constitutional Law

- The U.S. Constitution and its principles.
- Separation of powers and checks and balances.
- Federalism and the relationship between federal and state law.
- Key cases: Marbury v. Madison, Brown v. Board of Education.

Objective: To introduce students to the fundamental principles of U.S. Constitutional Law, including the structure of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the separation of powers, and the system of checks and balances.

Activity: Constitutional Law Scenario Cards

Process: Each group will receive a Constitutional Law Scenario Card that describes a legal issue involving the U.S. Constitution. The scenarios will require students to interpret constitutional provisions and apply them to the given situation. Students will make a “ruling” as if they were a Supreme Court Justice deciding on a case.

Assessment: Students will be provided with white boards and markers. The teacher will present a Constitutional Law Scenario to the class (both visually in text and read aloud). Students will then use the white boards to decide which amendment would apply to the scenario. They will hold their white boards up to provide teacher with immediate feedback of understanding.

Week 6: Criminal Law

- Defining crime and punishment.
- Elements of a crime: Actus reus and mens rea.
- Classification of crimes: Felonies, misdemeanors, and infractions.

- Criminal procedure: Arrest, search, and trial.

Objective: To help students understand the step-by-step procedures involved in the criminal justice system—from investigation to trial and sentencing—by actively engaging them in a simulated criminal case.

Activity: Mock Trial

Process: Students will be placed on either the side of the defense or prosecution. They will be provided with all evidence and applicable legal precedents associated with case. Students will then work in teams to build either a defense or case against the defendant.

Assessment: Arguments will be presented in a mock courtroom manner

Week 7: Civil Law and Torts

- Defining civil law: Contracts, property, and torts.
- Tort law: Intentional torts, negligence, and strict liability.
- Personal injury law and damages.
- Family law (divorce, support, custody)

Objective: To help students understand the key steps and parties involved in civil legal proceedings—from filing a complaint to the resolution of a case

Activity: Step-by-Step

Process: Students will work to create and fictionally file forms associated with the following civil proceedings:

Filing the initial complaint

Service of summons

Defendant's response (answer or motion to dismiss)

Discovery phase

Pre-trial motions and settlement talks

Trial (if no settlement)

Judgment and potential appeals

Assessment: Students will each be given a fictional civil case to work on. They will prepare the documents associated with said case. They will then be given a set of documents for a different civil case and will be required to accurately identify the documents.

Week 8: Contracts and Property Law

- Elements of a contract: Offer, acceptance, and consideration.
- Breach of contract and remedies.
- Basic property law: Real property vs. personal property.
- Real Estate Law: Landlord vs. tenants rights, understanding leases, evictions, security deposits, damages, mortgage responsibilities, penalties, default consequences

Objective: To help students understand the common legal issues in landlord-tenant relationships, the rights and responsibilities of both parties, and how landlord-tenant disputes are resolved through the legal system.

Activity: Eviction

Process: Students will be divided into groups based on if they represent the property owner or the tenant. They will be provided with specific case details regarding different scenarios in which a tenant may be evicted. The property owner's team will prepare a case against the tenants. The tenants will prepare an appeal against the property owner. Students will use local civil laws and regulation handouts as a guide when building their case.

Assessment: Following the presentation of each team's findings, students will write an individual reflection on whether or not they feel the law is biased towards one side or the other in regards to property disputes.

Week 9: Ethics and Professional Responsibility

- Introduction to legal ethics.
- Role of lawyers in society: Advocacy and ethics.
- Rules of professional responsibility: Confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and attorney-client privilege.

Objective: To introduce students to the importance of legal ethics by exploring common ethical dilemmas faced by legal professionals, fostering critical thinking about professional responsibility, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and ethical decision-making.

Activity: Is it ethical?

Process: Students will read scenarios and will highlight the potential ethical dilemmas. Once they identify the ethical dilemmas, they will write an alternative approach for how an attorney may deal with such a problem.

Assessment: Students accurately highlighting the potential ethical dilemma will demonstrate knowledge of each dilemma. Offering an alternative solution will demonstrate not only understanding but conflict-resolution.

Week 10: Dispute Resolution

- Types of legal dispute resolution: Litigation, arbitration, and mediation.
- The role of courts in resolving disputes.
- ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) systems.

Objective: Students will understand the differences between negotiation, mediation, and arbitration by simulating each ADR method in resolving the same fictional dispute

Activity: The Headphone Dispute

Process: Taylor and Jordan are classmates. Taylor loaned Jordan a pair of expensive wireless headphones. Jordan returned them two weeks later, but they were damaged. Jordan claims they were already acting up. Taylor insists they were in perfect condition. Now Taylor wants Jordan to pay for repairs. Jordan refuses, saying it's not their fault.

Round 1: Negotiation

- Taylor and Jordan try to reach a resolution without third-party help.
- Encourage use of active listening, compromise, and persuasive argument.

Round 2: Mediation

- Add a mediator who guides the conversation.
- Mediator cannot impose a decision, only facilitate discussion.
- Goal: A voluntary agreement.

Round 3: Arbitration

- Add an arbitrator who listens to both sides.
- Arbitrator asks questions, then makes a **binding decision**.

Assessment: Students complete a reflection worksheet answering the following: When might ADR be better than going to court? What are the benefits and limits of each ADR method? How might ADR reduce costs, time, and stress?

Week 11: Civil Rights and Liberties

- Understanding civil liberties under the Bill of Rights.
- Landmark civil rights cases.
- Modern issues in civil rights: Gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial justice.
- Workplace discrimination

Objective: Students will understand the difference between civil rights and civil liberties, explore landmark constitutional issues, and apply them to fictional scenarios.

Activity: Which Right is it relay

Process: Students are placed in groups and given a handout featuring scenarios. Students line up. The first in the row reads the first scenario: *A student wears a T-shirt with a controversial political message. The school asks them to change because it causes tension in class. The student refuses and is suspended.* When the student labels the right in question correctly they pass it to the team member behind them. The team member works on the next scenario: *A student's backpack is searched by a teacher without permission because they were "acting suspicious." A vape is found and the student is punished. The student says their 4th Amendment rights were violated.* The process continues until all scenarios are labeled correctly. The first team to do so wins.

Assessment: Students will complete a matching quiz featuring 10 new scenarios, correctly matching the scenario to the corresponding amendment

Week 12: International Law and Comparative Legal Systems

- Introduction to international law: Treaties, international courts, and diplomacy.
- Comparative legal systems: Common law, civil law, and Islamic law.
- Human rights law and international organizations (UN, WTO).

Objective: Students will explore the foundations of international law, compare key legal systems (common law, civil law, religious law, customary law), and analyze how countries address global legal challenges differently.

Activity: Around the world

Process: Students will each be assigned a different country receiving information on that country, they will then take on the role of delegates from different countries, each representing a different legal system. They will analyze and discuss how their nation would respond to a shared international legal issue, applying their country's legal principles and international law standards.

Assessment: Students will create a poster representing their assigned country, including a flag, legal principles, and an international court case they played a pivotal role in.

Week 13: Review and Case Study Analysis

- Review of all topics covered.
- Application of legal principles to case studies.
- Preparing for the final exam or project.

Activity: Review Games

Process: Students will use white boards, Bingo, and relay games to prepare for a final exam.

Assessment: Students will take final exam to demonstrate mastery of course content and objectives.