

This is a sample syllabus to provide prospective students with a feel for the class. The pages and links for the assigned readings have been removed, as they change regularly. The assignments and policies are samples and are updated annually.



COPAA SEAT 3.0

The Business of Special Education Advocacy

Course Description: This is a class for Special Education Advocates who are starting a non-profit or for-profit advocacy business. The focus is on the practical issues of business formation (starting and operating), not on the specifics of special education advocacy. The class is designed for students who have successfully completed the SEAT 2.0 curriculum (or have experience/training as an advocate) and now want to start working professionally with students and families. The curriculum draws on the experience of advocates who have started their own for-profit or non-profit business, and reviews the challenges, concerns, and solutions that they developed. The class addresses business issues generally, as the laws that impact business operations differ among localities. Included are business development and marketing strategies unique to advocates.

Course Materials:

Required: The Small Business Start-up Kit A Step-by-Step Legal Guide, Peri H. Pakroo, J.D., 10th Edition (2018)

Recommended: Special Needs Advocacy Resource Book, Rich Weinfeld & Michelle Davis, (2008) Starting and Building a Nonprofit a Practical Guide, Peri H. Parkroo, J.D., 7th Edition (March 2017)

WEEK 1: So, You Want to Start a Special Education Advocacy Business?

BEFORE CLASS: By September 5th upload a short video (30 to 60 seconds) called “Hire ME” on the COPAA community page for SEAT 3.0. In this short video should describes who you are and why someone should hire you as a special education advocate. This is an exercise is learning to market your skills and expertise.

Materials to Review Before Class:

Pakroo

“Cash Flow – How it Works to Keep Your Business Afloat”

22 Low-Budget Marketing Ideas for Small Businesses

Learning goals

Students will:

1. identify the concerns/challenges of becoming a paid special education advocate;
2. be familiar with different services paid advocates can/might provide and investigate their local market/community resources;
3. understand some business basics in running a small business – including administration, finance, product development, management and marketing;
4. be familiar with and start to create a basic business plan to plan for their advocacy business; and
5. be aware of when to seek professional legal and financial support for helping running their small business.

Homework: Review basic business plan templates in the below listed link. You may choose any template you wish, keeping in mind that throughout the class you will be completing the business plan for your small business:

Fill in sections on products (however you see those products) that you will be offering as a special education advocate in your small business. In addition, research what services are being offered in the area/market/community you plan to operate in, and document how you see your services fitting in.

WEEK 2: Starting and Running a Special Education Advocacy Business.

Learning goals

Students will:

1. learn about legal structures for businesses;
2. understand the differences between for-profit (including sliding scale and pro bono) and non-profit organizations and their funding models; and
3. identify implications of doing business in their state and locality and the issues that they will need to investigate (e.g., zoning/location, business licenses, insurance, taxes).

Materials to Review Before Class:

Pakroo

Nonprofit or for profit Difference

Understanding Fee for Service Nonprofit Models

Recommended for those interested in Nonprofits: “Budgeting for NonProfits”

Homework: Using your business plan template, research your local start-up costs (place of business, licenses, insurance etc.). Fill in sections on business structure and financial plan, including how you will determine your fees and some basic cash flow projections for your business. Please note: DUE TO ANTI-TRUST CONCERNS PLEASE DON'T SHARE YOUR FEE AMOUNTS.

This means that you will need to gather information from local sources such as the city/county/state you plan to operate within, Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Administration etc.

WEEK 3: Process and Procedures of Your Special Education Advocacy Business

Learning Goals

Students will:

1. understand the importance of ‘getting the word out’ about their business (using websites, word of mouth [endorsements], presentations, business cards, etc.);
2. be familiar with building a network with other service providers (e.g., pediatricians, psychologists, social workers, counselors, etc.);
3. understand the importance of creating processes and procedures for their business (including financial records and client information - creating, maintaining and disposing of client files).

Materials to Review Before Class:

Pakroo

Community Over Competition

Professional Networking

10 Ways to Market Your Small Business

Class Activity: Reviewing samples copies of documents. Participants are encouraged to post copies that you want to share on the SEAT 3.0 group page.

Homework: Using your business template, create your marketing plan (with cost estimates for your small business) as well as your planned place of business.

WEEK 4: Providing excellent service while keeping strong boundaries and building clear expectations

Learning Goals

Students will:

1. learn basic principles around providing excellent service to families;
2. understand procedures for gaining and maintaining clients (e.g., use of packets of materials, profiles, outreach documents, parent testimonials, reputation);
3. identify ways of creating and maintaining healthy and boundaries with clients;
4. identify ways of creating and maintaining clear expectations of the services an advocate provides and the skill set of the advocate; and
5. evaluate when to close/refer a case and their process for doing so.

Materials to Be Reviewed Before Class:

Pakroo,

Tips For Setting Boundaries At Work

Homework: “Manage Your Time” – fill out a chart (number of Clients, estimate amount of time for each case, time spent for administrative/office work to estimate the case load that you can hold).

WEEK 5: Everything We Didn't Cover in Weeks 1 through 4

Learning Goals

Students will:

1. understand the issues regarding educational rights and who holds them (divorce, co-parenting, kin care arrangements, foster parents);
2. consider where their business will be run from – including the challenges of working at home (e.g., distractions/being productive) versus the space, cost of office space, dedicated business line (cell), business e-mail address, etc.);
3. comprehend the significance of maintaining relationships with school districts; and
4. understand the costs and benefits of advocating in their own local school districts.

Materials to Be Reviewed Before Class:

Making School Decisions Post Divorce

Differences Between Special Education Advocates & Attorneys