



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

MAURER SCHOOL OF LAW
Bloomington

COURSE GUIDE

Applied Research Practicum: Legal Systems in Indiana (LAW-B628)

Meeting time: Thursdays, 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Semester Dates: 1/12/2026 - 5/8/2026

Room: Baier Hall 214

1. Instructors:

Angie Raymond Kelley School of Business angraymo@iu.edu Godfrey 3070T	William Henderson Maurer School of Law wihender@iu.edu Baier Hall 255 Office Hours: Mondays 4:25-5:25, by appointment.	Bella Bennett Maurer School of Law ismabenn@iu.edu Baier Hall 256 Office hours: Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.; By appointment
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As described below, the Applied Research Practicum (ARP) has additional instructors for specific parts of the course: Hon. James Carr ('75), Adam Licht, Matt Rust ('19), and Elmer Thoreson ('19)

2. Required Materials

No textbook is required for this course. All required course materials will be made available on Canvas as needed. You are responsible for regularly checking Canvas and completing all tasks on your To Do lists each week. All readings and assignments will be listed on each week's Canvas page.

3. Course Description

The Applied Research Practicum (ARP) is an ongoing access-to-justice project being conducted on behalf of the Indiana Supreme Court. Like every state, Indiana has a large and growing population of self-represented litigants (more than 50% in some areas of law). However, upstream from the courts is a much larger population of Indiana residents who struggle to afford legal services related to everyday life issues, such as housing, healthcare, employment, government benefits, and access to consumer credit. The bottleneck problem is a severe mismatch between ordinary people's legal needs and traditional law firm's capacity to provide affordable legal advice at scale.

In 2024, through the Commission on Indiana's Legal Future, the Indiana Supreme Court ruled that allied legal professionals working under a lawyer's supervision could help address legal deserts and

unmet legal needs among low- and middle-income Hoosiers. Additionally, the Court has shown readiness to fund a pilot grant for a nonprofit law firm model that would employ ALPs as part of its operational structure (like a nonprofit hospital or college that generates revenue to cover some or all of its operating costs). This is a potentially promising idea. However, someone must turn it from theory into practice. Fortunately, this is the role of applied research.

During the first iteration of this course (2024-25), undergraduates and law students successfully completed a detailed stakeholder analysis for the seven-county legal market surrounding Bloomington. The second iteration of the course (2025-26) is laying the foundation for a pilot nonprofit law firm to provide low-complexity, high-volume legal services in the same geographic area. This semester's work includes process maps, practice manuals, electronically enabled workflows, and document automation in family law and consumer debt, two high-need areas of law. With the assistance of a federal bankruptcy judge, we will also develop an advisory protocol to help clients determine whether they may benefit from either Chapter 7 or Chapter 13 consumer bankruptcy. The goal is to create resources and materials for ALPs and supervising lawyers to use in the pilot nonprofit operating business.

4. Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- (a) **Explain** the litigation processes in family law, bankruptcy, and consumer debt collection cases, from filing to conclusion (*Maurer JD Program Goal 1*).
- (b) **Evaluate and recommend** effective technology solutions for developing workflows and giving legal advice (*JD Program Goal 3*).
- (c) **Identify and analyze** access to justice issues and **develop** effective solutions (*JD Program Goals 3, 4 and 6*).
- (d) **Execute** the fundamentals of team-based project management, including the role of team-level manager (*JD Program Goals 3 and 5*).
- (e) **Conduct** basic qualitative and quantitative research on access to justice issues (*JD Program Goals 2, 4, and 5*).

5. Grading:

Below is a table of assignments and their corresponding point values. Assignment descriptions are located in the "Class Structure and Assignment Descriptions" portion of the syllabus.

Assignment	Point Value
Attendance and Participation	15
Courtroom Observations and Reflections (Due by May 11)	10
"100 Cases" Assignment (Completed during Week 2 Class)	5
Reflection Exercises (5 x 2 points each) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflection 1 due January 28• Reflection 2 due February 4	10

Assignment	Point Value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection 3 due February 25 • Reflection 4 due March 4 • Reflection 5 due March 25 	
Formative and Summative Feedback (2 x 5 points each)	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative Feedback due March 14 • Summative Feedback due April 20 	
Project Assignments	50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Plan – 5 points (due Feb. 20) • Interim Progress Report – 10 points (due March 14) • Final Project Submission – 35 points (due May 11) 	
	100 Total Points

6. Applied Research ("Why" portion of course)

An important threshold question: "What is applied research?" Applied research is research designed to solve practical problems of the modern world. This is very different from basic (aka *fundamental* or *pure*) research, which seeks to expand knowledge. In most research universities, basic research is the norm (this is how faculty get tenure), with applied research being a relatively rare exception.

As noted in the course description, the goal and purpose of this semester's Applied Research Practicum is to design and build foundational infrastructure that will enable a new nonprofit law firm to cost-effectively service the most common and recurring legal needs of low and moderate-income Hoosiers. This access and affordability gap is the practical problem we are trying to solve.

7. Team-Based Projects ("What" portion of course)

Because the Applied Research Practicum (ARP) is engaged in applied research, we (you and your instructors) need a work product that helps us solve the practical problem of access and affordability.¹ So, what does that mean for you? Rather than a traditional law school class, the ARP will feel more like a job with deadlines.

The solution we are working on—the nonprofit law firm that is self-sustaining through earned revenue—will take several years to design, build, and refine. Your instructors are the primary architects. During your time with us, your job is to complete (or in some cases, start) several items on our design-and-build sheet. Like so much of the modern workplace, these items are team-based projects in which team members (here, students) figure out the most efficient and effective way to complete the work. As you will see, your legal training is an asset for this particular phase of the ARP, but in many cases, so is your undergraduate training and/or work experience.

For the most part, team composition will remain relatively fluid, with one exception. Each student will be assigned (or, if possible, select) one of two areas of law:

¹ Professor Henderson has been known to ask during class, "What is most important to me?" The answer is always, "Advancing the applied research project so we solve the real-world problem."

- **Consumer Debt.** By a wide margin, consumer debt is the most common case type in the Indiana court system. The most common scenario is a creditor suing in court to collect a debt. When the debtor failed to appear (80-90% of the time), a default judgment is entered. Thereafter, the creditor seeks to enforce the judgment (i.e., collect the debt) through a proceedings supplemental hearing, which may result in wage garnishment (up to 25% of debtor pay), forced sale of property, and/or seizure of bank accounts. Unfortunately, of the hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers caught up in the debt collection process each year, virtually none of them have access to legal advice, thus compounding feelings of fear and helplessness and creating additional downstream financial hardship.
- **Family Law.** Divorce, child custody, and guardianship are common life events that require state action. Unfortunately, nearly 80% of all family law cases in Indiana courts have self-represented litigants on one or both sides. Although few low- and moderate-income Hoosiers can afford full courtroom representation, access to legal advice and form-completion services can dramatically improve the family law process for litigants, judges, and court staff. Part of the ARP's short to medium-term goal is to stand up a family law help center in Monroe County Circuit Court.

The above two areas of law are relevant to a vital Week 2 assignment: roughly half the class will review and code the last 100 debt collection cases filed in Monroe County Court (where Bloomington is located), and the other half will review and code the last 100 family law cases. In brief, we need to establish a baseline of legal need and legal activity in the largest court in our seven-county area.

After Week 2, all students will be exposed to some aspect of the following projects, with a subgroup of students driving the project to completion (or a particular milepost) as their capstone project.

- (a) **Project Requirement and Vendor Selection Exercise (Weeks 2-3).** The nonprofit law firm needs a technology platform (or connected platforms) that has the following capabilities:
 - Can be used to build and host an expert system for giving legal advice (if / then conditional logic)
 - The expert system becomes the basis for a guided interview workflow
 - The completed data fields can be used to auto-generate, and possibly auto-file, legal documents.

During Weeks 2 and 3, guest Instructor **Adam Licht**, a consultant with a wealth of legal tech experience, will set up this effort by providing the class with a detailed product requirement framework. Licht will provide the names of companies worth considering. Students apply the framework to various vendors with online research and demos, completing the evaluative matrix.

- A subgroup of students will present results to Licht in early April.

- (b) **Build or license decision (Week 4).** This subproject is adjacent to subproject #1. Students learn about debtor-side consumer debt collection from **Matt Rust ('19)**, an Indiana lawyer

who is the founder of LawLaw, a LegalTech company focused on assisting self-represented debtors in debt collection cases.

- There is a decent chance that the nonprofit law firm licenses LawLaw's platform, as it provides automated letters and pleadings in debt collection suits.
- Students working on the technology project (#1) need to be involved in this decision, as it raises interoperability questions that Adam Licht can answer.

(c) **Help Center at Monroe County Court for Family Law Cases (Week 5, first half).** A Monroe County Circuit Judge with close ties to the Law School wants a lawyer-staffed on-site help center to assist parties with family law issues.

- This is an opportunity to get exposure to the full range and complexity of family law cases in our geographic region. It is also a valuable precursor to the nonprofit law firm
- Crucial: This effort needs to evaluate the overlap between divorce, child support, and consumer debt issues, including the desirability/implications and/or likelihood of bankruptcy post-divorce. Thus, it is linked to projects (d) & (e).

(d) **Debt Relief Agencies (Week 5, second half).** Our nonprofit law firm is at grave risk of being confused with for-profit debt relief companies that negotiate consumer debt and earn a percentage of the savings. However, debtors often do not understand the risks and implications of engaging with these companies, which are highly effective marketers in a volume-based business. Access to affordable legal advice can help debtors identify better legal options.

- We need to learn as much as possible about this sector. **Elmer Thoreson ('19)** can get us started here, as he routinely witnessed the complexities and problems these companies created for debtors.
- Much of this sector is predatory or, at a minimum, profit-maximizing rather than mission-based. We need a database of all the major players.
- We need to understand how these agencies affect people's ability, or likelihood of, filing for bankruptcy (either Chapter 7 or Chapter 13).

(e) **Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 Bankruptcy.** Over 60% of all unmet legal needs involve some element of financial hardship. For many people, the best option is the fresh start of bankruptcy, which is a right enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.² Thus, our nonprofit law firm needs sufficient competency in bankruptcy to advise on consumer debt collection and family law matters. We also need to evaluate the potential of a business model that involves collaborations with Indiana's bankruptcy bar.

² Federal bankruptcy law originates in Article I, Section 8, Clause 4 of the U.S. Constitution, which grants Congress the power "to establish... uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies throughout the United States." The Framers included this clause to replace inconsistent state debtor–creditor laws under the Articles of Confederation; prevent interstate chaos and creditor favoritism; and support national commerce by providing predictable rules for debt discharge and creditor priority. Bankruptcy scholar David Skeel has referred to bankruptcy as the "first rung of capitalism," as a functioning market economy requires a legal exit from failure.

- During Week 7, **Judge James Carr ('75)** from the SD of Indiana Bankruptcy Court will teach one three-hour session on Chapter 7; during Week 8, he will teach another three-hour session on Chapter 13. These sessions will include actual bankruptcy trustees and attorneys.
- These classes will be recorded and transcribed, as we will use them a basis for an initial process map for basic bankruptcy counseling work.

8. Class Structure and Assignment Descriptions ("How")

1. ***Sub-project Groups.*** You will be sorted into project groups based on your indicated preference. Project descriptions are listed above.
2. ***Working Sessions.*** Many of our class periods will be “working sessions,” in which you will work with your group on your project. At the beginning of each of these classes, your group will report three things to the class: (1) what you said you would do at the end of the previous session; (2) what you have done and learned since the previous session; and (3) what you plan on working on during the present working session. At the end of these classes, your group will report your progress and what you plan to work on in the coming week to the class.
3. ***Attendance and Participation.*** This course involves extensive group work, which requires contribution from all members of a team. Therefore, it is imperative that you attend as many classes as possible to be fair to your team members, your instructors, and yourself. As such, you will be awarded one point for each class session you attend. Attendance in class sessions are, therefore, worth a total of thirteen (13) points. Half a point may be deducted for tardiness or for severe disengagement during class (e.g., not engaging with your group, utilizing your phone or laptop for non-class purposes). You can earn up to two (2) additional points based on your participation in and contributions to the classroom throughout the semester, which is considered separately from your class attendance.

Your instructors are aware that life circumstances can make it impossible or prohibitively difficult to attend class. If you are not able to attend a class session due to illness, travel, family situations, or circumstances, let us know as early as possible so we can work with you to find another option, such as having you attend class remotely or granting you an excused absence.

If you encounter a serious personal issue that may cause you to miss a significant number of classes, you should discuss the situation as soon as possible with the Dean of Students.

4. ***“100 Cases” Assignment.*** During our second class session, you and your group will work together to review and code filings from 100 cases. If you are in the Consumer Law group, you will review petitions from 100 civil collection cases in Monroe County. If you are in the Family Law group, you will review petitions from 100 divorce cases (with and without children) in Monroe County. You will be provided with a spreadsheet that has been created by your instructors within which to complete this assignment.

5. **Courtroom Observations and Reflection Paper.** You are required to attend four (4) hours of courtroom observations throughout the semester. By the end of the semester, you must submit a 2-3 page reflection on your experience observing court. This reflection must, in part, make connections between your “100 Cases” assignment and the in-court observations themselves. You are NOT permitted to use AI on this reflection, except to assist with grammar or organization.

6. **Formative and Summative Feedback.** At two different points in the semester, you will be evaluated on your contributions to your team. The first assessment is formative, and will be due the week before Spring Break. You will submit feedback on your team members prior to Spring Break. To receive full credit on this, you need only provide complete, good-faith feedback for your peers.

The summative assessment will take place at the end of the semester, and will help determine your teamwork grade. The summative review solicits only positive feedback; students who accumulate more specific positive feedback from peers—and provide more specific and complete feedback on others—will do better.

7. **Reflection Exercises.** Throughout the semester, you will complete five (5) different reflection exercises, each worth two points. These reflections will be posted to the class discussion board for that week. You have two options for completing these reflection assignments. You may either post your own reflection, or build off of a classmate’s reflection. In either option, your reflection should be approximately 200 words and include at least one question about the materials for that week. You are NOT permitted to use AI on these reflections, except to assist with grammar or organization.

8. **Final Project.** The majority of your grade will come from the project that you will be working on with your team throughout the semester. You will receive grades for three separate components of your project:

- a. Preliminary Project Plan. You will work with your group to submit a preliminary project plan early in the semester. This plan should be 1-2 pages, and contain (1) a description of your project; (2) steps you need to take to complete the project; (3) projected timeline for completion of major portions of the project; and (4) a plan for delegation of duties (i.e., who does what). Remember, this is a preliminary plan—while your overall project will not change, some of the specifics of *how* you complete your project might need to shift as circumstances require.
- b. Interim Progress Report. In March, your group will submit an interim progress report, in which you will update your instructors on the status of your project. You should discuss (1) the progress you have made so far; (2) challenges you have encountered and how your group addressed those challenges; and (3) your plan for the remainder of the semester.
- c. Final Project. At the end of the semester, you will submit the final materials for your project. Some of these materials will be specific to your group’s project. However, all groups will submit a short report that discusses: (1) the progress you have made since

your interim progress report; (2) challenges that arose after the interim progress report and how your group was able to overcome them; and (3) how the process of completing your project throughout the semester differed from or adhered to your initial and interim plans.

9. Course Schedule ("When")

Below are the topics that will be addressed and assignments due each week. Due dates and assignments are subject to change.

Week	Session	Assignments
1 (1/15)	Introduction to course; Preliminary delineation and scoping of projects	On Canvas, read: - Course Guide - Raymond and Henderson article
2 (1/22)	"100 Cases" Working Session	See Canvas.
3 (1/29)	Product Requirements for Tech INSTRUCTOR: Adam Licht	See Canvas. o Reflection Exercise 1 due Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 11:59 p.m.
4 (2/5)	Law Law with Matt Rust INSTRUCTOR: Matt Rust; Elmer Thoreson	See Canvas. o Reflection Exercise 2 due Wednesday, Feb. 4, at 11:59 p.m.
5 (2/12)	Working Session	See Canvas. o Project Preference due by Wednesday, Jan. 11, at 11:59 p.m.
6 (2/19)	Working Session	See Canvas. o Formative Feedback due Friday, Feb. 20, at 11:59 p.m. o Project Plan due Friday, Feb. 20, at 11:59 p.m.
7 (2/26)	Bankruptcy – Chapter 7 INSTRUCTOR: Judge Carr + Guests	See Canvas. o Reflection Exercise 3 due Wednesday, Feb. 25, at 11:59 p.m.
8 (3/5)	Bankruptcy – Chapter 13 INSTRUCTOR: Judge Carr + Guests	See Canvas. o Reflection Exercise 4 due Wednesday, March 4, at 11:59 p.m.
9 (3/12)	Working Session	See Canvas. o Interim Progress Report Due Saturday, March 14, at 11:59 p.m.
10	SPRING BREAK- NO CLASS	NO CLASS.

Week	Session	Assignments
11 (3/26)	Working Session	See Canvas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reflection Exercise 5 due <i>Wednesday, March 25, at 11:59 p.m.</i>
12 (4/2)	Complete Technology Selection INSTRUCTOR: Adam Licht	See Canvas.
13 (4/9)	Final Bankruptcy Process Maps INSTRUCTOR: Judge Carr	See Canvas.
14 (4/16)	Final Presentations	See Canvas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summative Feedback due <i>Friday, April 17, at 11:59 p.m.</i>
5/11	FINAL ASSIGNMENTS DUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Final Project due <i>11:59 p.m.</i> ○ Courtroom Observations + Reflection due <i>11:59 p.m.</i>

10. AI Policy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related technologies are powerful tools for accelerating learning and boosting productivity. Across virtually all areas of our professional work, including this class, your instructors are exploring ways to leverage them effectively. Thus, we encourage our students to do the same. That said, by a wide margin, the most reliable and durable way to build foundational domain knowledge—the core purpose of a JD degree—is through close reading, producing written work product, and peer discussion. As Ezra Klein comments, it's "the process of grappling" with knowledge that changes us. Without the requisite domain knowledge, we are unable to detect AI's significant limitations.

11. University Policies

The Maurer School of Law is committed to providing all students with a positive, supportive learning environment. Specific guidance on [disability accommodations](#), [religious observances](#), [bias-incident reporting](#), [sexual misconduct](#), and [Title IX](#) is available online. If you have questions, please contact the Leonard D. Fromm Office for Student Affairs at 812-855-4809 or lawosa@iu.edu.