

Program Description
Access to Justice Internship Program - Summer 2010
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Faculty

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Sponsors: Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas
Lone Star Legal Aid
Texas Access to Justice Commission
Texas Civil Rights Project
Texas RioGrande Legal Aid
All law schools in Texas

Website: www.texasatj.org/ProgramsServices/

I. Introduction

The Access to Justice Internship Program provides a unique opportunity for law students to participate in academic internships with non-profit providers of civil legal services located in areas without a local law school. The goals are to encourage more students to help address the legal problems of underserved individuals and communities, and to educate future attorneys about those problems.

The program incorporates fieldwork and an academic component, and academic credit may be available. A stipend is provided to every student to help defray living expenses. Interns work with accomplished lawyers and study access to justice, legal decision-making, advocacy skills, attorney-client relationships, and legal institutions. Supervising attorneys provide students with a variety of experiences and assignments, including significant research and writing.

In the summer of 2010 **twenty-seven law students** (three from each Texas law school) will intern in the offices of Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas, Lone Star Legal Aid, the Texas Civil Rights Project, and Texas RioGrande Legal Aid.

II. Background

This project grew out of the TATJC Law School Advisory Committee. In 2005 the deans of all of the Texas law schools convened to discuss how the schools could work together to increase access to justice. They decided to create new academic internships focused on providing direct legal services, since such internships would be educationally valuable to students and provide needed assistance to legal service providers.

The first internship course was successfully held in South Texas during the summer of 2006, and the program has steadily grown since then.

III. Educational Objectives

1. To develop students' lawyering skills through participation in and observation of the legal work performed in their placements;
2. To expose students to issues of professional responsibility and ethics within the context of practice;
3. To enhance students' understanding of how principles learned in law school apply to the real-world resolution of legal problems;
4. To give students the opportunity to participate in and reflect upon legal institutions and the lawyering role;
5. To permit students to gain practical experience in specialized areas of the law;
6. To instill fundamental values of the legal profession, including providing competent representation, ensuring access to the courts, promoting justice, and committing to an ongoing process of professional self-development.

IV. Student Academic and Fieldwork Requirements

The academic and fieldwork components of the program are designed to satisfy all of the ABA requirements for academic internships. Students will begin by participating in a 3-hour orientation training focused on professionalism and access to justice. The orientation trainings, led by the faculty instructors and faculty members from participating schools, will be held in April in Austin, Dallas and Houston. The faculty leaders will also meet individually with students.

Students will begin their internships by June 1, 2010. Students are required to work full-time for at least seven weeks, and are strongly encouraged to work for a longer period.¹ Students will be assigned readings, participate in on-line classes, and submit written assignments. The faculty leaders will conduct small group meetings and site visits in numerous regional locations during the summer, and will maintain contact with students via email and telephone.

Students will be instructed to learn about and comply with all confidentiality rules of their sponsoring organizations and the Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. While the students' internship experiences serve as a basis for class discussion and assignments, all confidentiality constraints will be honored.

The faculty leaders will evaluate (on a pass/fail basis) each student's performance. They will consult with the supervising attorneys about the students, and each student will be evaluated in writing by his or her supervising attorney at the end of the internship. The faculty leaders will forward the evaluative information for each student to the faculty contact at the student's school for any determination regarding academic credit.

Student Selection, Credit, Tuition and Stipends: Each school selects its own students for the program, and the faculty leaders will work with the selected students to match each one with an appropriate placement. Students will be assigned to placements on a rolling basis. Schools are encouraged to give preference to students who have strong academic credentials, are willing to commit more than seven weeks to the program, and have some fluency in Spanish (particularly if the student plans to work in South Texas).

¹ The faculty leaders will monitor students in their placements until they are finished.

Academic credit and tuition arrangements are left up to each school. Schools are strongly encouraged to make credit available, and the faculty leaders will provide any necessary information to facilitate that process.

Participation in this program will require students to pay unusual housing and travel costs. A stipend of \$250/week will be provided by the Texas Access to Justice Commission to every student for a minimum of seven weeks and a maximum of twelve weeks of work. Each student is required to work for at least seven weeks, and students are strongly encouraged to work as long as possible. Students are expected to commit to the length of their internship period at the time of application.

V. Role of the Supervising Attorney

While the instructors are responsible for the content of the internship program, supervising attorneys are essential educational partners in this endeavor. A supervisor with at least three years experience must be appointed for each student. The expectations of supervisors are:

Orientation: Supervisors should ensure that each student receives an orientation about the mission of the office, workplace policies and procedures, resources available, and confidentiality of information, documents and files. Supervisors are asked to provide training materials or a list of suggested readings to students.

Internship Plan: Each student is responsible for developing educational goals and creating a specific learning plan for the internship. Students discuss these issues with the faculty instructors at the beginning of the program. Each student also meets with his or her supervisor to discuss these goals and the experiences that might help to achieve them. The student and supervisor together create a plan that includes activities designed to maximize the educational content of the internship. This plan should be as concrete as possible and should consider all available learning opportunities (staff meetings, observation of proceedings, work assignments, client contact, etc.).

Work Assignments and Requirements: Students should be assigned to do significant legal work. Supervisors are encouraged to assign tasks based on their needs, keeping in mind that some projects and/or opportunities for observation are more suited to student objectives than others. Supervisors are asked to plan challenging, varied assignments, including substantive legal research and writing.

The supervisor is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the student. If students receive work from several people, the supervisor should be aware of the assignments and resolve any conflicts that arise. Students may occasionally work with non-lawyer professionals, but the student's work must be primarily legal in nature.

Each intern will maintain contemporaneous timesheets reflecting the hours they work and the general nature of their activities. The timesheets must be signed at the end of the internship period by the supervising attorney or another staff member.

Supervision: The internship program offers a unique opportunity for a student to meet regularly with an experienced attorney to discuss cases, proceedings, clients, professional responsibility issues, and activities the student has observed. Such interactions help the student develop insight into the role of lawyers.

The supervisor's involvement in teaching the student and serving as a mentor is very valuable, and regular supervision is a critical part of the educational experience. The supervisor should be available to answer questions, provide feedback, and monitor assignments. Supervisors are encouraged to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of an intern's performance on each activity and provide suggestions for improvement.

Evaluation: Each supervisor will be contacted by one of the faculty leaders during the program to discuss the student's activities and performance. The supervisor must complete a written evaluation of the student at the end of the internship and conduct an exit conference to discuss the evaluation and the student's experience.

Students and supervisors are urged to try to resolve any problems together. If an issue arises that does not seem easily addressed, a faculty leader should be contacted immediately.

VI. Important Dates

March 3	Deadline for students to be selected by each school; Schools are encouraged to select students as soon as possible since students are assigned to placements on a rolling basis. After March 3 rd , any open slots will be filled by students from waiting lists submitted by other schools.
April	Orientation training sessions will be held in Austin, Dallas and Houston. Each student must attend an orientation. Dates will be finalized soon.
June 1	Students begin internships by now
TBD	Small group meetings and site visits at numerous regional locations