

LW5552: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Independent Research

Subject Code

LW - Law

Course Number

5552

Academic Unit

School of Law (FL)

College/School

School of Law (FL)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

#LW5622 Legal methods, Research and Writing (this requirement applies to JD student only)

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

LW6551E or LW5551

Exclusive Courses

LW6537C/E and LW6137C/E Dissertation (Students who have completed or are taking any of these Dissertation courses are not allowed to take LW5552 Independent Research.)

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course aims (i) to develop students' ability to identify a suitable topic that constitutes a research gap in the existing literature; (ii) to give students the freedom and flexibility to develop their expertise in a subject area of interest through independent library-based and/or empirical research, and (iii) to harness writing skills to produce a publishable paper, under the supervision and guidance of an experienced staff member.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Identify a suitable research topic and design a research proposal on an area of law worth pursuing.	20	x	x	
2	Search, read, analyse and cite research materials relevant to one's research proposal.	25	x	x	x
3	Critically apply selected legal theories and techniques to the subject matter of the paper.	25	x	x	x
4	Write a paper of individual research of publishable quality and with an substantial element of originality.	30	x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Self-directed research and writing.	Each student will be required to work independently, undertaking an individual piece of work related to his/her chosen area of research. Students will be encouraged to devise their own topics, although the supervisor may provide some guidance during regular meetings.	1, 2, 3, 4	7 (approx..)

2	Consultations with supervisor.	The student will follow a systematic monitoring programme, seeking feedback from the supervisor at regular intervals: i. Scheduling an initial meeting at which the independent research paper proposal is discussed including: the proposed research question methodology, background literature, and timetable for research and writing. ii. Presentation of an initial draft to the supervisor for consideration, analysis and comment. iii. Submission of a final draft. This final draft may or may not warrant comment from the supervisor.	1, 2, 3, 4	1 (approx..)
---	--------------------------------	--	------------	--------------

Additional Information for LTAs

Supervisors are not responsible for the production of research material or for the preparation of the independent research paper. This is the sole responsibility of the student.

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Coursework (final research paper)	1, 2, 3, 4	100	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Minimum Continuous Assessment Passing Requirement (%)

40

Additional Information for ATs

Length and Style

1. The research paper must be submitted by the end of the semester (the exact date is to be advised in due course). The length of the main text of the research paper must fall in the range of 8,000 to 10,000 words (excluding footnotes). The main text should be supplemented by footnotes as per the most recent version of the Oxford Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities (OSCOLA).

Use of GenAI

2. Students may use GenAI for researching the subject area, collecting/coding/analysing empirical data, proofreading and for ensuring consistency in citations. However, students should not use Gen AI in producing a first draft. The author's voice must be reflected in the paper. Furthermore, the student must be able to provide insights not obtainable by GenAI.

3. Students should appropriately attribute ideas with citation to (a) primary sources such as legislation, cases and treaties, (b) secondary sources such as books and articles, and (c) output from GenAI.
4. The risk of hallucination is inherent in the use of GenAI. The student who undertakes Independent Research is responsible for checking for sources provided by the GenAI software, and is responsible for all errors or the citation of non-existent material.

Use of Translation Software (whether GenAI or otherwise)

5. Use of software for translation is not prohibited. However, we do not encourage students to write in another language and to use translation software to generate the English text. These kinds of writings suffer from a number of serious problems. What makes for a sufficiently tight or sustained argument in one culture may not be pass the mark in another. A software translation of the words, phrases or sentences – even if accurate – very often does not mean that the argument is well constructed in the translated language. Moreover, literal translation comes with the risk that the translation contains unidiomatic language. Since the Hong Kong university environment provides students the opportunity to improve proficiency in English legal writing, students pursuing Independent Research should take advantage of this learning opportunity.

Emphasis on Unique Contribution or Original Insight

6. In formulating the research question, the student must be confident that it is one that s/he can provide unique contribution or original insight. An exhaustive literature review is integral to the process, but that it should be noted that such a review does not constitute unique contribution.
7. A unique contribution or original insight may take a variety of forms. It may be a critique of a development. It may be a recommendation to transplant certain rules or institutions from another legal culture or jurisdiction, while providing a comprehensive analysis of the ramifications. It may involve a new or improved theoretical conception of the existing legal rules.

Marking

8. The faculty member who supervised the independent research paper and another anonymous faculty member mark the research paper simultaneously. The relevant External Academic Advisor and/or a third marker may moderate assessment of the research paper, especially if there is a significant difference in grades assigned by the supervisor and the second marker.

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

Independent Research paper (100%) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

The paper will be assessed for Originality, Breadth of Research, Citation & Authority, Quality of Presentation, Logic, Accuracy, Independent Thought and Substance.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Unique contribution and original thinking; sustained argument and good marshalling of material to support the propositions put forward.

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good insight with some capacity to carryout sustained argument. Capacity to analyse and synthesize material. Good literature literature review.

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Student who is profiting from the university experience; demonstrates understanding of the subject; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.

Marginal

(D) Sufficient familiarity with the subject matter to enable the student to progress without repeating the course.

Failure

(F) Little evidence of familiarity with the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited, or irrelevant use of literature.

Assessment Task

Independent Research paper (100%) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

The paper will be assessed for Originality, Breadth of Research, Citation & Authority, Quality of Presentation, Logic, Accuracy, Independent Thought and Substance.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Unique contribution and original thinking; sustained argument and good marshalling of material to support the propositions put forward.

Good

(B+, B) Good insight with some capacity to carryout sustained argument. Capacity to analyse and synthesize material. Good literature literature review.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Student who is profiting from the university experience; demonstrates understanding of the subject; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.

Failure

(F) Little evidence of familiarity with the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited, or irrelevant use of literature.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Original Thinking

Legal Research

Writing

Detailed Syllabus

There is no formal syllabus. Students undertaking independent research must find a faculty member with relevant research interest and expertise to agree to provide academic supervision. Students should prepare a short research proposal on a subject area of his/her chosen stream of study and obtain approval from the faculty supervisor.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Nil

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Selected Background Reading
2	Bahrij J, Hong Kong Legal Research: Methods and Skills (Sweet & Maxwell Asia 2007)
3	Cane P and Kritzer H (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Empirical Legal Research (Oxford University Press 2010)
4	van Hoecke M, Methodologies of Legal Research (Hart Publishing 2017)

5	Kossof P, Chinese Legal Research (Carolina Academic Press 2014)
6	McConville M and Chui WH (eds), Research Methods for Law (3rd edn, Edinburgh University Press 2017)
7	Salter M and Mason J, Writing Law Dissertations: An Introduction and Guide to the Conduct of Legal Research (1st edn, Pearson 2007)
8	Warner J, More Than Words: How to Think About Writing in the Age of AI (Basic Books 2025)
9	Watkins D and Burton M (eds), Research Methods in Law (2nd edn, Routledge 2018)
10	Webley L, Legal Writing (5th edn, Routledge 2024)