The Experiential Learning Requirement and You

Beginning with students matriculating in Fall 2015, the College of Law requires you to take either a clinic or an externship of at least 3 credits to graduate. You can meet the requirement by participating in the NIU Clinical Law Program or by taking an externship that includes a classroom component. This brochure is designed to help you understand the new experiential learning requirement, and help you plan your schedule to meet the requirement.

Why did the College of Law create an experiential learning requirement?

Graduating from law school and passing the Bar exam are only parts of becoming an effective lawyer. Experiential learning in clinics and externships provides opportunities to represent clients, develop professionalism, apply legal knowledge to solve real-life legal problems, hone your practice-oriented legal skills, and manage case files and information, while still in law school. The American Bar Association and the Illinois State Bar Association have both encouraged law schools to provide more practice experience to law students before graduation. At NIU, clinics and externships are offered on a pass/fail basis to allow students to learn while preparing for practice. Experiential learning also allows students to work with practicing attorneys and begin developing their own legal networks.

Can I take both a clinic and an externship?

Students can take both an externship and a clinic, but not during the same semester. Clinics and externships are intensive learning experiences that take serious time commitments. Additionally, many externships and clinics involve commuting or work outside of normal school hours.

I am just finishing 1L year, why should I think about this now?

The best way to plan your clinic or externship is to work backwards from the semester you want to participate in experiential learning. All clinics and externships require that a student have taken or be enrolled in Professional Responsibility. Additionally, some externships and clinics have required or recommended pre-requisites or corequisites such as Lawyering Skills or other doctrinal classes. Finally, most experiential learning opportunities require an Illinois Supreme Court Rule 711 license, which requires the completion of 45 credits toward the J.D. degree. You need to determine the exact prerequisites for your preferred experiential learning experience to be ready to start your externship or clinic when you want. The earlier you start planning, the better off you will be. This is especially true of students trying to graduate in December of their 3L year or students pursuing their law degree on a part-time schedule.

For more information about experiential learning at NIU, contact one of the following faculty members:

Anita Maddali, Associate Professor of Law and Director of Clinics, amaddali@niu.edu or (815) 753-0207

Sheila Maloney, Director of Externships smaloney@niu.edu or (773) 407-6373

Paul Cain, Clinical Professor, Criminal Defense Clinic, pcain@niu.edu or (815) 962-9980

Wendy Vaughn, Clinical Associate Professor, Civil Justice Clinic, wvaughn@niu.edu or (815) 962-9980

Colleen Boraca, Clinical Assistant Professor, Health Advocacy Clinic, cboraca@niu.edu or (630) 229-0752

Alan Boudreau, Visiting Clinical Assistant Professor, Foreclosure Mediation Clinic, aboudreau@niu.edu or (815) 753-2407

http://www.niu.edu/law/academic/experiential/index.shtml

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What is the difference between a clinic and an externship?

Clinics and externships provide a chance to gain real-world legal experience under the supervision of practicing attorneys. Both combine a classroom component taught by NIU faculty with a field experience. However, externships and clinics provide different learning opportunities. No one experiential learning class is best for everyone.

Can I work while I take a clinic or externship?

All civil and criminal externships fulfill the requirement. Many students successfully work while in an externship or clinic. Law students must balance classroom learning, experiential learning, work, families and other commitments, while maintaining the high level of professionalism required of new lawyers. If you believe you might have difficulty balancing work, school and experiential learning, you should consult with the Dean of Students, Director of Externships or your clinical faculty member to develop a plan that works for you.

What are some recent NIU externship placements?

In recent years, NIU externs have worked at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Chicago Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights, Chicago Medical – Legal Partnership for Children, Chicago Park District Legal Department, City of Naperville Law Department, The Joint Commission (health care accreditation non-profit), Illinois Education Labor Relations Board, Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, Prairie State Legal Services, Public Defender and State’s Attorney’s Offices (in Boone, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, Ogle and Winnebago counties), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, and Working Hands Legal Clinic.

Are there externships that do not meet the experiential learning requirement?

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For more information, see: http://www.niu.edu/law/academic/experiential/index.shtml

### Clinics and Externships

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<th>Clinics</th>
<th>Externships</th>
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<td><strong>Legal areas</strong></td>
<td>Students can choose externships across a wide variety of legal areas, including public policy work.</td>
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<td>NIU offers clinics focused on criminal law, civil law, administrative law and alternative dispute resolution.</td>
<td>Externships are available in public interest legal organizations, state and federal government agencies, public defenders and state’s attorney’s offices, and other organizations where you can be supervised by a licensed attorney. Externship locations are based on the organization you work with. You have more ability to customize an externship to meet your specific legal interests.</td>
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<td><strong>Student planning</strong></td>
<td>Students must work with the organization or agency to secure an externship. Each externship has its own application requirements and deadlines. Those deadlines may be well in advance of the start of any given semester, especially for highly competitive externships. Students must also fill out an externship application prior to registration for the semester.</td>
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<td>Students fill out an application during registration for the semester ranking their clinical choices. All four clinics are offered during the fall, spring and summer terms. Clinic spots are assigned on a first come, first served basis after a priority application deadline.</td>
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<td><strong>Student role</strong></td>
<td>Students can work with their internship supervisors to customize their role within the externship organization.</td>
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<td>Students take the lead on their cases and act as first chair for their clients.</td>
<td>Externs are supervised by practicing attorneys in the organization or agency that hosts the extern.</td>
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<td><strong>Supervision</strong></td>
<td>Clinical students are supervised by fulltime NIU clinical faculty members.</td>
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