**ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE**

**Social Sciences Division**

**PLS 225 *–* Law Office Management and Field Experience**

**Course Outline**

**Course Number & Name:**  PLS 202 Advanced Legal Research and Writing

**Credit Hours:**  3.0 **Contact Hours:**  3.0 **Lecture:** 3.0 **Lab:**  N/A **Other:**  N/A

**Prerequisites**:  Grades of “C” or better in PLS 202 and PLS 206

**Co-requisites:** None **Concurrent Courses:** None

**Course Outline Revision Date:**  Fall 2010

**Course Description**: Students are placed in law-related positions to gain practical experience necessary for success as legal assistants. Students are required to follow established learning objectives related to their positions to effect the attainment of specific job competencies. Students are required to attend routine sessions on campus with their professor to review their work experiences. The course also examines the role of the paralegal, the Code of Professional Ethics, and other related standards of proper conduct.

**Course Goals:** Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. discuss the codes of professional conduct;

2. identify and describe the legal team;

3. identify, define, and describe legal administration and technology;

1. identify, define, and explain legal ethics and malpractice;
2. identify, describe, and explain the significance of client relations and communication skills;
3. describe and explain law office timekeeping and billing;
4. describe and discuss the significance of client trust funds and law office accounting;
5. describe and explain the process for calendaring, docket control, and case management; and

1. describe and discuss legal marketing.

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)**: Upon successful completion of this course, students should specifically be able to do the following:

1. Discuss and examine the codes of professional conduct:

1.1 *discuss and examine judicial conduct;*

1.2 *discuss and examine attorney ethical standards;* and

1.3 *discuss and examine paralegal professionalism*

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)** (continued):

2. Identify and describe the legal team:

2.1 *identify and describe roles and responsibilities of employment for a paralegal;*

2.2 *identify, describe, and discuss the types of law practices;* and

2.3 *describe law practice organization structures*

3. Identify, define, and describe legal administration and technology:

3.1 *explain why legal assistants need an understanding of file and law library management;*

3.2 *explain file management;*

3.3 *describe filing methods and techniques;*

3.4 *describe the significance of ethics involved in filing management;*

3.5 *describe law library management;* and

3.6 *describe law office and law library technology*

4. Identify, define, and explain legal ethics and malpractice:

4.1 *identify, discuss, and examine ethical and malpractice considerations*; and

4.2 *identify, discuss and examine conflict of interest*

5. Identify, describe, and explain the significance of client relations and communication skills:

5.1 *explain why legal assistants need to foster good client relationships and communicate effectively*;

5.2 *define, describe, and explain the legal professional’s ethical duty to communicate with clients*;

5.3 *define, describe, and discuss the legal professional’s client relationships;* and

5.4 *define, describe, and discuss the importance of communication skills in the legal organization*

6. Describe and explain law office timekeeping and billing:

6.1 *describe and discuss the difference between timekeeping and billing*;

6.2 *explain why legal assistants need to know timekeeping and billing;*

6.3 *describe and discuss the different kinds of legal fee agreements;*

6.4 *explain value billing*;

6.5 *describe, discuss, and explain the ethics involved in timekeeping and billing;* and

6.6 *describe and discuss legal expenses*

7. Describe and discuss the significance of client trust funds and law office accounting:

7.1 *explain why legal assistants need a basic understanding of law office accounting;*

7.2 *identify, describe, and discuss the significance of the client funds and the trust/escrow accounts;*

7.3 *describe and explain budgeting;*

7.4 *describe the collection process;*

7.5 *describe the significance of internal controls;* and

7.6 *explain why lawyers and non-lawyers cannot share fees*

**Measurable Course Performance Objectives (MPOs)** (continued):

8. Describe and explain the process for calendaring, docket control, and case management:

8.1 *discuss and examine calendaring, docket control, and case management;*

8.2 *discuss and explain the process of scheduling appointments;*

8.3 *discuss and explain the process of scheduling hearings and court dates;*

8.4 *discuss and examine the manual docket control systems;*

8.5 *identify the various types of computerized docket control systems;*

8.6 *discuss the significance of computerized legal case management;*

8.7 *identify, discuss, and examine advanced case management features;* and

8.8 *discuss and examine the docket cycle*

9. Describe and discuss legal marketing:

9.1 *describe the primary components of a legal marketing plan;* and

9.2 *analyze a legal marketing plan*

**Methods of Instruction**: Instruction will consist of a combination of on-the-job training and classroom/seminar meetings that may employ any of the following instructional methods: legal case reviews, lectures, group activities, role play, oral presentations, document drafting, essays, research assignments, films, cable, news, websites, television programs, field trips, and community outreach projects.

**Outcomes Assessment:** Checklist rubrics are used to evaluate on-the-job professional performance as well as all classroom/seminar non-test type assessment instruments (e.g., role play scenarios that range from preparing for an employment interview through actually working as a paralegal and interviewing a client) for the presence of course objectives. Data collected will be analyzed to provide direction for the improvement of program instruction, viability of class assignments, relevancy of assigned course materials, and evaluation of instructional time spent on specific topics.

**Course Requirements:** All students are required to:

1. Maintain regular and prompt attendance to all class sessions and at the professional site.
2. Conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times according to the National Federation of Paralegals Associations, Inc. Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Guidelines for Enforcement.
3. Complete homework assignments and quizzes (if applicable).
4. Complete all written and oral exercises (scored grading) inside and outside of class as assigned.
5. Complete the Midterm and Final Assessment Activities (e.g., paper, presentation, and/or project).
6. Voluntarily participate in class discussions, class exercises, and group projects.
7. Complete all assessment activities as scheduled.
8. Follow any specific class requirements mandated by the instructor.

**Methods of Evaluation:** Final course grades will be computed as follows:

 **% of**

**Grading Components final course grade**

* Attendance/Class Participation  **0 – 5%**

Attendance points will be computed based on the ratio of the number of days attending the course during a regular semester (i.e., 28 contact days). A similar procedure will be used to determine participation points.

* **Notebook containing Course Handouts, Program Summaries** 5 – 10%

**and Table of Contents**

The notebook is a practical exercise designed to assess students’ abilities to organize large volumes of information and allows students to create a reference source of all material related to course objectives for themselves.

* Topic Sentence Outlines **5 – 10%**

Topic sentence outlines are practical exercises designed to enhance students’ reading comprehension and study skills.

* On-Site Job Performance 7**0 – 85%**

The site supervisor in conjunction with the instructor evaluates the student’s professionalism and performance during 240-hours on-the-job training experience for the mastery of course objectives.

* **Extra Credit Opportunities**  5 – 10%
	+ Voter registration – The student should provide written evidence of participation in the electoral process.
	+ Notary Public – Students are encouraged to research, process, and complete a notary public application for approval to include on their resumes to enhance their marketability.
	+ Membership in Paralegal Association of New Jersey (PANJ) – Students are encouraged to join the Paralegal Association of New Jersey to include on their resume to enhance their marketability.

**Note**: The instructor will determine (as appropriate) the specific component(s) appropriate for the course and provide specific weights which lie in the above-given ranges at the beginning of the semester.

**Academic Integrity:** Dishonesty disrupts the search for truth that is inherent in the learning process and so devalues the purpose and the mission of the College. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

* plagiarism – the failure to acknowledge another writer’s words or ideas or to give proper credit to sources of information;
* cheating – knowingly obtaining or giving unauthorized information on any test/exam or any other academic assignment;
* interference – any interruption of the academic process that prevents others from the proper engagement in learning or teaching; and
* fraud – any act or instance of willful deceit or trickery.

Violations of academic integrity will be dealt with by imposing appropriate sanctions. Sanctions for acts of academic dishonesty could include the resubmission of an assignment, failure of the test/exam, failure in the course, probation, suspension from the College, and even expulsion from the College.

**Student Code of Conduct:** All students are expected to conduct themselves as responsible and considerate adults who respect the rights of others. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. All students are also expected to attend and be on time for all class meetings. No cell phones or similar electronic devices are permitted in class. Please refer to the Essex County College student handbook, *Lifeline*, for more specific information about the College’s Code of Conduct and attendance requirements.

Note: Students shall conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. See National Federation of Paralegals Associations, Inc. Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Guidelines for Enforcement.

**Course Content Outline:** based on the text **Practical Law Office Management**, 3rd edition, by Brent D Roper; published by Thomson Delmar Learning.

**Unit Topics to be Covered**

1 Introduction & Course Overview – The legal team, law practices, and law firm governance; introduction of the legal team; roles and responsibilities and employment of a paralegal; types of law practices; law practice organization structures

2 Legal Administration And Technology – Introduction; legal administration principles; functions of a legal administration; practice management and leadership; controlling financial management; human resources; planning; market management; organizing policies, and systems; facilities management; office services management; technology and information systems management

3 Ethics and Malpractice – Introduction; importance of legal ethics and professional responsibility; the unauthorized practice of law; competence and diligence; conflict of interest

4 Client Relations and Communication Skills – Introduction; why do legal assistants need to foster good client relationships and communicate effectively?; ethical duty to communicate with clients; client relationships; communication skills

5 Legal Fees, Timekeeping, and Billing – Introduction; difference between timekeeping and billing; the reasons why legal assistants need to know timekeeping and billing; kinds of legal fee agreements; value billing; the ethics of timekeeping and billing; legal expenses; timekeeping; billing

6 Client Trust Funds and Law Office Accounting – Introduction; why legal assistants need a basic understanding of law office accounting; client funds – trust/escrow accounts; budgeting; collection/income; internal controls; the reasons why lawyers and non-lawyers cannot share fees

7 Calendaring, Docket Control, and Case Management – Introduction; calendaring, docket control, and case management; appointments; hearings and court dates; ethical and malpractice considerations; conflict of interest; manual docket control systems ; types of computerized docket control systems; overview of computerized legal case management; advanced case management features; the docket cycle

8 Legal Marketing – Introduction; the legal marketing plan

9 File and Law Library Management; the reasons why legal assistants need an understanding of file and law library management; introduction to file management; filing methods and techniques; filing management and ethics; introduction to law library management; technology and the law library

Note**:** In PLS 225, the instructor must cover the 9 units listed above minimally in any reasonable order throughout the duration of the semester/term. Student mastery of these units will be enhanced by the on-the-job training experiences. Suggested assessment activities to be performed at midterm and at the conclusion of the course are listed below.

Suggested Midterm Assessment Activities – Prepare topic sentence outlines of each chapter in the first half of the textbook including answers to questions in each chapter; require a midterm evaluation from the legal site supervisor (i.e., third party assessment); prepare written draft skits for role play and taping that address the paralegal’s preparation for employment from preparing for the interview and being interviewed and employed to the client interview; examine the code of professional ethics and other related standards of proper conduct

**Suggested Final Assessment Activities** – Prepare topic sentence outlines of each chapter in the second half of the textbook including answers to questions in each chapter; require a final evaluation from the legal site supervisor (i.e., third party assessment); finalize written skits and practice them for taping that address the paralegal’s preparation for employment from preparing for the interview and being interviewed and employed to the client interview; examine the code of professional ethics and other related standards of proper conduct