

Public Interest Externship Frequently Asked Questions

When can I apply for an Externship? Students in the day program may enroll in the Externship Program as early as the second semester of their second year and extended division students may enroll in the first semester of their third year, although priority is given to third-year day students and fourth-year extended division students.

Will I be able to appear in court? Students who have completed over half of their law school credits, and who have completely or are currently enrolled in either evidence or trial practice, are eligible to be certified under Rule 9 in Rhode Island or Rule 3:03 in Massachusetts. In general, only students who will be representing indigent clients through legal services or the public defender's office, or who will be representing the state, are eligible to be certified under the Rules.

When and how do I apply? You must apply in the semester *before* you wish to do an Externship. An information session about the Externship Program and our in-house Clinics is held each semester (generally in November and April) to inform students about the range of opportunities available. Applications are generally due a few weeks before the beginning of reading period. The Feinstein Institute will post the date of the information session and the application deadline on our website.

What are the requirements of the program? Students are required to work the equivalent of two full days each week (about 14 hours) for a total of 180 hours over the course of the semester. In addition, students are required to enroll in a co-requisite seminar: Either the Judicial Process and Ethics seminar; the Public Interest Lawyering and Ethics seminar; or Pursuing Justice through Interdisciplinary Practice: The Medical/Legal Collaborative. Students receive 3 ungraded credits for the fieldwork and 2 graded credits for the seminar.

How do I choose my placement? All students submit an application listing their placement preferences to the Feinstein Institute. The Director reviews all applications, and chooses students based on the strength of their applications, the thoughtfulness of their essays, and their reasons for choosing a particular placement. All things being equal, students closest to graduation have priority for the program. The Director then meets with each accepted student, and determines the most appropriate placement. The student's application materials (application, resume, writing sample) are then sent to the appropriate judge or legal organization, and the student arranges a formal interview with the placement. The judge or supervising attorney makes the final selection.

Can I do both a public interest externship and a judicial externship in different semesters? No. Students are allowed to do only one externship for credit. Students must choose between the two options.

Can I take a clinic in addition to an Externship? Yes. Students can take one clinic (6 clinical credits) and one externship (3 clinical credits) for a total of 9 clinical credits toward graduation.

What is the difference between a Clinic and an Externship? In an in-house clinic (Community Justice and Legal Assistance, Criminal Defense, and Disability and Family Law), students represent their own clients under the supervision of a faculty member. Students learn how to represent a client from beginning to end with intensive faculty supervision. The number of clients in a clinical setting is controlled to provide the best learning experience.

In an Externship, students generally work alongside an attorney who is primarily responsible for the case. Students may work on parts of many different cases because of the schedule limitations. Students are mentored by a supervising attorney and learn about aspects of public interest law that go beyond client representation. Students frequently learn about handling a high

volume case load, about the political pressures in public interest offices, about having an institutional practice, about legislative and policy issues, and about the realities of day-to-day practice in a high pressure environment. Students also make valuable contacts for the future.

Students learn very different skills in each program, and are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to do both a clinic and an externship. The Director of the Feinstein Institute (Laurie Barron) and the Clinical Faculty (Professors Cook, Horwitz, and Margulies) are available to help students think through their choices and plan a progression of experiential education. Students should also consider using their Public Service Requirement as a way to explore hands-on legal work. The Director of Public Service and Community Partnerships (Liz Tobin Tyler) is available to help students craft a valuable work experience.

How are students chosen for the Judicial Externship Program? Do grades matter?

Students are chosen on the basis of their academic credentials, strength in legal writing, thoughtfulness of their essays, and the overall strength of the application. Students with the highest academic credentials are generally chosen for the most prestigious judicial placements, but each decision is made after careful review of the application by the Director. Yes - grades do matter, but they are only one of several factors. The Director also solicits feedback from the Legal Writing Faculty, and from individual faculty members to learn as much as possible about each student's capabilities.

What kind of work do students do in the Judicial Externship Program? Most of our judges treat students as if they were in the same role as their full-time post-graduate clerks and assign the same types of research, memo writing, and decision or opinion writing. Students can expect to work very hard and to do a significant amount of research and writing.

If I am planning to do a post-graduate clerkship, does it still make sense for me to do a judicial externship? It depends. A judicial externship done during the spring of a student's second year can strengthen the student's application for post-graduate clerkships. In addition, a judicial externship can allow the student to explore a different type of court than the setting for a post-graduate clerkship. For instance, students can choose an externship in a federal trial court if they are planning a post-graduate clerkship in a state supreme court. Students should consult with the Feinstein Director to review their options.

In what courts do students generally do their judicial externships? We have placements with the Rhode Island Superior Court, the Rhode Island Supreme Court, the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island, and the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Are we competing with students from other law schools when we apply for these externships? In general, the Rhode Island judges and the Rhode Island legal organizations have reserved a slot for a student from Roger Williams each semester. Because we are the only law school in the state, our students have access to highly prestigious judges and lawyers who value their connection to the law school community.

When should I start to plan for doing a clinic and an externship? Students should attend an informational session as early as the second semester of their first year (or the fall of their second year) in order to learn about their options. Some of the programs have prerequisites and it is valuable to think about doing one program during the spring of the second year and one program during the student's final year.

Do students ever get jobs through their externships? Yes. Many of our externship supervisors are alums of the law school who got their jobs by doing externships as law students. On the other hand, there are some judges who will not consider a student who has done an

externship for a post-graduate full-time clerkship position. Students can learn about these policies before choosing their preferences.

Is an externship any different than a summer internship? Yes. Because we are awarding academic credit for these experiences, there is a requirement that students think carefully about their learning goals for the experience, address them with both the Feinstein Director and their supervising judge or attorney, and develop a plan to achieve those goals through the semester. The goal for the Externship Program is to teach students to become reflective lawyers by engaging in self-directed learning. The pedagogical goals of the program are described in detail in the Externship Manual, which is available in a PDF file on this website.