Law Practice Management
George Mason University School of Law
Fall 2013

Instructors: David Ginsberg and Robert Feisee
Telephones: 703-934-1480 and 703-654-6019
E-mails: dginsberg@cgglawyers.com and raf@insightlaw.net

Professor Ginsberg is a founding partner in an eight attorney family law firm in Fairfax, Virginia. Professor Feisee is the founding partner in a three attorney trusts and estates firm in Ashburn, Virginia. Both Professors are 1996 graduates of the George Mason University School of Law.


Course Purpose:

This course was created for students who plan to enter private practice as a lawyer or firm manager. Some of you may be planning to go it alone; others may be joining small firms already in existence where every lawyer is involved in firm management to a greater or lesser degree; others may be uncertain about career plans, but intend to learn about practice as an alternative that they may consider.

Course Policies:

Introduction: Law Practice Management is a two credit, one semester course that will meet for two hours once a week. The course is designed to provide you with a foundation in law practice management. It will expose you to all aspects of the administrative and business side of a law firm whether you want to hang a shingle or become a partner in a medium to large size firm. It will acquaint you with the practical and ethical issues surrounding billing, trust accounts, and collections; marketing for lawyers, and client interaction from the initial consult to conclusion of representation. This course is intended to give you the basic foundation in the business aspects of law necessary to enable you to operate your own practice or become a financially productive member of a firm. Classes will include lecture, discussion, interactive role playing, and projects. By the conclusion of this class, you will outline the steps necessary to reach your desired legal position.

Class attendance: Absence or lateness will have a significant negative effect on your grade (excused absences are limited to religious observances, medical or family emergencies, and illness).

Internet policy: Please do not access the internet or send emails or instant messages during class.
Class Participation: There will be classes devoted to simulations/presentations on different segments of building your law practice. You are expected and required to participate in each of these simulations. You are also expected to participate in class discussions during the remaining classes.

Written Papers: The written papers should be typed with one inch margins. Each paper must be your own independent work. There will be one short written assignment during the semester, and your final exam will be a paper.

Grades: Your final grade for the class will be based on the following components:

(1) Business Plan: At the end of the semester in lieu of a final exam, you will be required to submit a business plan for your proposed law practice. The business plan will be an individual project. This paper will constitute 50% of your final grade.

(2) Partnership Agreement: On the first day of class, you will be assigned to a firm consisting of four students. Your "firm" will prepare a partnership agreement, which will constitute 20% of your final grade.

(3) Questionnaire: Your "firm" will be required to complete a questionnaire, which will constitute 10% of your final grade.

(4) Class participation: Your class contributions and attendance will constitute 10% of your final grade.

(5) Time Records: Keep a record of time spent in this course, including the dates and time spent on reading, attending class, working on group projects, working on individual projects and other activities. You may utilize a word processing table, a spreadsheet or a dedicated timekeeping software like Timeslips or Quickbooks to record this information. This assignment will be worth 10% of your final grade.

Office Hours: Office hours will be made available upon request. You may contact either Mr. Ginsberg or Mr. Feisee directly to meet to discuss any issues or concerns that you may have regarding the class.

Schedule

(1) 8/19: Course overview
   a. Review grading policies and discuss class assignments
   b. Keys to a successful law practice
   c. Organizing your law practice
   d. Student description of his/her career goals
   e. Assignment of student law firms
   f. Review of Questionnaire

(2) 8/26: Allocation of Resources
   a. Personnel
b. Physical/Office
  
c. Technology

(3) 9/9: Budgeting
    a. Revenue and Expense Projections
    b. Accounting Procedures

(4) 9/16: Marketplace for legal services and business/profession discussion
    a. Competition for Legal Services
    b. Providers of Legal Services
    c. Are you a business or a professional service provider
    d. Questionnaire Due (Group Project)

(5) 9/23: Managing the Practice of Law
    a. Business strategies applied to law firms
    b. Risk Management

(6) 9/30: Strategic Planning and Marketing of Legal Services
    a. Marketing Plans
    b. Marketing Strategies

(7) 10/7: Marketing for Solo versus Firms
    a. Identify different strategies for firms of different sizes
    b. Economics of marketing

(8) Tues. 10/15: Marketing Presentation (Individual)

(9) 10/21: Managing Financial Resources
    a. Start-Up Expenses
    b. Operating Expenses
    c. Profits
    d. Financial Planning

(10) 10/28: Managing Clients
    a. Attracting and maintaining ideal client
    b. Billing and collecting fees
    c. Terminating representation

(11) 11/4: Technology
    a. Legal Services
    b. Billing
    c. File Management
    d. Partnership Agreement Due (Group Project)

(12) 11/11: Practice Systems Components
    a. Firm policies and procedures
    b. Ethics
    c. Time Management: Work product and billing records

(13) 11/18: Presentation of Firm goals (Group Project)

(14) Thurs. 11/21: Guest lecture: Banking and obtaining financing for firm; and Business Plan discussion

FINAL EXAM – Business Plan and Time Records due by December 9, 2013 at 5:00 p.m. by e-mail to Mr. Ginsberg and Mr. Feisee.