Law Practice Management
George Mason University School of Law
Fall 2016

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Professor Ginsberg is a founding partner in a family law firm in Fairfax, Virginia. Professor Feisee is the founding partner in a 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). (Please see also Academic Regulation 4-1, Class Attendance.)

Internet policy: Please do not access the internet or send emails or instant messages during class.
Class Participation: 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 60% of your final grade.

(2) Partnership Agreement: You will be assigned to a firm consisting of two to four students. Your "firm" will prepare a partnership agreement, which will constitute 20% of your final grade.

(3) Class participation: Your class contributions and attendance will constitute 20% 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) 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) Allocation of Resources
   a. Personnel
   b. Physical/Office
   c. Technology

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

(4) Managing Financial Resources
   a. Start-Up Expenses
   b. Operating Expenses
   c. Profits
   d. Financial Planning

(5) 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

(6) Managing the Practice of Law
a. Business strategies applied to law firms
b. Risk Management

(7) Strategic Planning and Marketing of Legal Services
a. Marketing Plans
b. Marketing Strategies

(8) Marketing for Solo versus Firms
a. Identify different strategies for firms of different sizes
b. Economics of marketing

(9) Marketing (Application to Firms)

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

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

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

(13) Integration of firm goals and resources into comprehensive plan

(14) Guest lecture: Banking and obtaining financing for firm; and Business Plan discussion

FINAL EXAM – Business Plan