



Foundations of Practice

All first-year students at Mitchell Hamline's take a required a course on the role of lawyers and professional identity development in the legal profession.

The course, named *Foundations of Practice*, is designed to assist students with the important work of constructing their professional identities leading to a more in-depth understanding of the important work of lawyers, greater career satisfaction, improved law student and lawyer health and wellness, and increasingly thoughtful perceptions about the law student's role in the legal profession.

Foundations of Practice introduces and explores the professional competencies and characteristics that lead to a satisfying and successful professional career. Building upon the recent work of the [Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System](#) and the [National Taskforce on Lawyer Wellbeing](#), the course will help students identify the skills, experiences, and individual values they bring to their work as lawyers in the profession.

Students gain an understanding of the importance of an attorney's reputation, health and wellness, and professional and ethical judgment in an increasingly challenging and demanding market. Students are also exposed to the continually changing nature of the legal profession and their responsibility as members of the profession to advance their individual and collective skills and expertise in ways that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse client population.

Lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals are invited into the in-person and virtual classrooms to enrich discussion, infuse practice-oriented perspectives into our learning, and share their career progression and professional development experiences with students. A small team of adjunct faculty also assist in providing practitioner feedback on student assignments and leading selected small group class discussions. Students also participate in off-campus experiences that introduce them to the work of lawyers inside of law firms, companies, non-profits, and judicial settings.

Finally, *Foundations of Practice* also includes a mentoring component that pairs each student with a practitioner working in the student's area of interest. The mentor and student work together to explore the work of the mentor and the student's interest generally in the legal profession. Mentors offer insight into their career paths and offer suggestions to students as they begin to explore their own and seek early opportunities to gain legal experience. Mentors introduce students to various aspects of the legal profession through an informational interview and attending a professional event with the student.

For more information on *Foundations of Practice*, please contact Associate Professor Leanne Fuith (leanne.fuith@mitchellhamline.edu).

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Course Outline

Foundations of Practice is organized around three units of study in which faculty and students:

Our Professional Identity (Unit 1): Define and identify our professional identity as law students and future lawyers and the values that we hold individually and as a profession and how our work should align with our values. Explore and identify the unique strengths, skills, and characteristics that we bring to our work as law students and future lawyers and how those strengths, skills, and characteristics are utilized in the legal profession. Learn about the importance health and wellness in the legal profession and of caring for ourselves.

Topics include:

- Professionalism and Professional Identity
- Identifying and Leveraging on Your Strengths
- Career Pathways and Exploration
- Lawyer Health and Wellness, Mindfulness, and Self Care

The Changing Legal Landscape (Unit 2): Identify and explore the key drivers that are changing the legal marketplace. Identify how these changes in the practice of law are impacting the work of lawyers and our roles in the legal profession. Explore the changing needs of clients and the impacts that access to justice, technology, and other emerging issues have on our profession. Identify and understand the ways that law students and lawyers need to adapt to changes in the legal marketplace to stay relevant and to continue to meet the needs of our clients and serve justice.

Topics include:

- Future of Legal Services and Trends in the Legal Profession (Technology, More for Less, Liberalization)
- Access to and the Quality of Justice (and the need to meet clients where they are at)
- Deregulation of Legal Services & the Changing Role of Lawyers
- Building a More Diverse and Inclusive Profession & Multicultural Lawyering
- Demands on the Lawyer and the Legal Profession (trauma-informed practice, resilience, isolation, and inclusion)

Our Professional Engagements with Others (Unit 3): Define and explore the concept of civility and understand the personal, professional, moral, and ethical values and guidelines that might influence how we interact with colleagues, supervisors, opposing counsel, clients, and members of the judiciary. Practice strategies for developing resilience in the face of adversity, for working collaboratively and for communicating our needs and identifying the needs of others in peaceful and productive ways. Explore the concept of professional branding as an external expression of our professional identity and learn about the ethical guidelines that govern lawyers in this work.

Topics include:

- Professional Branding and Communications
- Professional Judgement, Ethics, and Conduct for Lawyers
- Working Collaboratively and Emotional Intelligence
- Lawyers, Leadership, and Looking Ahead

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Health and Wellbeing Readings

Students are assigned a wide variety of readings throughout the semester including these readings focused on Lawyer Health and Wellbeing.

- *The Hidden Sources of Law School Stress: Avoiding the Mistakes that Create Unhappy and Unprofessional Lawyers* (Larry Krieger, 2014)
- *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being Report* (National Taskforce on Lawyer Well-Being, 2017)
- *Character is the Foundation of Effective Lawyering* (Neil Hamilton, Minnesota Lawyer, 2009)
- *Professionalism Aspirations Preamble* (Minnesota Supreme Court, 2001)
- *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession: Diversity and Well Being* (American Bar Association, July 2020)
- *Trauma Informed Legal Practice Toolkit* (Golden Eagle Rising Society, Canada 2020)
- *My Healthy Mind Platter* (Dan Siegel, 2011)
- *Mindfulness for Lawyers Handbook* (John Krop, J.D.)
- *The Emotionally Attentive Lawyer: Balancing the Rule of Law with the Realities of Human Behavior* (15 Nev. L.J. 442, Kiser)
- *Heart Versus Head: Do Judges Follow the Law or Follow Their Feelings* (Texas Law Review, 2015, Wistrich, Rachlinski, Guthrie)

For more information about the Health and Wellbeing curriculum and components of Mitchell Hamline's *Foundations of Practice* course, contact Dean of Students Lynn LeMoine

(lynn.lemoine@mitchellhamline.edu).

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Final Project

Foundations of Practice is a pass/fail class that culminates in a Final Project which asks students to develop a plan for their Professional Identity Development moving forward. Specifically, students are asked to reflect on and write about:

1. Professional Summary & Mission Statement
 - a. How they perceive themselves and their professional identity within the legal profession.
 - b. What values do they hold?
 - c. What unique contribution would they like to make to the legal profession?
 - d. Students are asked to distill their description of their professional identity into a 1-2 sentence Mission Statement that they can use as a guide moving forward.

2. Self-Evaluation
 - a. Why are they the right one to do this work? What background and experience (legal or non-legal) do they already bring to the table?
 - b. What are their strengths and how will they be important in the work the student sets out to do?
 - c. What opportunities do those strengths create for the student?
 - d. What potential challenges or skill gaps might the student need to address and how will they address them? Students consider their work throughout the semester including discussions on the changing legal profession, the need for lawyers to be responsive, and the skills of resilience, problem solving, working collaboratively and emotional intelligence, and self-care.

3. The Path Forward
 - a. Describe how they will fulfill their mission in their work as a lawyer. What work will they do? Where will they do it and who will they serve?
 - b. How will the students personally respond to the key issues facing the legal profession discussed during the semester, including lawyer health and wellness, professional conduct, civility, and ethics, building a diverse and inclusive profession, and the changing legal landscape.
 - c. Identify 6-8 people (a “personal board of directors”) who will assist the student with their professional development moving forward and describe how each person will assist them and why they were chosen.
 - d. Identify 3-5 goals the student would like to accomplish during law school that will put them on a path toward achieving their mission. The students are asked to draft SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable (Reasonable), Relevant (aligned with your long-term values), and Time Bound.