The Judicial Externship Program provides students with the opportunity to observe and participate in the legal process from the unique vantage point of the judiciary. The primary educational goal of the program is to allow student externs to gain insight into the judicial process, as well as to utilize and improve their research, writing and analytical skills.

Participating students work 12 hours per week for a supervising judge during the fall or spring semesters (20 hours per week during the eight week summer term) and receive three hours of academic credit, awarded on a pass/fail basis.

Enrollment

The program is limited to third year students with a GPA of 2.8 or higher.

Students interested in participating in the Judicial Externship Program must meet with the faculty supervisor to determine an appropriate potential placement. The faculty supervisor then submits the student’s credentials to the proposed supervising judge, who may then interview the student. All placements are subject to the approval of the supervising judge and the faculty supervisor.

Field Placement

To maximize the educational benefit of the experience, each student extern should spend time doing research and writing for the supervising judge and should have the opportunity to observe proceedings both in court and in chambers when possible. In addition, it is critical to the experience that the student extern receives appropriate feedback from the supervising judge.

The supervising judge will be asked to perform student evaluations at mid-semester as well as at the conclusion of the semester.

The work of a student extern will necessarily vary depending on the nature of the work of the particular court and the individual supervising judge. Typical and appropriate activities for student judicial externs include the following:

1) research and prepare draft opinions and/or orders on matters before the court;

2) research and write bench memos to help prepare the supervising judge for oral argument;

3) research and write other legal memoranda relating to matters before the court;
4) observe proceedings in open court including oral argument;

5) observe various proceedings in chambers, including pretrial and settlement conferences;

6) observe proceedings in other courtrooms, especially those that involve skilled and experienced lawyers and/or interesting legal issues, and

7) other activities as agreed between the supervising judge and the faculty supervisor.

Guided Student Reflection and Evaluation

Students will meet with the faculty supervisor on a periodic basis throughout the semester. Additionally, the students will be expected to keep in regular email contact with the faculty supervisor, both on an individual basis and in group discussions guided by the faculty supervisor with other externship students. In these discussions, the student should reflect upon their judicial externship experience, including: the decision making process of the supervising judge; the pressures and considerations that may influence those decisions; the role written and oral advocacy plays in the judicial decision process; the role the student’s legal research and analysis has played in judicial decision making; the professionalism the student has observed in the courtroom and chambers; and how the student may further develop their research, writing and analytical skills.

At mid-semester, the faculty supervisor will communicate with the supervising judge and obtain feedback and evaluation of the student’s performance. At the conclusion of the semester, a written evaluation of the student will be completed by the supervising judge. The supervising judge will meet with the student and discuss the evaluation, as well as the student’s reflections of their work at the externship placement.

For further information contact Prof. David Taylor, Director of Skills Training at the College of Law or at dtaylor@niu.edu.