Law Practice Management
George Mason University School of Law
Fall 2019

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Professor Ginsberg is a founding partner in a family law firm (Cooper Ginsberg Gray) in Fairfax, Virginia. Professor Feisee is the founding partner in a trusts and estates firm (Insight Law) 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. The course is designed to help students identify and develop solutions to management and business issues that arise in law practices. The course offers practical advice and guidance regarding the management of your practice regardless of the firm size that the student plans to join.

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 necessary to enable you to operate your own practice or become a financially productive and successful member of a firm. Classes will include lecture, discussion, 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: You are expected to participate in class discussions during the classes.
Written Papers: The written papers should be typed with one inch margins. Except for group projects, each paper must be your own independent work. There will be one written group 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. Student description of his/her career goals
     c. Business of Law
     d. Marketplace for Legal Services
     e.
  (2) Legal Services: Your Product
     a. Competition for Legal Services
     b. Providers of Legal Services
     c. Are you a business or a professional service provider
     d. Assignment of student law firms
  (3) Firm Ownership Issues
     a. Should you have a partner?
     b. Ideal Partner Characteristics
     Strategic Planning – short and long term
     c. Firm Goals
     d. Mission Statement
     e. Definition of Success
     f. Team Member Goals
     g. Time Management
  (4) Marketing: Getting Clients
     a. Marketing Plans
b. Marketing Strategies
   c. Identify different strategies for firms of different sizes
   d. Economics of marketing

(5) Managing Clients: Keeping Clients
   a. Attracting and maintaining your ideal client
   b. Setting expectations with clients
   c. Scope of representation
   d. Billing and collecting fees
   e. Termination of representation

(6) Systems: The key to a successful practice
   a. Know your process
   b. Firm policies and procedures
   c. Utilizing systems to help manage your team
   d. Ethics
   e. Work product and billing records
   f. Billing & Collections

(7) Human Resources: Handling your most valuable asset – your team members.
   a. Creating a Successful Team
   b. Recruiting
   c. Compensation
   d. In house vs. out-sourcing

(8) Managing Your Team
   a. Setting Expectations
   b. Review Process
   c. Goals & Incentives

(9) Finance: Budgeting and managing your money
   a. Start-Up Expenses
   b. Operating Expenses
   c. Profits
   d. Financial Planning

(10) Budgeting
    a. Revenue and Expense Projections
    b. Accounting Procedures
    c. Collections

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

(12) Allocation of Resources – What is the best use of your limited resources?
    a. Personnel
    b. Physical/Office
    c. Technology

(13) Review
    a. Course review and discussion of business plan
b. Guest lecture: Banking and obtaining financing for firm; and Business Plan discussion

FINAL EXAM – Business Plan