

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 co-requisites 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:

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

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.



Northern Illinois University

College of Law

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.

Clinics	Externships
Legal areas	
NIU offers clinics focused on criminal law, civil law, administrative law and alternative dispute resolution.	Students can choose externships across a wide variety of legal areas, including public policy work.
Student planning	
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.	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.
Student role	
Students take the lead on their cases and act as first chair for their clients.	Students can work with their internship supervisors to customize their role within the externship organization.
For more information, see: http://www.niu.edu/law/academic/experiential/index.shtml	

Clinics	Externships
Choices	
Choose from 4 clinics: Civil Justice Clinic (Rockford) where students represent senior citizens in estate planning matters and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in order of protection and related family or civil matters; Criminal Defense Clinic (Rockford) where students represent criminal defendants from bond hearing through trial or sentencing charged primarily with misdemeanor criminal offenses and major traffic offenses; Foreclosure Mediation Clinic (Geneva) where students represent homeowners in foreclosure in the Kane County Foreclosure Mediation Program; and Health Advocacy Clinic (Aurora) where students work, as part of a team with social workers and medical providers, to help clients of the second largest homeless shelter in Illinois access public benefits and expunge/seal their criminal records to help transition people out of homelessness.	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.
Supervision	
Clinical students are supervised by fulltime NIU clinical faculty members.	Externs are supervised by practicing attorneys in the organization or agency that hosts the extern.

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?

All civil and criminal externships fulfill the requirement. All judicial externships, the Huskie Athletic externship, the Innocence Project and the Federal Defender externship currently do not meet the experiential learning requirement as they lack a companion classroom component. If you have a question about a specific externship, check with the Director of Externships.