

## **A PREFACE TO THE TRAINING MATERIALS PROFESSIONALISM FOR LAW STUDENTS**

### **I. HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE COURSE**

This course was developed as a collaborative effort on the part of the VSB Standing Committee on Professionalism and the Board of Governors of the Section on the Education of Lawyers for the purpose of presenting to students of the law schools situated in Virginia, as early as possible in a law student's training, the VSB's aspirations of professionalism. The VSB long has been committed to instructing and modeling professionalism in an age when law practice is being marked by incivility and commercialism. This commitment has been evidenced by the Mandatory Professionalism Course, which focuses on Virginia's ethical standards and is required of all those newly licensed to practice in the Commonwealth.

The Professionalism Committee developed and has overseen the presentation of that course since its inception. In the course of its oversight, the Committee recognized a need to present foundational concepts of professionalism- integrity, honor, trustworthiness, civility, respect-- as early as is practicable in the training of a lawyer. The Education Section, whose Board of Governors has member deans from each of the accredited law schools in the Commonwealth, embraced the notion that such a training program would have a place in their schools' curricula.

Together these two bodies formed a joint subcommittee and charged it with developing a program suitable to the goal of professionalism training while accounting for the nature, focus and constituency of each of the seven law schools in the Commonwealth. The program that has ensued is one whose format closely tracks the proven model of the Mandatory Professionalism Course, but offers material that goes beyond ethics in an effort to recapture the historical attributes of our profession in changing times. Moreover, this course is being offered at an early stage in the law students' careers in order to maximize its effect on the thinking of future practitioners whether they remain here after law school or go elsewhere.

### **II. FACULTY AND FORMAT**

Those chosen to present the Professionalism for Law Students program have demonstrated an interest in improving professionalism in Virginia. For the most part, they will have served as faculty in the Mandatory Professionalism Course, and have reputations for conducting themselves in a manner consistent with high standards of professionalism. This faculty demographically will reflect the practicing and judicial bars of Virginia but will be tailored to the audience the program is attempting to reach.

To succeed, the program must be relevant to law students. That relevance has several components. The first is substantive and reflects the desire of the VSB to pass on fundamental principles of professionalism to the next generation of lawyers. These principles are contained in the substantive training materials which all faculty should endeavor to incorporate in their presentations.

Another component of relevance involves delivery of the subject matter. This component plays a significant role in faculty selection. While the VSB determines the subject matter that is relevant to present, the audience plays a role in determining the manner and means of delivery. Thus, the faculty will represent those in the profession with whom the law student can more readily identify and whose achievements can be viewed as reasonably attainable in the foreseeable future.

The format of the course also must be relevant, and the one for this course is designed to equalize lecture and student interaction by the use of brief presentations coupled with discussions of hypothetical questions. As a result, the faculty who are asked to be involved in the discussion portion of the course have a role equally important to that of those presenting the lectures. Furthermore, all faculty must be prepared enough to present any of the topics should circumstances require sudden changes in faculty composition.

### **III. THE APPROACH**

The program will be introduced by having the students imagine for the day that they are attending their own funeral. Colleagues will be called upon to give their eulogies, but must tell the truth about them in the areas each colleague will address, namely their reputation generally among those in the profession, their reputations with their clients, and their reputations with the courts. How will this eulogy sound?

### **IV. THE TOPICS**

The subject matter of this course is divided in two topical categories: Professionalism & Relationships with Clients, and Relationships with the Court. Faculty presenters will have 7-8 minutes to speak on the topic assigned. Every effort should be made to stay within the time allotted for each topic.

### **V. THE HYPOTHETICALS**

There will not be enough time to cover many hypothetical questions and stir the discussion necessary to make this portion of the program as interactive as it needs to be. In this instance, less may be better.

Faculty will be provided with no more than four hypothetical cases with the suggested objective. **REMEMBER** this is a program on professionalism **not** ethics. There may be more than one professionalism issue and there may be more than one correct professional approach to take.

*The goal here is **not** to get **the** right answer but to get the students thinking honestly, with integrity, character and a sense of the right and proper thing to do.*

### **VI. STUDENT EVALUATIONS**

Students will evaluate these programs. Initially, the evaluations will be for purposes of determining the value of the course in the Virginia law schools. More than that, the evaluations will show whether premier representatives of the State Bar can present a course on a subject very important to the Bar in a way that communicates it effectively.