

Legal Research Study Proposal

In 2009, The University of South Dakota School of Law integrated the legal writing and research programs into a full year Fundamental Legal Skills (FLS) program. The purpose of the change was to create a full year program that would introduce law students, in a practical but dynamic way, to fundamental skills needed to become successful entry level attorneys.

Historically, awarding only one hour of course credit has been one of the deterrents to students putting needed time into learning time-consuming skills. By conferring three hours of credit for the course, the program recognizes the importance of rewarding time and energy that students must employ to become good researchers.

This study aims to evaluate the fundamental legal skills of the 2009 entering class at least three times during of their law school experience; identify through surveys, administered throughout the three year curriculum, which fundamental skills may be deficient; identify which skills need to be brought more in line with law firm expectations of research skills for entry level attorneys; and propose changes to curriculum if surveys indicate weakness in particular areas.

The empirical research portion of this project will have a two part focus. The first part of the focus will identify studies that have been conducted in law firms to determine the areas of importance in research in law firm settings.

The second focus of the study will be conducted through a survey given to USD students who will graduate in 2012. The survey will assess their legal skills when they are incoming 1Ls, another survey at the end of their 1L Fundamental Legal Skills class, possibly another in the

second year and another in the final semester of law school. Each survey becomes increasingly difficult in terms of the questions asked about research.