

Washington State University

College of Education

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Will defend the dissertation

Date: April 7, 2020

Time: 10:00 A.M.

Location: Pullman – Cleveland Hall 353

TriCities – Floyd 207S

Zoom by request

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend.

**TECHNICAL LEGAL VOCABULARY FOR LAW SCHOOL INITIATES WHO SPEAK ENGLISH AS
AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE**

Chair: Thomas Salisbury

Legal English is the lingua franca of international commerce, inspiring internationally-trained attorneys to study legal English and U.S. law. Studying law in a different language, culture, and legal system can be a Herculean task. Technical legal vocabulary is a significant part of that task. Research aimed at supporting materials and methods development for teaching and learning legal English has not caught up to the global spread of legal English. This study addresses the need for research that can inform such materials and methods development. Specifically, it is a two-part needs analysis addressing technical legal vocabulary. It first identifies the technical legal vocabulary used in a Contracts course, a prototypical, foundational, business-oriented U.S. law school course. It also describes how vocabulary is treated in course discussions and lectures. Keyword analysis was found to more effectively identify useful vocabulary than was identification of terms achieved by focusing on those defined within course discussions. Qualitative analysis confirmed that teaching and learning technical legal vocabulary is significant: it was integral to learning legal concepts and occurred frequently. Further, the Contracts professor explicitly focused on how word meanings can shift depending on legal contexts. The second part of needs analysis assesses what initiate law students who speak English as an additional language knew about the terms identified in part one. Participants were familiar with technical legal vocabulary that occurs with more frequency in everyday spoken English (e.g., client, defense, jury). They were unfamiliar with technical legal vocabulary that occurs with less frequency in everyday spoken English (e.g., adhesion, fiduciary, officious). This suggests that, within an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context, the lower frequency words are the words that could be taught and learned with the aim of helping students better understand class discussions.