

EN4573: LANGUAGE IN LAW AND CRIME

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Language in Law and Crime

Subject Code

EN - English

Course Number

4573

Academic Unit

English (EN)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

EN2401 Language in Law and Crime

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

As members of civic society, we are all of us subject to the formal, legal rules enacted by governments. However, these rules are conveyed through a language that has developed a reputation for being overly technical and consequently impenetrable

to non-specialists. Language use in other legal domains like the courtroom is similarly opaque. This course aims to develop students' understanding of the relationship between language and the law and crime by offering a discourse analytical perspective to English legal texts and practices, especially language use in the construction and interpretation of legislation, and in the criminal justice system, including the courtroom. It considers the way that language may function as a forensic tool in particular legal cases. In addition it looks at the way that language is used to talk about law and crime, and aims to foster language and critical thinking skills that can be applied to related topics.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Critically analyse data from legal settings and apply knowledge acquired from the course to their interpretation.	x	x	x
2	Explain the structures of legal text and transform such text into plain English.	x	x	
3	Discuss law and crime-related topics using a range of appropriate language.	x	x	x
4	Present clearly constructed and critically sound arguments relating to legal issues.	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	Interactive lectures	Students will participate in interactive lectures which provide examples and tools for analysis of data.	1, 2, 3
2	Independent reading	Students will complete readings which provide examples and tools for analysis of data.	1, 2, 3

3	Text analysis / discussion	Students will analyse and discuss legal texts, developing their understanding of how language is used in legal contexts, applying their knowledge of legal language and conventions, and interpreting text in light of the wider social context by providing clear and logical reasons for arguments.	1, 2, 3, 4	
4	Writing / presenting activities	Students will rewrite examples of legal text to make them accessible to non-specialists. Students are exposed to sample presentations, and are asked to consider the arguments from a critical standpoint; they also give mini-presentations in preparation for the final assessment.	2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	In-class quiz	1, 2	20	Individual: Students will analyse the features of a legal text and render it in plain English	No
2	In-class presentation	1, 2, 3, 4	30	Groupwork: Students will critically compare legal interactions, using language that is specific and appropriate to the interactions they are presenting	No

3	Detailed evaluative report	1, 2, 3, 4	40	Individual: Students will analyse a set of data and make judgments with respect to the legal implications, applying their knowledge and understanding of legal language and conventions	No
4	Class participation	1, 2, 3, 4	10	Individual: Based on how frequently, actively and constructively students participate.	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

Assessment task 1: In-class quiz: : Text analysis and rendering in plain English

Criterion

Analysis (10 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

The text is comprehensively analyzed and explained All key features of text are identified

Good (B+, B, B-)

The text is soundly analyzed and explained Most key features of text are identified

Fair (C+, C, C-)

The text is adequately analyzed and explained Sufficient key features of text are identified

Marginal (D)

The text is inadequately analyzed and explained Insufficient key features of text are identified

Failure (F)

The text is barely analyzed/The analysis is not at all comprehensible Few key features of text are identified

Assessment Task

Assessment task 1: In-class quiz: : Text analysis and rendering in plain English

Criterion

Rendering of text into plain English (10 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

'Translated' text is a completely clear and accurate rendition of original

Good (B+, B, B-)

'Translated' text is a mostly clear and accurate rendition of original

Fair (C+, C, C-)

'Translated' text is an adequately clear and accurate rendition of original

Marginal (D)

'Translated' text is insufficiently clear and a generally inaccurate rendition of original

Failure (F)

'Translated' text is mostly unclear and inaccurate rendition of original

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 2: In-class presentation

Criterion

Critical understanding and analysis of law and related issues (10 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Shows full understanding of main concepts

All relevant information is included in explanation of concepts

Relevant information is comprehensively analyzed and explained

Good (B+, B, B-)

Shows sound understanding of main concepts

Most relevant information is included in explanation of concepts

Relevant information is analyzed and explained

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Shows adequate understanding of main concepts

Sufficient information is included in explanation of concepts

Relevant information is adequately analyzed and explained

Marginal (D)

Shows inadequate understanding of main concepts

Insufficient information is included in explanation of concepts

Relevant information is inadequately analyzed and explained

Failure (F)

Shows little understanding of main concepts

Very limited information is included in explanation of concepts

Relevant information is barely analyzed/The analysis is not at all comprehensible

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 2: In-class presentation

Criterion

Construction of arguments (15 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Arguments are completely clearProvides completely logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Good (B+, B, B-)

Arguments are mostly clearProvides mostly logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Arguments are sufficiently clearProvides sufficiently logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Marginal (D)

Arguments are insufficiently clearProvides somewhat illogical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Failure (F)

Arguments are unclearProvides largely illogical or no explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 2: In-class presentation

Criterion

Use of language appropriate to the topic (5 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

A comprehensive range of appropriate language is used

Good (B+, B, B-)

A wide range of appropriate language is used

Fair (C+, C, C-)

An adequate range of appropriate language is used

Marginal (D)

An inadequate range of appropriate language is used

Failure (F)

Language used is completely inappropriate

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 3: Data analysis task

Criterion

Analysis (20 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

The data are comprehensively analyzed and explained

Good (B+, B, B-)

The data are soundly analyzed and explained

Fair (C+, C, C-)

The data are adequately analyzed and explained

Marginal (D)

The data are inadequately analyzed and explained

Failure (F)

The data are barely analyzed/The analysis is not at all comprehensible

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 3: Data analysis task

Criterion

Use of language appropriate to the topic (law & crime) (5 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

A comprehensive range of appropriate language is used

Good (B+, B, B-)

A wide range of appropriate language is used

Fair (C+, C, C-)

An adequate range of appropriate language is used

Marginal (D)

An inadequate range of appropriate language is used

Failure (F)

Language used is completely inappropriate

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 3: Data analysis task

Criterion

Construction of arguments (15 marks)

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Arguments are completely clear

Provides completely logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Good (B+, B, B-)

Arguments are mostly clear

Provides mostly logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Arguments are sufficiently clear

Provides sufficiently logical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Marginal (D)

Arguments are insufficiently clear

Provides somewhat illogical explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Failure (F)

Arguments are unclear

Provides largely illogical or no explanation of relationship between data and conclusions

Assessment Task

Assessment Task 4: Class participation

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

An excellent record of attendance and participation. Attended all classes punctually, always participated actively and constructively in class and group activities.

Good (B+, B, B-)

A good record of attendance and participation. Attended most classes punctually, mostly participated actively and constructively in class and group activities.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

An adequate record of attendance and participation. Attended an adequate number of classes and was adequately punctual, sometimes participated actively and constructively in class and group activities.

Marginal (D)

An inadequate record of attendance and participation. Did not attend an adequate number of classes or was often not adequately punctual, occasionally participated in class and group activities but needs to be more active and constructive in class.

Failure (F)

A poor record of attendance and participation. Often failed to attend class and/or often failed to participate in class and group activities.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Language and law, Forensic linguistics, Discourse analysis, Genre analysis, Conversation analysis, Legislation, Courtroom discourse, Police interviews, Plain legal English, Workplace communication, Professional discourse

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Bhatia, V. K. (1993): <i>Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings</i> . London: Longman.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Cotterill, J. (Ed.) (2002): <i>Language in the legal process</i> . Basingstoke: Palgrave.
2	Gibbons, J. (Ed.) (1994): <i>Language and the law</i> . Harlow: Longman
3	Gibbons, J. (2003) <i>Forensic linguistics: An introduction to language in the justice system</i> . Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
4	Leonard, R. (2005) <i>Forensic linguistics: Applying the scientific principles of language analysis to issues of the law</i> . <i>International Journal of the Humanities</i> , Vol. 3.
5	Levi, J. N. and Graffam-Walker, A. (Eds.) (1990): <i>Language in the judicial process</i> Plenum Press: London
6	Shuy, R. W. (1993): <i>Language crimes: the use and abuse of language evidence in the courtroom</i> . Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
7	Stygall, G. (1994): <i>Trial language: differential discourse processing and discursive formation</i> . Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company:
8	Tiersma, P. M. (1999): <i>Legal language</i> Chicago: University of Chicago Press.