



# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW

## EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM GUIDE

### **I. EXTERNSHIP PURPOSE AND EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES**

The Michigan State University College of Law Externship Program provides law students with a stimulating and practical educational experience. The various externship sites offer hands-on opportunities to observe the legal and judicial systems at work and to engage in relevant legal work under the supervision of practicing attorneys or judges.

These programs also provide students with an understanding of the practice of law "in the trenches" and give the students an opportunity to more significantly appreciate what it means to be an attorney or judge.

#### **A. General Objectives**

While the objective of the externship programs is to provide students with practical legal experience and skills, the nature and breadth of those experiences and skills are varied among the programs. The following objectives are those which are common to every externship program. They are intended to identify for both students and supervisors the educational experience to which all students should be exposed during their externship.

1. **Legal Analysis**

Students should further develop the ability to cull pertinent factual data and analyze relevant legal principles in order to assess and justify the merits of alternative legal positions. Students should enhance their research and writing skills in meeting this objective. Students should also develop the ability to expeditiously and effectively use appropriate research materials within the context of analyzing specific legal problems.

2. **Problem Solving/Negotiation**

Students should further develop their abilities to find a common ground among competing points of view and work toward a solution acceptable to diverse interests.

3. **Professional Responsibility**

Students should develop the ability to recognize the ethical considerations that come into play as a practicing attorney or judge. Students should appreciate the sometimes conflicting role of an attorney both as an advocate and as an officer of the court.

4. **Self Awareness**

Students should begin to see themselves as productive members of the legal profession. Through their externship experience students can more closely focus upon those aspects of law practice in which they have an interest in order to help determine career paths.

5. **Communication Skills**

Students should have the opportunity to improve their ability to communicate both orally and in writing. As the audience changes, students should develop the

facility to control and vary communication based on the particular audience (e.g. client, staff, attorney, judge).

## **B. Specific Objectives**

The Michigan State University College of Law Externship Programs are classified under four broad categories - Judicial Externships, Legal Aid Externships, Non-Profit Externships, and Government Attorney Externships. In very limited circumstances, law firms in which the student performs court appointed defense work and/or pro bono work may be approved as an externship site by the Externship Program Director.

In addition to the general objectives, each category has other educational objectives which pertain to the particulars of the exposure the students receive.

### **1. Judicial Externship Objectives**

- a) Students learn legal process from the unique point of view of a sitting judge.
- b) Students learn judicial decision-making by assisting the judge in ruling upon motions, cases, or evidentiary objections.
- c) Students' research and writing skills are enhanced by the drafting of legal memoranda, proposed rulings, or jury instructions.
- d) Students come to understand the administrative pressures placed upon the judicial system and the use of alternative dispute resolutions techniques as a method of docket control.

## **2. Legal Aid Externship Objectives**

- a) Students gain a deeper appreciation of the need for legal representation of persons who cannot afford legal representation on their own.
- b) Students learn to interview and counsel clients and to identify and explain to the client the pertinent factual and legal issues as well as available remedies.
- c) Students should enhance both their oral and written advocacy skills using all necessary resources to present the case or argument most favorable to the client.
- d) Students develop the ability to competently and successfully negotiate on behalf of the client.

## **3. Non-Profit Externship Objectives**

- a) Students gain an understanding of the role non-profit agencies play in promoting specific societal interests and how legal representation enhances that role.
- b) Students should enhance both their oral and written advocacy skills using all necessary resources to present the case or argument most favorable to the client.
- c) Students develop the ability to competently and successfully negotiate on behalf of the client.

#### **4. Government Attorney Externship Objectives**

- a) Students should obtain specific insight and particularized knowledge of the governmental office in which they work. Students learn the governmental policies served by the office as well as the social and political forces that impact upon those policies.
- b) Students should learn and experience a governmental entity as a client whose legal standing and interests are both similar and dissimilar to the private client.
- c) Students enhance their oral and written advocacy skills presenting matters on behalf of the government unit.

## **II. STUDENT ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION**

### **A. Student Eligibility**

Minimum eligibility requirements for the full-time student are to be in good academic standing (at least a 2.0 GPA) and have completed at least one full year of legal study (29 credits). Students who have completed less than 29 credits are eligible if, during the externship semester, they take at least the minimum number of credits, which includes the 3 credits for the externship, to reach 29 credits.

### **B. Selection Criteria**

The selection criterion varies in some respects from externship to externship. In some instances, for example, more advanced students with excellent academic standing

and legal writing skills are required. In others there is a preference for students with certain course backgrounds beyond the first year curriculum. The individual Externship placement will disclose what additional criteria beyond minimal eligibility are required. Information regarding each specific externship site can be found on the Career Services Office's electronic job posting system.

**C. Selection Process**

Students apply specifically to the Externship sites which interest them and which they meet the requirements of the position. Where desired by the Externship placement site, additional screening by way of interview may occur. The externship attorney or judge will make the selection in accordance with the applicable selection criteria.

**D. Registration**

Students are responsible for ensuring timely completion and submittal of the Externship Agreement Form and the Registrar Externship Enrollment Form. The forms must be submitted to the Externship Program Director and the Registrars' Office, as applicable, prior to the end of the applicable add period to be eligible to participate in the Program.

### **III. EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS & CREDIT ALLOCATION**

#### **A. Credit Hour Allocation**

Students will be awarded 3 hours of academic credit upon successful completion of an externship program. No more than 9 hours of externship credit may be counted toward graduation requirements. This equates to three 3 credit externships or one 3 credit and one 6 credit externship (Washington DC Semester or Ottawa Program Only). Students may not perform more than one externship at the same site.

#### **B. Time Requirement**

For every 3 credits, students are expected to spend a minimum of 168 working hours during the semester. This equates to 12 hours per week during the 14-week Fall and Spring semesters working directly under the supervision of an attorney or judge. During the Summer semester it is anticipated that the externship period will be less than 14 weeks. The exact number of weeks worked during the Summer will be at the discretion of the site supervisor and, if less than 10 weeks, must be also approved by the Externship Program Director.

#### **C. Writing Requirements**

Students are also required to keep a report of their activities, which must be signed by the supervising attorney or judge and turned in to the Externship Program Director on a twice monthly basis – the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Facsimiles will be

accepted. This report must reflect the legal work performed by the students over a two-week period and should be a page in length, on average. Specifically, the students should describe and discuss the substantive legal and procedural issues on which they are working.

At the conclusion of the program, students will produce written reports on their externship experiences. The reports should be a minimum of 5 pages in length and should include a brief summary of the activities they performed in their externship. The report should be keyed to the educational objectives of the externship and the student should discuss his/her experience in terms of each objective. Copies of work product that were developed during the semester should accompany the report. Students may redact confidential information from their work product, if necessary.

The students should also discuss their own observations of the legal and/or judicial system at work. Additionally, the students should discuss the legal challenges encountered and if and how they were overcome.

#### **D. Mid-Semester Seminar**

Students are required to attend a mid-semester seminar sponsored by the Externship Program Director. Arrangements will be made for students whose externship site is out-of-state.

## **E. Externship Evaluation**

At the conclusion of the externship program, students will be responsible for evaluating the program. The evaluation will be submitted to the Externship Program Director on forms provided for that purpose.

## **IV. EXTERNSHIP SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

The primary purpose of externships is to provide the students with an educational experience through which they will come to understand in a significant way the legal system at work and to foster a real appreciation for the role which practicing attorneys and judges play in our legal institutions. It is imperative, therefore, that students work directly under the supervision of an attorney or judge and that such supervisors be fully informed of the educational objectives of the program.

Toward that end, each supervising attorney or judge is informed in writing of the educational objectives and the supervisor responsibilities. These are set forth in Part I. No doubt students provide useful work to their externship placements; however, the primary benefit must be the meaningful education of the student.

The following provisions reflect the responsibilities of the externship supervisor.

### **A. Externship Work Content**

Students are required to perform legal tasks, such as research, analysis, investigation, counseling or legal writing. Non-legal clerical or other tasks must be avoided.

Students should be provided with an opportunity to discuss legal issues of concern in the externship with attorneys or judges at the placement. Students should be provided with an opportunity to meaningfully observe the inner workings of the legal system.

**B. Externship Supervision**

Initially students should be introduced to the work and role of the externship office, to the working environment, to available support resources, and to the attorney's or judge's staff with whom the student will be working.

The supervising attorney or judge in every externship placement is required to be responsible for seeing that all work assignments of students are properly supervised. Proper supervision requires that each student be given adequate, appropriate, and considered direction in work assignments, including a sufficiently detailed description of the problem assigned, the time within which the work should be completed, some initial guidance, access to the appropriate resources, and the availability of the supervising attorney or judge for further guidance if necessary.

Although students are expected to be resourceful and take the initiative, students must not be assigned a project and then isolated. Substantial access to the supervising attorney or judge for guidance and advice must be an integral part of every externship experience.

### **C. Evaluation**

Students should receive periodic constructive review of their performance in the program from the supervising attorney or judge, along with an opportunity to discuss broader issues that may go beyond the specifics of a single work assignment.

At the completion of the externship period, supervising attorneys and judges are responsible for providing evaluations of the student's work on forms provided for that purpose. Such evaluation shall be submitted to the Externship Program Director and shall be shared with the student. In addition, it is advisable that an exit interview between the student and the supervising attorney or judge take place to review all that has been accomplished during the program.

### **STUDENT PROPOSED EXTERNSHIPS**

In addition to recognized externship programs, it is possible for a student to propose other externship placements which are comparable to existing externships. For example, a student may propose a judicial externship with a judge other than those with whom Michigan State University College of Law has an on-going relationship.

Students shall have the proposed supervisor complete the Externship Agreement Form. The Form shall be submitted to the Externship Program Director for externship site approval. If the student proposal is approved, the student must comply with all of the Externship program requirements.



## Externship Agreement Form

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Student Name

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Name of Organization

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Supervisor Name (Prefix, Name and Title)

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Address of Organization

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(Area Code) Telephone Number

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(Area Code) Fax Number

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Email Address of Supervisor

Externship Position Description (Including duties and responsibilities of student)

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If this externship is at a new site, please provide an agency description (you may attach separate sheets if needed)

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I am committed to providing the student with work assignments that correlate with the objectives as outlined in the attached MSU College of Law Externship Program Guide. The student will be provided with an orientation, supervision and evaluation.

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Supervisor Signature

Date

*Please return to: Career Services Office, MSU College of Law, 301 Law College Bldg., East Lansing, MI, 48824. Or fax to: 517-432-6831*