

University of St. Thomas School of Law
Public Interest Externship Course
Syllabus
Spring 2011

Introduction

The purpose of the public interest externship program is to offer students an opportunity to learn about public interest practice while engaging in significant hands-on legal work in a field placement at a public interest organization. Students will be challenged to discuss complex issues of ethics, access to justice, and professional growth through personal and group reflection exercises. Externship logs will serve both as a record of tasks accomplished and a reflection tool for the group project.

The public interest externship will require a significant time in the field in addition to the classroom component. Placement supervisors will expect externs to behave professionally and with skill in all respects. Externships require a commitment on the part of both the student and host agency. Students are expected to commit to the work, hours, and challenges of the externship program by scheduling their semester in such a manner as to avoid the need to drop the course. Agencies are expected to provide the extern with an appropriate workload designed to challenge the student while serving the mission of the organization. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor of any challenges in an agency or supervisor relationship that may lead to difficulties in meeting the requirements of the externship.

Experiential learning offers a wonderful opportunity to hone practical legal skills but also involves many of the challenges of professional practice; the classroom component will be a confidential and positive environment to share successes, insights, and struggles. Client and agency confidentiality will be maintained at all times and students will review the applicable rules early in the course to ensure proper measures are taken to protect themselves and their clients. Guest speakers and panelists will be utilized to enhance the classroom component by providing expert and diverse perspectives on public interest practice.

Credits and Grading

Students will receive three (3) law school credits for their work in the public interest externship program. The total time commitment will be 150 hours between the fieldwork and classroom components of the externship. The course will be graded pass/fail. A student's grade will be based on attendance, participation, individual and group assignments, and the midterm and final evaluations of the supervising attorney. Any student who does not complete the classroom and fieldwork components of the externship will receive a failing grade.

1. Class Attendance and Participation (25%)

Class attendance and participation are mandatory and students are expected to be prepared for discussions based on assigned readings and reflection topics. Classroom time will be used for structured discussions, guest speakers, and group work. Attendance will be monitored and any student with more than two unexcused absences will be

dropped from the course.

2. Individual and Group Assignments (25%)

Throughout the semester students will receive reflection topics and group assignments based on their field experiences. One assignment will be to keep a time log including a brief description of work accomplished. Students will be grouped with others at similar field placements and will be assigned readings and projects targeted to their practice area.

3. Field Supervisor Evaluation (50%)

The student will be evaluated at the midterm and conclusion of the externship by his or her supervisor. The supervisor will be asked to evaluate the student's:

- a. Applicable legal, analytical, and professional skills
- b. Intellectual capacity and creativity
- c. Initiative and responsibility
- d. Ability to work well with clients and co-workers
- e. Commitment to agency and client goals

Public Interest Externship Seminar

Required text: J.P. Ogilvy et al, Learning from Practice: A Professional Development Text for Legal Externs (1998).

There will also be hand-outs provided in class that students are expected to read and reflect on prior to class discussions or guest speakers. The seminar is designed to provide students with reflection and feedback on their field placements, promote discussion centered on topics of importance in public interest practice and professional responsibility, and address the challenges and benefits of careers in the public interest.

Each student will be placed in a practice area group based on his or her field placement. Practice area groups will be assigned readings and discussion topics specific to issues of importance in their field. The practice area group will also prepare a presentation to be shared with the class at the end of the semester.

Jan. 24: Introduction to Public Interest Practice and Externship Structure

Jan. 31: Introduction to Public Interest Practice and Externship Structure
Chapter 2—Setting Goals for the Externship

Feb.7: Small group discussion (topic to be assigned)

Feb. 14: Supervision and Work Styles
Chapter 3—Learning from Supervision

Feb. 21: Practical Professionalism and Ethics Concerns in Public Interest Practice

Turn in time logs

Guest Speaker from Lawyer's Board of Prof. Responsibility
Chapter 4—Ethical Issues in Externships: An Introduction
Chapter 5—Ethical Issues in Externships: Confidentiality
Ethics for Ethical Attorneys (Patrick Burns)

Feb. 28: Small group discussions (Bias in the Legal System)

Mar. 7: Public Interest Work as a Career

Turn in time logs

Q & A Panel with UST Alumni in Public Interest Practice

Mar. 14: Public Interest Funding

<http://www.startribune.com/investigators/113823889.html?elr=KArksUUUoDEy3LGDiO7aiU>

Mar. 21: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

Mar. 28: Small group discussions

Chapter 19—Presentations

Apr. 4: Client Population and Need

Legal Services Planning Commission Report and Maps

Turn in time logs

Apr. 11: Gideon v. Wainwright and Civil Gideon

The Right to Civil Counsel Under Minnesota Law

Week of Apr. 18: Group Presentations (time & date TBA)

Turn in time logs

Week of Apr. 25: Group Presentations (time & date TBA)

May 1: **Turn in final time log (120 hours minimum)**

Compensation

Students shall receive no compensation for the work performed as part of the public interest externship program. This rule does not preclude reimbursement of incidental out-of-pocket expenses related to the field placement.

Accommodations

Qualified students with documented disabilities who may need classroom accommodations should make an appointment with the Enhancement Program – Disability Services office. Appointments can be made by calling 651-962-6315. You may also make an appointment in person in O'Shaughnessy Educational Center, room 119. For further information, you can locate the Enhancement Program on the web at <http://www.stthomas.edu/enhancementprog/>.