

Course Syllabus

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 Edit

PLS 67, Family Law Section 0706, Fall 2025 Course Syllabus

Course Description

This course will cover key topics in substantive and statutory Family Law in California, with an emphasis on the paralegal's role in a Family Law setting. We will address marriage and pre-marital agreements, divorce/dissolution of marriage and post-nuptial agreements, annulments, division of marital property, the parent-child relationship, child custody and support, adoption, guardianship, court procedures, Judicial Council forms and resources available on the California Courts web site (<http://www.courts.ca.gov> → <http://www.courts.ca.gov>), legal research (Westlaw, Lexis), seminal cases ("case law"), California self-help centers, including the Family Law Facilitator's Office and other resources available to self-represented litigants, and the paralegal's role in alternative dispute resolution/mediation processes. Ethical obligations, Family Law terminology and DissoMaster and other computer applications will also be addressed.

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate and apply knowledge of the procedures and processes of the family court in California.
2. Apply Family Law court rules, and know how to locate local rules.
3. Define and properly use terminology relating to Family Law.
4. Develop an awareness of procedural requirements and the mandatory and optional Judicial Council forms relevant to Family Law cases.
5. Draft documents commonly used in Family Law.

Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of fundamental common law and statutory Family Law concepts governing marriage (creation and dissolution), parent-child relationships, guardianships, and other matters controlled by the family court.
2. Locate, describe, and analyze print and electronic sources of law relating to Family Law.
3. Explain the ethical obligations of a paralegal relating to Family Law.

4. Demonstrate an understanding of the communication skills needed to meet the emotional and legal needs of the client.
- 5 Define the paralegal's role in assisting in Alternative Dispute Resolution / Mediation /Collaborative Law processes.

Class Meetings

Because this course will be taught strictly in an online format, material and activities will be offered asynchronously, meaning that students can access them anytime. I will be available for remote office hours as needed, and as arranged in advance with students. I look forward to meeting with you outside of class to discuss and/or answer questions about the class materials and assignments, or to discuss your career goals or other topics. Just ask! Please email me at lpedicini@santarosa.edu to set up a time for either a call or a Zoom meeting. For urgent issues, you may text me at 530-330-5907.

A new module will **typically** post each week by noon on Monday. The assignments for each week will typically be due on the following Sunday (the day before the new module posts) by midnight.

I will routinely rely on announcements as a means of communicating with the class. Please ensure you are set up in Canvas to receive announcements. If you are not, you may miss important information. Announcements are also posted in Canvas (under the syllabus section). If a missed announcement leads to you submitting an assignment late or not at all, this will be your responsibility.

Instructor Contact

Laura Pedicini

Email: lpedicini@santarosa.edu

Phone: 530-330-5907

You may also use the [Canvas Conversations Inbox \(https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-2670\)](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-2670) to send me a message. If you would like to set up a time for a private Zoom call, or to speak by phone, please email me.

I make every effort to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on a weekend or holiday. If I don't respond within those timelines, please email me again as I may have overlooked your email.

Course Web Site

Students will use the Canvas course web site for assignment instructions, submitting assignments, viewing classmates' work, sharing resources, and viewing grades. Information designed to bring you up to speed on Canvas is available in the Module section of the course (see week 0).

Required: Textbook

There is a required textbook.

Required Materials:

1) Family Law for Paralegals (Aspen Publishing) 9th Edition

by J. Susana Ehrlich (Author)

ISBN: 978-1-5438-4734-5

****Note - Because the textbook is not specific to California law, we will be consistently supplementing the reading with other, California-specific sources. There will be no cost to you for this material.

Required Software

- **Chrome** [↗\(https://support.google.com/chrome/answer/95346?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en-GB\)](https://support.google.com/chrome/answer/95346?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en-GB) is the recommended browser for Canvas

Run this **computer readiness test** [↗\(https://apps.3cmediasolutions.org/oei/tools/computer-readiness.html\)](https://apps.3cmediasolutions.org/oei/tools/computer-readiness.html) to check your browser for plugins and versions.

Important Dates

Date Class Begins:	8/18/2025	FIRST CENSUS DATE:	9/8/2025
Date Class Ends:	12/12/2025	Last Day Drop for Refund:	8/31/2025
Last Day Add w/o add code:	8/24/2025	Last Day Drop w/o W:	9/7/2025
Last Day Add with add code:	9/7/2025	Last Day Drop with W:	11/16/2025
Date Midterm Roster:	10/20/2025 - 11/16/2025		
Date Final Exam:	TBA the week of 12/13 to 12/19		

Dropping the Class

If you decide to discontinue this course, it is your responsibility to officially drop it. A student may be dropped from any class when that student's absences exceed ten percent (10%) of the total hours of class time. It is strongly advised that if you need to miss more than one class/homework deadline in a row that you contact the instructor to avoid being dropped from the class.

Attendance

For face-to-face courses, students who fail to attend the first class meeting may be dropped by the instructor. **For classes that meet online, students who fail to log on and initiate participation by 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time of the first day of the class may be dropped by the instructor.**

For classes that meet online, a No-Show is an enrolled student who has not logged on and initiated active participation by 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time of the second day of the class.

Instructor Announcements and Q&A Forum

The instructor will post announcements on the Announcements page in Canvas throughout the semester. Canvas notifies students according to their preferred Notification Preferences.

Late Policy

All assignments are due at 11:59 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on the due date. A late submission will receive a 20% penalty. Submissions more than one week late are not accepted without prior arrangement.

Quizzes, Exam and other Assignments

Online multiple choice quizzes (10 questions per quiz) will be given on a semi-regular basis. The quizzes will be "open book" and their purpose is to ensure that you are benefiting from the reading. As long as you are completing the reading each week (including reading assigned outside of the textbook), you will be successful on the quizzes. There will also be a final exam, which will include an essay component.

The class also requires a visit to a family law court in the county of your choosing. This visit will culminate in a final paper which will address your impressions of the court observation. More details about the assignment will be provided well in advance. In the past, students have told me that this assignment taught them more about family law than any other assignment.

Finally, there will be weekly discussion group questions arising out of the reading. All students must participate in the discussion group questions. Since the class only meets online, the discussion group questions provide us with our only option for developing a cohesive classroom community. If you do not respond to a classmate's post, as required, at least 5 points will be deducted from your grade.

Grading Policy

Click the "Grades" link in Canvas to keep track of your grades. I will typically grade once per week and post grades and comments in the Canvas gradebook.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

- A 90% 90 points or more
- B 80% 80 to 89 points
- C 70% 70 to 79 points
- D 60% 60 to 69 points

Standards of Conduct

Students who register in SRJC classes are required to abide by the SRJC Student Conduct Standards. Violation of the Standards is basis for referral to the Vice President of Student Services or dismissal from class or from the College. See the [Student Code of Conduct page. \(http://student-conduct.santarosa.edu/\)](http://student-conduct.santarosa.edu/)

Collaborating on or copying of tests or homework in whole or in part will be considered an act of academic dishonesty and result in a grade of 0 for that test or assignment. Students are encouraged to share information and ideas, but not their work. See these links on Plagiarism:

[SRJC Writing Center Lessons on avoiding plagiarism](http://srjcwritingcenter.com/research/plagiarism/plagiarism.html) ➞

[\(http://srjcwritingcenter.com/research/plagiarism/plagiarism.html\)](http://srjcwritingcenter.com/research/plagiarism/plagiarism.html)

[SRJC's Statement on Academic Integrity](http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/santarosa/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=A63TMC78051C) ➞

[\(http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/santarosa/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=A63TMC78051C\)](http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/santarosa/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=A63TMC78051C)

Special Needs

Access and Accommodations: It is the mission of the Santa Rosa Junior College to support inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or to accurate assessment of achievement—such as time-limited exams, inaccessible web content, or the use of non-captioned videos—please notify the instructor as soon as possible. Students are also welcome to contact the [Disability Resources Department \(https://drd.santarosa.edu/drd-home\)](https://drd.santarosa.edu/drd-home) (DRD). DRD is a resource for students that provides authorization for academic accommodations, training and access to assistive technology, and collaborates on strategies for academic success.

Outline of Topics (Not Necessarily in this Order)

I. Introduction to Family Law

A. Family Law Practice

1. Scope
2. Adversarial vs. collaborative process

- B. Interest of the government
 - 1. Constitutional issues
 - 2. State issues
 - 3. Domestic relations court system
- C. Legal research methods in family law
 - 1. Legal sources
 - a. Primary authority
 - b. Secondary authority
 - 2. Non-legal sources
- D. Role of paralegal in family law practice
 - 1. Interview work
 - 2. Investigative work
 - 3. Pro bono work
- E. Ethical considerations in family law practice
 - 1. Unauthorized practice of law
 - 2. Confidentiality
 - 3. Conflict of interest
 - 4. Attorney's fees
 - 5. Communications with opposite side
 - 6. Professional relationship with client
 - 7. Paralegal's responsibility to client, court and supervising attorney
 - 8. Features of jurisdiction's Code of Professional Responsibility
 - 9. Grievance procedures

II. Marital Relationships

- A. Marriage
 - 1. History and definition of marriage
 - a. Ceremonial
 - b. Common law
 - c. Same sex unions/marriages
 - 2. Presumptions and public policy considerations
 - a. Valid
 - b. Void
 - c. Voidable
 - 3. Legal consequences of marriage
 - a. Breach of promise to marry
 - b. Mutual duty to support
- B. Premarital and cohabitation agreements
 - 1. Legality and enforceability
 - 2. Client consideration - implications of death and divorce

3. Modification

4. Types

- a. Uniform Premarital Agreement Act
 - i. Definitions
 - ii. Formalities
 - iii. Effect of marriage
 - iv. Amendment or revocation
 - v. Enforcement
- b. Marital property agreement
 - i. Partition or exchange of community property
 - ii. Agreement between spouses concerning income or property from separate property
 - iii. Formalities
 - iv. Enforcement
- c. Agreement to convert separate property to community property and vice versa
 - i. Formalities
 - ii. Management of converted property
 - iii. Enforcement
 - iv. Rights of creditors
- d. Post-nuptial agreements
- e. Cohabitation agreements

III. Breakdown of the Marital Relationship

A. Termination overview

- 1. Equity v. law
- 2. Issues
- 3. Religious considerations

B. Annulments

- 1. Definition
- 2. Purpose
- 3. Requirements
- 4. Procedure
- 5. Consequences
- 6. Other forms of relief
 - a. Separation
 - b. Alternative dispute resolution/mediation/collaborative law

C. Divorce

- 1. Definition--contested versus uncontested
- 2. Requirements
 - a. Common law grounds
 - b. Statutory grounds

- 3. Defenses to fault grounds
- 4. Property rights
- 5. Consequences
 - a. Personal issues
 - b. Financial issues
 - c. Tax issues
- D. Trial practice and dissolution of marriage
 - 1. Jurisdictional issues
 - 2. Preparation of pleadings, service of process, discovery documents, temporary orders, divorce decrees, and orders
 - 3. Preliminary hearing for interlocutory relief
 - 4. Special relief matters, bifurcation, litigation fees and costs, collection of arrearages
 - 5. Analysis of equitable distribution and alimony
 - 6. Client considerations - interviewing techniques
 - 7. Modification and appeals of divorce decrees
- E. Ancillary issues - wills, deeds, qualified domestic retainer orders, settlement agreements, decrees

IV. Post Divorce Enforcement

- A. Property issues
 - 1. Classifications
 - a. Marital property
 - i. Community property state
 - ii. Non-community property state
 - b. Homesteads
 - i. Sale
 - ii. Conveyance
 - iii. Encumbrances
 - c. Inheritance
 - d. Retirement, pension, employment benefits and other plans
 - e. Insurance rights
 - 2. Valuation of property
 - 3. Division of liabilities
- B. Child issues
 - 1. Custody
 - a. Purpose - child's best interest
 - b. Kinds
 - i. Parental: joint/sole
 - ii. Non-parental: relative/non-relative
 - c. Agreements
 - i. Uniform Child Custody Act

- ii. Private agreements
- d. Litigation
 - i. Procedure
 - a. Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship
 - b. Court Order s
 - ii. Additional parties
 - a. Guardian ad litem
 - b. Attorney ad litem
 - c. Court-appointed special advocate
 - d. Volunteer advocates
- 2. Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA)
 - a. Statutory authority
 - b. Indian child's best interest and cultural consideration
 - c. Jurisdiction
 - d. Placement preferences
- 3. Visitation
 - a. Parents
 - b. Step-parents
 - c. Grandparents
- 4. Termination of parental rights
 - a. Grounds for involuntary termination
 - b. Procedures
 - c. Hearing and order
- 5. Adoption
 - a. Common Law and statutory basis
 - i. Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA)
 - ii. Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA)
 - b. Agency v. non-agency
 - c. Voluntary and involuntary termination
 - d. Artificial reproduction issues
 - e. Adoption of adult
- 6. Paternity
 - a. Uniform Parentage Act
 - b. Temporary orders
 - c. Conservatorship, support and payments
 - d. Acknowledgment/denial
 - e. Scientific/DNA testing
 - f. Presumptions and burden of proof
- 7. Support - general and medical
 - a. Federal guidelines

- i. Uniform Interstate Family Support Act
 - ii. Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act
 - iii. Other interstate, intrastate, and international support laws and procedures
- b. State guidelines
- c. Enforcement procedures
 - i. Liens
 - ii. Garnishment of wages
 - iii. Suspension of license
- d. Modification.
 - i. Managing conservatorship
 - ii. Possession or access to child
 - iii. Financial support
- 8. Child abuse
 - a. Child Abuse Central Registry
 - b. Reports of abuse/neglect
 - i. False reports
 - ii. Confidentiality
 - c. Abandoned children
 - d. Adversary hearing and notice

C. Spousal support issues

- 1. Alimony and equitable distribution
- 2. Maintenance
- 3. Modification
- 4. Appeals

V. Families in Crisis

A. Domestic violence

- 1. Legal responses
 - a. Protective orders
 - b. Criminal prosecution
 - c. Termination of divorce and custody rights
 - d. Impact on children

B. Battered woman's syndrome

C. Review of placement

VI. Changing Legal Status of Children

A. Child delinquency and dependency

- 1. Juvenile court proceedings
- 2. Liability of parents for conduct of child

B. Emancipation

VII. Alternate Family Structures

- A. Single parent
- B. Step-families/blended families
- C. Same-sex parents
- D. Foster parents

VIII. Surrogacy

- A. Definition
- B. State laws

IX. Changing Roles of Women in Society

- A. Civil Rights Act, Title VII
- B. Abortion and reproductive rights
- C. Equal Pay Act
- D. Pregnancy Disability Act
- E. Family Leave Act
- F. Change of name

X. Family Relations Issues

- A. Elder care issues - conservatorship proceedings
- B. Homeless issues
- C. Offenses against the family
 - 1. Bigamy
 - 2. Sale/purchase of child




















Assignments:




















1. Read textbook and outside sources of approximately 40 pages per week.
2. Weekly discussion group assignments based on readings
3. Regular (weekly or bi-weekly) 10 question, multiple choice quizzes (open book)
4. Field Trip to family court and court paper.
5. Final exam





















List of assignments




















To view all course content, please consult the *Modules* section of Canvas. New modules will typically post each Monday by noon. In some cases, assignments may span 2 weeks. Assignments will NOT be posted in advance.













Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
	<div> Discussion - Week 1, Fall 2024 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398536) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 10 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398528) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 11 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398527) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 14/15 - Thanksgiving Overlap (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398525) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 2, Fall 2024 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398534) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 3, Fall 2024 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398533) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 4, Fall 2024 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398532) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 5, Fall 2024 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398531) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 6 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398530) </div>	
	<div> Discussion - Week 7 (https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398529)</div>	

Date	Details	Due
		
	 <u>Discussion Group Assignment</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398526	
		
	 <u>Discussion: Class Introductions</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398535	
		
	 <u>Extra Credit Assignment - Thanksgiving Holiday</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398537	
		
	 <u>Family Law Courtroom Visit - Submission Upload</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398538	
		
	 <u>Final Exam</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398514	
		
	 <u>Quiz - Week 10 - Spring 2019</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398524	
		
	 <u>Quiz - Week 12 - Spring 2017</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398519	
		
	 <u>Quiz - Week 13 - Spring 2017</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398517	
		
	 <u>Quiz - Week 14 - Spring 2017</u> https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398516	
		

Date	Details	Due
	 Quiz - Week 15 - Spring 2017 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398520 	
	 Quiz - Week 16 - Spring 2017 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398518 	
	 Quiz - Week 6 - Spring 2019 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398523 	
	 Quiz - Week 7 - Spring 2017 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398522 	
	 Quiz - Week 8 - Spring 2019 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398515 	
	 Quiz - Week 9 - Spring 2019 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398521 	
	 Reading / Video Watching Assignment https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398539 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 1 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398540 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 10 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398541 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 11 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398542 	

Date	Details	Due
	 Reading Assignment - Week 14/15 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398543 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 3 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398544 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 4 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398545 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 5 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398546 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 7 & 8 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398547 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 8 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398548 	
	 Reading Assignment - Week 9 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398549 	
	 Reading Assignment / Online Information Gathering https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398550 	
	 Writing Assignment https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398551 	
	 Writing Assignment - - Upload Your Work in Week 7 Module	

Date	Details	Due
	https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398552 	
	 Writing Assignment - - Week 10 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398553 	
	 Writing Assignment - - Week 11 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398554 	
	 Writing Assignment - Due NEXT Week (with Week 8 Module) https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398555 	
	 Writing Assignment - Week 1, Fall 2024 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398556 	
	 Writing Assignment - Week 2, Fall 2024 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398557 	
	 Writing Assignment - Week 3, Fall 2024 https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/79801/assignments/1398558 