

MEMO

To: Students in Legal Analysis and Writing—Part II: Spring
From: Profs. Kevin D. Ashley, Ann Sinsheimer, Chris Schunn, Diane Litman,
Re: Research study in connection with course assignment.
Date: January 30th, 2012

As indicated in your course syllabus you will receive a brief-writing assignment later in the semester. The assignment involves using an online system to diagram arguments in order to help prepare your arguments. As an initial step, you have read, or will soon read, an assigned legal opinion and create an outline that will help you in diagramming and writing your own argument for the brief. The online diagramming system, called LASAD, provides a web-based framework and training for the construction of argument diagrams.

In cooperation with Prof. Sinsheimer, Profs. Ashley, Schunn, and Litman, and their assistants, Dr. Lippman, Mr. Lynch, and Mr. Falakmasir, who are all researchers from the University of Pittsburgh Learning Research and Development Center (the “Researchers”) are conducting a research study entitled, “Teaching Writing and Argumentation with AI-supported Diagramming & Peer Review.” The purpose of the research study is to examine the pedagogical utility of argument diagrams as an aid to improving students’ written argumentation. For that reason, the Researchers would like to collect data in connection with your work on the course writing assignment, including your use of the LASAD program.

Prof. Sinsheimer has instructed all students in the class to complete the course brief-writing assignment and to use the LASAD system to diagram arguments. For purposes of the research study, however, the Researchers will only collect and use data of students who are willing to participate in the research study, and participation in the research study is entirely voluntary.

In particular, the Researchers will collect the following information from or with respect to all and only students who choose to participate in the research study: students’ argument diagrams, opinion outlines, briefs and other written assignments and scores on said assignments, worksheets, and surveys. In addition, for purposes of interpreting the research results the Researchers will collect demographic information including students’ LSAT scores, GPAs, and gender.

All participating students’ data will be confidential. Each participant will be assigned an anonymizing code, and a master list linking codes and students’ names will be prepared. Only two members of the research team will have access to the master list and will use it only to link the data from the registrar to class data. After that point, all analysis of the data will be done under anonymous codes, and the master list will be maintained in a secure place, as will any other personally identifying information. While the results and excerpts from argument diagrams, opinion outlines, briefs and other written assignments

and scores on said assignments, worksheets, and surveys may be reported in academic papers and presentations, no personally identifying information will be disclosed.

There are no foreseeable risks involved with your participation in the research study and no direct benefits to you. There will be no payment for participation. Your participation, however, will lead to enrichment of knowledge in the field of intelligent tutoring systems and may help to improve future educational methods for teaching legal reading, writing, and argumentation skills.

This research study is classified by the university as "exempt" under 45 CFR Part 46 as an evaluation of an educational strategy. Thus, it is not necessary to obtain a signed consent form to participate in the study. Students may indicate their willingness to participate in the research study by completing the attached form releasing their demographic information and course data. Students may withdraw from the research study at any time by emailing Prof. Kevin D. Ashley at Ashley@pitt.edu. Students planning to complete the course writing assignment but who are not willing to participate in the research study should not complete the attached form.

This study is being conducted by Prof. Kevin D. Ashley. He can be reached at ashley@pitt.edu or via telephone at (412) 624-7496 if a participant has any questions.

To sign up for the study, please complete the form titled "Waiver to Release Educational Records and Permission to Obtain Specified Data" and deliver it to Patricia Blake in Room 514B. Prof. Ashley will contact you with instructions.

**WAIVER TO RELEASE EDUCATIONAL RECORDS AND
PERMISSION TO OBTAIN SPECIFIED DATA**

My signature on this date means that I hereby authorize the Registrar of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law to release certain educational record information, in particular, my LSAT scores, GPAs, and gender, to Profs. Kevin Ashley, Chris Schunn, and Diane Litman, and their assistants, Dr. Jordan Lippman, Mr. Collin Lynch, and Mr. Falakmasir for use in the research study entitled, "Teaching Writing and Argumentation with AI-supported Diagramming & Peer Review."

I understand that by signing this authorization, I am waiving my rights of nondisclosure of these records under federal law only to the person(s)/organization(s) specifically listed. This release does not permit the disclosure of these records to any other persons or entities without my written consent or as permitted by law.

I further understand that I do not have to consent to this disclosure and that I may revoke the authorization by sending a written revocation of this authorization to Prof. Kevin Ashley and/or the University Registrar. I understand that any revocation of authority hereunder would only govern subsequent releases and only be valid from the time that Prof. Ashley or the Registrar receives the written notice.

I also agree to the collection and use for the above research study of the following information in connection with Legal Analysis and Writing—Part II: Spring: argument diagrams, opinion outlines, briefs and other written assignments and scores on said assignments, worksheets, and surveys. I understand that my information will be treated anonymously and then used for the purposes of this research study in aggregate format; therefore, I cannot revoke my consent. I understand that this information will be maintained as confidential and that no personally identifying information will be disclosed.

Name	Subject's signature	Date	email
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Student System ID Number