Introduction to Professional Skills

Program Description and Syllabus

Orientation 2015
Widener Law Delaware¹

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¹Effective July 1, 2015, Widener University School of Law in Wilmington, Delaware will become Widener University Delaware Law School.
Program Description

Many students find law school very different from other school experiences. The subject matters may be new, the workload is heavy, and the vocabulary used in law school seems alien. Even the testing and grading processes in law school are often different from processes employed in other education settings.

The Introduction to Professional Skills program (IPS) is a series of required classes designed to prepare students for unique features of a law school education. The program provides a common body of knowledge for all students in the first semester. In addition, the IPS classes provide opportunities to discuss and practice skills essential to a successful performance as a law student and as a member of the legal profession. You will continue to develop those skills in doctrinal classes and the Applied Learning Labs during the semester.

Reading Materials

The required materials for IPS are the following: (1) Tracey George & Suzanna Sherry, What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: An Introduction to the Study of Law, and (2) the Introduction to Professional Skills Readings Supplement (2015). You may purchase the George & Sherry text from the bookstore on campus as well as from any online book vendor. The Readings Supplement is posted on the Widener Law School web site under Current Students/Registrar's Office/Orientation/Office of Student Affairs.

You should read chapters 1 through 6 of What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know before classes begin on Tuesday, August 11. We also recommend that you have access to a law dictionary, such as Black's Law Dictionary, to assist you with the new vocabulary you will encounter throughout your law school career.

Attendance

Faculty will take attendance for each class of IPS by passing out an attendance sheet at the beginning of each class and having each student initial next to the student's name on the sheet. Your initials will be the only record we have of your attendance in class. Please remember that the School of Law’s Code of Conduct applies to entering information on attendance records.

Please do not be late for class. Coming into a class late is unprofessional, disruptive, and distractive both to other students and to faculty. Anyone repeatedly late will be counted as being absent.

Preparation for Class

Competence is a foundation of the practice of law as a profession, and competence requires thorough preparation. Accordingly, you are expected to read the materials assigned for each class and to prepare to address those materials in class. It is not too early to begin preparing the assigned readings on the attached syllabus. As noted above, the workload in
law school is heavy and managing the time to handle that workload is a skill you should begin to develop. The syllabus for Introduction to Professional Skills is set forth below.

SYLLABUS FOR INTRODUCTION TO PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Tuesday, August 11

Preparation

What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: Chapters 1 through 6.

Introduction to Professional Skills Readings Supplement (2015): Sections I through III. Try your hand at creating case briefs for the court opinions in Section III.

Class 1
Introduction to American Courts and Legal Processes

Class will begin with a brief explanation of Introduction to Professional Skills. Most of the class, however, is devoted to reviewing American constitutional democracy and how a case typically proceeds through trial and appellate courts. The class also will address elements of judge-made law as it relates to the larger system of laws, including such concepts as “common law” and stare decisis. Although some of the material covered may be a review for some students, much of the material is likely to be new. This class provides an important foundation for understanding the origins of and contexts for the materials studied in law school.

Class 2
Expert Learning in Law School: Case Briefing and Analysis

Many law school subjects are taught through reading and discussing judicial opinions (“cases”). This class introduces students to active reading strategies and techniques as means for reading cases effectively. We will highlight the process of creating a case brief, an active reading process students will continue to hone throughout the first year of law school. A case brief provides a framework for extracting and sorting important information from an opinion. The skills developed in creating case briefs are vital for class preparation, exam preparation, and for much of the legal analysis lawyers do.

This class will focus on several court opinions addressing the concept of claims arising from the “same transaction or occurrence.” That concept plays a role in several key parts of Civil Procedure, including modern claim preclusion and party joinder. The class will introduce students to sources of law other than the common law as well as the role of underlying public policies in the application of rules of law.
**Wednesday, August 12**

**Preparation**

*Introduction to Professional Skills Readings Supplement (2015): Section IV.*

In addition please review the Code of Conduct in the Student Handbook. You can find the Handbook on the Law School’s website under Current Students/JD Academics/Office of Student Affairs.

**Class 3**

**Character & Fitness Requirements for Admission to the Profession**

Not only must an applicant to a state bar pass a multi-day bar examination, the applicant also must pass a review by the board of bar examiners of the applicant’s character and fitness. This class will focus on how your conduct before and during law school can affect the character and fitness assessment you must pass to be admitted to practice.

**Class 4**

**Title IX**

Widener University requires each student to receive information and training on compliance with laws prohibiting sexual harassment. This class fulfills the requirement for new students.

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**Thursday, August 13**

**Preparation**

*What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: Chapters 1 through 6.*

*Introduction to Professional Skills Course Materials Supplement (2014): Sections V and VI.*

A brief video recording about outlining will be posted on line in early August 2015. Please watch the recording as part of your preparation for class, and create an outline of permissive party joinder using your class materials and your notes from the classes on August 11. Bring a copy of your outline to class.

(Turn to the next page for class descriptions)

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2 Please note that, due to issues of time management, this class will be Class 4 for students assigned to Sections S and W.

3 Due to issues of time management, this class will be Class 4 for students assigned to Section M.
Class 5

Effective Time Management and Use of Resources from the Student Perspective

No one doubts the novelty and complexities of the first year of law school require effective time management and an understanding of available resources. In this session successful students will lead a discussion of what worked for them and respond to questions you have about how to excel -- and not merely survive – during the first year of law school.

Class 6
Success in the Classroom: Taking Notes and Outlining in Law School

Attending classes and being fully engaged in classroom discussions are crucial steps in the learning process for law students. Being fully engaged requires taking effective notes. This class will provide proven techniques for creating exceptional notes, as well as an overview of the essential types of information that should be included in your notes. This class will use the cases on false imprisonment assigned for Class 1.

Successful law students prepare for final exams all semester. A critical step in the exam preparation process is the creation of course outlines. If done correctly, the process of outlining will help you understand and retain the large amounts of information on which you will be tested. This class will reinforce the outlining concepts covered in the video recording described above.

Class 7
The End Game: Taking Essay Exams

Most incoming students are unfamiliar with the essay examinations given by law professors. The essay examination tests a student’s ability to not only know the rules studied in class, but also to apply the rules to new circumstances. The class will introduce students to the skills needed to succeed on essay exams by having faculty and students work with each other on a practice question.

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4 This class will be Class 7 for students assigned to Section M.
Glossary of Terms

Please familiarize yourself with the following terms before classes begin.

Appellant
Appellate court
Appellee
Cause of action
Civil liability
Common Law
Complaint
Constitution
Criminal liability
Defendant
Dictum
Dissent
Federalism
Issue
Holding
Jurisdiction
Motion
Plaintiff
Precedent
Prima Facie Case
Relief
Remedy
Respondent
Separation of Powers
Stare decisis
Statute
Torts
Trial court