



Detroit Mercy School of Law Externship Course  
*Student's Guide to Frequently Asked Questions*

University of Detroit Mercy School of Law has long been a recognized leader in preparing students for the actual practice of law. We offer experiential learning through multiple in-house clinics, a comprehensive externship program and rigorous Law Firm Practice courses. The Externship Program is a cornerstone of our experiential learning program as it allows students to receive academic credit and integrate practical experience in a legal setting while working as a legal extern for a court, government agency, or nonprofit organization. A student's externship experience is often the highlight of his or her law school experience.

How does an externship differ from in-house clinical work? Clinic students typically have more responsibility for their clients and cases while working under the guidance of a clinical professor. Clinics focus on each student's development as a lawyer, sometimes to a greater extent than may occur in an externship setting. But the clinical program operates in a controlled setting. The special value of an externship, in contrast, lies in the "real world" experience it provides:

*In-house clinics have special strengths, but most do not accurately replicate the atmosphere of law practice in terms of their office settings, workloads, and ivory tower approaches to practice. Placing students in practicing lawyers' and judges' offices removes this artificiality, and students know they are working in contexts similar to those that await them after graduation.*

Roy Stucky and Others, *Best Practices for Legal Education: A Vision and a Roadmap*, p. 146 (2007).

What follows are frequently asked questions about the Externship Program, the experience and the registration and application process.

## **1. WHAT IS AN EXTERNSHIP?**

The Externship course allows a Detroit Mercy Law student to earn three academic credits for working outside the law school with a court, government agency or non-profit organization. Students work under the direct supervision of a site supervisor in the office where they are placed. At the same time, they are supervised by a faculty member of the law school who teaches the Externship course. Students must satisfy classroom, journaling and paper requirements as set forth by the Externship faculty member, and they must additionally meet the minimum number of hours required for the field portion of the course.

## **2. IS THE EXTERNSHIP COURSE A REQUIRED COURSE?**

No. Externships are elective courses that are not required for graduation, but they are recommended for second and third year students for the practical training they provide.

## **3. ARE THERE GPA REQUIREMENTS OR PRE-REQUISITES?**

All students must be in academic good standing and have a cumulative G.P.A. of 2.2 or better to enroll in the Externship course. For first year students who wish to do an externship during the summer following their first year, the American J.D. students must possess a first-semester G.P.A. of 2.2 or higher and have completed 24 credits hours in their first year. First year Dual J.D. students must have a first-semester G.P.A. of 2.2 or higher in Comparative Legal Theory and Analysis I.

Please note: Externship credits for the Dual J.D. students do not count toward credits required for graduation.

For all students who meet the above eligibility requirements: Students may *not* apply to a federal judge or state appellate judge without pre-approval of the Externship Director.

## **4. ARE THERE INTERNAL LAW SCHOOL DEADLINES FOR APPLYING FOR THE EXTERNSHIP COURSE?**

Yes. If a student is interested in the Externship course, the student must submit a letter of interest (this may be done by email) to Externship Director Anne Yantus at [yantusam@udmercy.edu](mailto:yantusam@udmercy.edu) by the following dates:

- Fall Semester: August 1
- Winter Semester: December 1
- Summer Semester: April 30

The email or letter of interest does not bind the student to register for the course, but it provides sufficient time to arrange the externship placement before the start of the semester.

## **5. DOES THE LAW SCHOOL SECURE THE EXTERNSHIP PLACEMENT FOR ME?**

No. Students must find their own externship placement from a list of approved placement sites. The proper procedure for doing so is as follows:

- Student consults list of externship placements (see website)
- Student consults with Externship Director Anne Yantus before applying for any *judicial* placement (and may consult with her before applying for other placements)
- Student submits cover letter, resume and writing sample to the Career Services Office (CSO) *before* applying to the externship placement
- After review by the CSO, the student sends cover letter, résumé, writing sample and transcripts to the desired externship placement

- If the student is accepted for the externship placement, the student **MUST** notify Externship Director who will then approve the student's registration for the Externship course
- Additional requirements apply for non-United States citizens, see Question 22.

**6. AM I REQUIRED TO SUBMIT ALL OF MY EXTERNSHIP APPLICATION MATERIALS TO THE CAREER SERVICES OFFICE?**

You should work with the Career Services Office prior to submitting any application materials to a field placement agency or organization. CSO provides an excellent service to students and we want our students to take advantage of that service.

**7. ARE THERE ANY PLACES WHERE I CANNOT DO AN EXTERNSHIP?**

Please consult the list of approved placements as there are numerous externship opportunities for students. Note, the first externship must be done at a court, government agency or non-profit organization. We do not permit placement at a private law firm or for-profit corporation for the first externship experience.

Note: Students will not be placed with a federal judge or state appellate judge without prior approval of Externship Director. If you wish to secure this type of placement, please contact Professor Yantus at [yantusam@udmercy.edu](mailto:yantusam@udmercy.edu).

**8. CAN I DO MY EXTERNSHIP WITH A FOR-PROFIT FIRM?**

Not unless this is your second externship experience and the placement has been pre-approved by the Externship Director.

**9. CAN I GET PAID BY THE EXTERNSHIP AGENCY?**

No. Detroit Mercy Law does not allow its students to be paid for the work done in the Externship Program unless the student has received a stipend or scholarship funded by an entity other than the field placement.

**10. WHAT IF I HAVE A CONTACT THAT CAN GET ME INTO A GREAT EXTERNSHIP THAT IS NOT ON THE LIST?**

The Externship Director must approve all field placements, especially those not on the list provided to students. Please allow time for the approval process. Also, please remember that the first externship experience must be with a court, government agency or non-profit organization.

A student may work with a for-profit organization only for the *second* externship placement, but the placement must be pre-approved by the Externship Director. Please allow ample time for the approval process.

### **11. DO I HAVE TO FORMALLY REGISTER FOR THE EXTERNSHIP COURSE?**

Yes. Once the student secures the externship placement (i.e., the placement with a court, government agency or approved non-profit organization), the student must alert the Externship Director who will then approve the student's registration for the Externship course. The student does nothing more at this time as the registrar will manually register all approved students for the Externship course.

### **12. HOW MANY CREDITS ARE AWARDED FOR AN EXTERNSHIP?**

The Externship course is a three-credit course.

### **13. HOW IS THE EXTERNSHIP COURSE GRADED?**

Pass or No Pass. In order to pass the course, students must complete a *minimum* of 120 hours at the field placement and must complete all additional requirements of the Externship course. Please also note the general rule that a student may have no more than 11 credit hours of pass/no pass credits during his or her law school career.

### **14. DOES THE COURSE INCLUDE A MINIMUM NUMBER OF HOURS FOR THE FIELD WORK?**

Students must complete between 120 and 180 hours of work at the field placement over the course of 15 weeks during the Fall and Winter semester and over the course of 8 weeks during the Summer semester. Student may begin working at the field placement no more than one week before the start of the semester and may conclude their work hours no more than one week after the end of the semester. Typically, a student will work 9 to 12 hours per week (or 18 to 24 hours during in the Summer semester). Students should consult with the site supervisor to determine how many days per week the student will work. Also, students are advised to plan on working *more* than the minimum 120 hours to avoid problems related to unexpected emergencies, closure of the court/agency, etc.

### **15. MUST I SUBMIT WEEKLY TIME LOGS DURING THE SEMESTER?**

Yes. Students must have the site supervisor sign a weekly time log prepared by the student. The student should then forward the time logs to the faculty member teaching the Externship course.

### **16. WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM?**

Students must attend an initial orientation session (to be held before or at the start of the semester) and must also attend classroom meetings that are scheduled by the faculty member teaching the Externship course. Students must also prepare weekly journals, reflection papers and a final paper.

Additionally, and with the assistance of the faculty member teaching the Externship course, students must prepare a written understanding to be signed by the student, faculty member and site

supervisor that describes the “substantial lawyering experience and opportunities for performance, feedback and self-evaluation” that are required by ABA Standard 304(c)(iii). This written understanding should also include “the respective roles of faculty and any site supervisor in supervising the student and in assuring the educational quality of the experience for the student[.]” *Id.* Please see the Externship faculty member for language to be inserted in the written understanding.

### **17. WHICH PROFESSOR TEACHES THE EXTERNSHIP COURSE?**

The Externship course is taught by a full-time faculty member (Professor Pamela Wilkins).

### **18. WHAT IS A SITE SUPERVISOR?**

“Site Supervisor” is a term used by the American Bar Association to describe the person who is responsible for supervising you at the field placement. The Site Supervisor is the extern’s contact person at the externship site. In addition to providing day-to-day supervision at the externship site, the Site Supervisor will provide a formal written evaluation of the student's performance and certify the hours worked at the completion of the term.

### **19. WHAT TYPES OF DUTIES WILL I BE EXPECTED TO PERFORM?**

Duties will vary by location, but generally include research, writing, legal analysis, observation and possible court appearance.

### **20. CAN I WORK FROM HOME?**

No. Externship work must be performed at the site location.

### **21. ONCE MY EXTERNSHIP HAS STARTED, WHAT IF I HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT THE SITE, THE WORK, THE SUPERVISOR OR ANY OTHER ISSUE?**

As a general rule, you should first try to resolve the issue with the Site Supervisor. If this is not possible or the problem has not been resolved, students should immediately communicate with the faculty member teaching the course.

### **22. ARE THERE SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-UNITED STATES CITIZENS?**

Yes. All non-U.S. citizens must obtain a Curricular Practical Training (CPT) application from Externship Director Anne Yantus. The form must be completed, signed and returned to Professor Yantus for her signature (you may leave the form with the Student Services Center for forwarding to Prof. Yantus). Professor Yantus will then sign the form and forward it to Assistant Dean and Registrar Loretta Lewins-Peck. Dean/Registrar Peck will complete the paperwork, create a new I-20 form and then contact each student upon its completion. Each student must stop in the Student Services Center to sign the new I-20 form. Once the student has signed the new I-20 form, a copy

of the form will be made by the Student Services Center and will be placed in the student's international file. The student retains the original of the new I-20 form.

*Students who are not U.S. citizens (whether in the American J.D. or Dual Degree program) may not volunteer to work in the United States without appropriate immigration documents. As indicated above, the School of Law requires a CPT form for its non-U.S. citizens who wish to gain practical experience through an internship or externship with a legal provider. The CPT form is dependent on the student receiving academic credit and cannot be provided without the connected Externship course. In short, students may NOT volunteer with a legal provider without also taking the Externship course.*

*Further, full-time non-U.S. citizen-students may not work more than 20 hours per week in the Externship course when they also maintain full-time status during the same semester. Please note full-time status is required of dual degree students during the summer following their first year.*

The United States Attorney Office does not accept non-U.S. citizens into their externship program. This is true for other U.S. offices and agencies, although it does not apply to the U.S. Judicial Branch.

If a student is additionally asked to provide a copy of the I-9 form, the student should contact Professor Yantus.

### **23. MAY I DO MORE THAN ONE EXTERNSHIP?**

Students are permitted to take the externship course twice, although not at the same location. A third externship is not permitted.

You may contact Externship Director Anne Yantus if you have questions that are not answered by this handout or should you need further clarification. Professor Yantus can be reached at [yantusam@udmercy.edu](mailto:yantusam@udmercy.edu).