RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ACADEMIC COURSE OUTLINE

LAW OFFICE MANAGEMENT   LEGL-127

I. Basic Course Information

A. Course Title and Number: Law Office Management   LEGL-127

B. New or Modified Course: Modified

C. Date of Proposal: Spring 2011

D. Sponsoring Department: Business & Public Service

E. Semester Credit Hours: 3

F. Weekly Contact Hours: Lecture: 3
                                   Lab: 0

G. Prerequisites: Role of Paralegal LEGL-101
                                   (This prerequisite is for AAS students only –
                                   No prerequisites for Certificate students)

H. Laboratory Fees: None

I. Name/Email of Coordinator: Maria M. DeFilippis, Esq.
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II. Catalog Description

Prerequisite: Role of the Paralegal LEGL-101. This prerequisite is for AAS students only; no prerequisite for Certificate students. This course is an introduction to and exploration of the law office as a business and as a profession. The functional aspects of law office management such as fees, billing, timekeeping, ethical requirements, accounting, budgeting, and facilities management will be discussed. Administrative skills such as leadership, communication, delegation and personnel issues will also be addressed. Specific software and related skills in the essential operating systems that comprise the modern law office will be reviewed, including docket control, records management, file management, and library management.

III. Statement of Course Need

Law office management is a term used to describe the many daily tasks and the long-range planning needed to run an effective and modern legal practice. The attorney practitioner is relying more and more upon paraprofessional staff to assist with daily management functions as well as long-range software and other systems planning. This course provides those students who have a career

interest in this legal management area with an understanding of the realities of the practice of law, including handling of the firm and its day-to-day operations. The student will also develop the necessary skills to organize firm business, deal with human relations and understand employee motivation. From this knowledge of the firm and its practice goals, the student will be equipped to integrate and participate on a firm management team and assist practicing attorneys in the effective management of their law offices.

IV. <u>Place of Course in College Curriculum</u>

A. The course is an elective in the following programs: Paralegal Studies, AAS Degree and Certificate.

B. This course will transfer to any school with a Paralegal Studies four year degree, which includes Montclair, Thomas Edison, and St. Elizabeth College in New Jersey. It will also transfer to any four year institution offering an ABA approved paralegal program of study.

V. <u>Outline of Course Content</u>

This course is divided into three parts. The first third of the course will   cover the area of the legal marketplace, those people that comprise the law office and the personnel relationships both within the firm and external   to it. The second third of the course is devoted to a discussion of the basic   functions of the law office including fees, timekeeping, billing and financial   management. The final third of the course will deal with the systems that   make law offices work, including software, docket control systems, records   management, file management, and library management.

<u>UNIT I:</u>THE LEGAL MARKETPLACE

A. <u>**The Law Firm Setting**</u> (3 hours)
    1. Its Growth and Evolution
    2. Its Organization and Structure
         a. Sole proprietorships
         b. Partnerships
         c. Professional corporations
         d. Office-sharing arrangements
         e. Miscellaneous firms
    3. Its Governance
    4. Ethics of Firm-Client Relationships

B. <u>**The Legal Team**</u> (3 hours)
    1. Historical Perspective
    2. The Legal Team Members and Their Roles
    3. Management Skills
         a. Organizing and planning functions
         b. Decision-making functions
         c. Staffing functions
         d. Interpersonal functions

C. <u>**Personnel Relations**</u> (3 hours)

      1. Role and Functions of the Personnel Manager
      2. Employee/Management Objectives
          a. Hiring issues
          b. Education
          c. Evaluation
          d. Compensation
      3. Team Approach to Decision-making

D. <u>The Attorney-Client Relationship</u> (3 hours)
      1. Variables Affecting Client Relations
      2. Cultivating Clients
          a. Marketing and Advertising
          b. Public Relations
          c. Solicitation
      3. The Attorney-Client Relationship
          a. When Does it Begin?
          b. When Does it End?
      4. Attorney Discipline

E. <u>Paralegal Ethics and Client Relations</u> (3 hours)
      1. Evolvement of Paralegal Ethics
          a. Role of Bar Associations
          b. Role of Paralegal Associations
      2. Paralegal Ethics and Client Relations
      3. The Unauthorized Practice of Law
          a. Representing Clients in Court
          b. Preparing Legal Documents
          c. Giving Legal Advice
          d. Independent Paralegals

<u>UNIT II:</u>   LEGAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

A. <u>Legal Fees</u> (3 hours)
      1. Types of Fees and Costs
          a. Retainer fees
          b. Fixed fees
          c. Contingent fees
          d. Disbursement costs and overhead
      2. Determination of Fees and Costs
          a. Formulas
          b. Leveraging
      3. Statutory Fees and Guidelines
      4. Fee Agreements

B. <u>Timekeeping</u> (3 hours)
      1. Tracking time
          a. Timekeeping systems
             • manual
             • automated
          b. Various timekeeping software

    2. Billing
        a. Process
        b. Methods
- manual
- automated/software
- billing service bureaus

        c. Using collection bureau
        d. Fee disputes and arbitration

C. **Demonstration of Tabs III Legal Software** (3 hours)
    1. Timekeeping Methods
    2. Billing Methods

D. **Managing Client Trust Accounts** (3 hours)
    1. Types of Funds
    2. Maintaining the account
        a. N.J. Rule requirements
        b. Disbursing the account
        c. Closing the account
    3. IOLTA
    4. Trust Account Abuses

E. **Technology in the Law Office** (5 hours)
    1. Common Legal Software
        a. Spreadsheets
        b. Databases
        c. Litigation Support
    2. Internet
    3. Intranets and Extranets
    4. Ethics of Technology

UNIT III: **LAW OFFICE SYSTEMS**

A. **Introduction** (2 hours)
    1. Types of Systems
        a. Macro
        b. Micro
        c. Mini and Subsystem
    2. Systems Development
    3. Systems Storage
    4. Common Problems

B. **Docket Control Systems** (3 hours)
    1. Elements of a Docket Control System
    2. Calendar Systems
        a. Master Calendar
        b. Personal Calendar
        c. Calendaring Procedures
        d. Calendaring Ethics
    3. Tickler Systems

4. Computerized and Manual Docketing Systems
5. File Review System

C. <u>File and Records Management</u> (3 hours)
1. Filing Systems
    a. Types
    b. Classifications
2. Opening Files
3. File Maintenance
    a. Document categories
    b. Indexes
    c. Electronic records
    d. Document retrieval
4. File closing and Destruction
    a. Procedures
    b. Inactive files
    c. N.J. Rules
5. Ethics in File Management
    a. Conflict of interest checks
    b. Preservation of client property
    c. Confidentiality concerns

D. <u>Law Library Organization and Management</u> (2 hours)
1. Classes and Authority of Law
2. Law Library Organization and Procedures
    a. Library Size
    b. Types of Library Organization
    c. Library Maintenance
    d. Library Checkout Systems
3. Court Forms, Forms Files, and Knowledge Banks
4. The Law Librarian

E. <u>Law Library Technology</u> (3 hours)
1. On-Line Legal and Non-legal Databases
2. Microform
3. CD-ROM
4. E-mail and Telefacsimile (Fax) Transmission
5. The Internet
6. Electronic Citation

VI.   <u>Educational Goals and Learning Outcomes</u>

A. <u>Education Goals</u>

Students will:

1. Produce written work that reflects critical and creative thought relative to law office management. (GE NJ 1)

2. Develop the ability to communicate and collaborate with others to attain effectiveness in the running of a legal practice. (GE NJ 1)

3. Use technology and other systems to research, collect and organize information to make decisions and solve law office management problems. (GE NJ 4)

4. Analyze and evaluate ethical problems in a legal practice setting. (GE NJ 9)

5. Understand diverse peoples, differing values, perspectives and behaviors and their effect on law firm environment. (GE NJ 8)

B. Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe and compare the various forms of legal practice including sole proprietorships, partnerships, professional corporations and office-sharing arrangements.

2. Understand the various client file systems, calendaring and monitoring systems, library and retrieval systems as well as essential office equipment.

3. Describe and compare the various methods for and the importance of accurate and timely tracking of law firm revenues and expenses, including reporting requirements, basic accounting concepts, timekeeping systems and billing practices.

4. Develop competency in the automation and computerization of management functions, finances, communication, library, and practice support.

5. Develop and evaluate criteria for staff selection and methods of maintaining office harmony, including the importance of adherence to state and federal laws regarding hiring/firing and employment discrimination.

6. Identify goals for sufficient training for all employees and goals to efficiently boost productivity while eliminating employee frustration and helping morale.

7. Identify the need for and devise plans to implement an office move, including negotiation, transition criteria, and troubleshooting.

8. Explain the need for and importance of confidentiality, discretion, and other ethical principles in law office management.

9. Demonstrate basic skills and confidence in the following areas:
   - Prioritizing tasks;
   - Organizing work day;

- Delegation;
- Maintaining harmonious communication through effective listening and constructive feedback among support staff, attorneys, and administration;
- Maintaining smooth flow of office procedures, including supply inventory;
- Screening, hiring, evaluating, and exercising authority in personnel matters;
- Maintaining financial records, time records, budgeting needs as prescribed by partners' goals, accounting, tax considerations, and payroll;
- Acting as liaison between vendors, accountants, and consultants.

VII.   Modes of Teaching and Learning

This course will employ the following methods of teaching:
   A. lecture/discussion
   B. computer-assisted & legal specialty software instruction & assignments
   C. small group work & student collaboration
   D. student oral presentations

VIII.   Papers, Examinations, and other Assessment Instruments

This course will employ the following methods of assessment:
   A. Quizzes and examinations
   B. Student Presentations
   C. Document preparation assignments

IX.   Grade Determinants

Written exams, class participation and attendance, document assignments and student group presentations will be used to assess the students according to the general education goals and learning outcomes listed above.

X.   Text and Materials
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   A. Textbook: Nollkamper, *Fundamentals of Law Office Management* (Current Edition); Thomson/DelMar Publishing Company.
   B. web sources
   C. other computer-based and software-specific legal sources

XI.   Resources

The course will require the use of a CATT room to present course specific software, PowerPoint materials, images of legal forms and related documents used in law office management. Students will need ability to access software in a computer lab for preparation and presentation of individual and group assignments.