

Practical assignment: Court observation! Counts for 5% of total course grade; graded on a scale of 1-5.

The purpose of this assignment is to foster understanding of the structure and functions of the court systems; your ability to navigate those systems; and your competence in communicating observations of legal proceedings.

Gen Ed Student Learning Outcomes include Skills (communicate in diverse settings and groups, using written and oral means; derive meaning from experience, gather information from observation); Integration (understand and navigate systems); and Values, Ethics and Relationships (demonstrate civic knowledge; understand organization of government).

Overview: A common task for paralegals is attending court proceedings, then provide written and/or oral summaries to supervising attorneys, to assist the attorneys in preparing for proceedings in those courts or before those judges, or other purposes. Each student will attend a court proceeding in person; post on OpenLab a written summary of the proceeding, and provide an oral description and analysis of their experience to the class.

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Court observation: Each student shall locate, and observe for about one hour, a proceeding in any court: state or federal, civil or criminal, trial or appellate, in any jurisdiction. If you attend the class court observation trip, you are welcome to use that proceeding as the subject for this assignment. You are also welcome to identify and observe a proceeding on your own. You are advised to get information about the court(s) you would like to visit in advance, including schedules and visitor policies, such as whether they permit electronic devices. If you are permitted to carry an electronic device, silence it at all times. **When a judge is in the courtroom or a proceeding is taking place, PUT AWAY any electronic devices.** If you'd like help choosing a proceeding, let me know. Two students may observe a proceeding together; if so, each student should post a separate written summary but they may give the oral presentation together.

Written summary: By the start of the class following the class court observation trip, OR by the end of Tuesday, Dec. 6 if you observe a proceeding on your own, each student shall post on our course OpenLab site a summary of her/his observation, with "Court observation" as the category. Please include the following information, in narrative, paragraph form (not bullet points as you see here):

- the date of your observation
- the name and location of the court (such as "NY Supreme Court, Kings County, in downtown Brooklyn")
- how you chose the proceeding, such as talking with court staff, looking at the court's website, etc.
- name of the case (such as "Jones v. Smith" or "People v. Coughlin")
- names and roles of participants, such as judge, plaintiff, defendant, lawyers, witnesses, etc. (as many as you can get)
- a short description of the proceeding, including what the overall case is about (such as medical malpractice, or personal injury, or armed robbery, including who allegedly did what to whom) and the nature of the particular proceeding you observed (such as a witness testifying during a trial, or lawyers arguing about evidence, etc.)
- your personal reaction to the experience: what you thought about what you saw, including how it affected your view of the law or your interest in a legal career, and why, and/or other issues
- any other information that you find notable or interesting, such as interactions with court staff, judges, attorneys, etc.

Oral presentation: During a designated class shortly after the class trip, or by Thursday, Dec. 8 if you observed a proceeding on your own, each student will give a short oral presentation to the class about her/his experience, including the points listed above and anything else you'd like to address.

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If you have any questions, please ask!! And have fun. (That's a requirement.) ☺