

WASHINGTON SEMESTER PROGRAM
American University
Washington, DC

Internship Course Syllabus
Justice
Spring 2007

Professor Ann Stansbury

Introduction

Welcome to Washington, DC and the Washington Semester Program at American University. For most of you the Internship program will be a memorable experience, from which you will continue to draw valuable lessons in the years ahead as you move forward in your education and careers. When you complete the program you should have:

- 1) an overview of the types of work that are carried out by professionals whose work pertains to our system of criminal justice, including lawyers, researchers, administrators, and others;
- 2) the ability to analyze the structure and dynamics of an organization and to evaluate its effectiveness;
- 3) enhanced professional skills, including interviewing, turning in a polished work product, and working as a member of a team;
- 4) contacts to help you as you enter the job market or apply to graduate schools; and
- 5) ideas about the types of careers that you would find satisfying.

The purpose of the internship course is to provide you with supervision and a format for learning as much as possible from your work experience. Bear in mind that the total amount of time that you will spend at the internship site, two days per week, is relatively brief. During our class sessions you will have the opportunity to increase your knowledge by sharing your perceptions with your classmates and discussing common workplace issues. In addition, there will be a total of four short written assignments, which are described below.

I will be available throughout the semester to help you obtain an internship that best suits your interests and career objectives, and to help you with any problems that may arise in the course of the internship. **Please call or send me an e-mail at any time** when you have questions about how to proceed or concerns about the internship. I am usually on campus every Wednesday from 4:00 to 5:30, and am available to meet you. **My mailbox is in Dunblane Hall accessible from outside the Faculty Workroom. This is where you should turn in forms, written assignments, and any messages.** I check the mailbox and phone and e-mail messages frequently, so you should get a quick response to any questions. At the end of the semester my assessment of your academic work will account for 60% of your grade and your internship supervisor's assessment of your job performance will be 40%.

Important Dates During the First Three Weeks

On Thursday, January 11 and Friday afternoon, January 12 I will meet with each of you individually to discuss your plans for the internship. Please come to Professor Siman's office, Dunblane 112 to meet with me. These meetings should last only about ten minutes each.

Also on Friday, January 12 plan to attend the Internship Bazaar from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon in the Bender Sports Arena on the main campus. Representatives from a number of organizations will be on hand and some may conduct interviews.

By Wednesday, January 31 you should have completed your interviews and selected an internship. Your internship supervisor must complete and sign an internship form outlining your duties. You must sign the form and return it to me. Please be sure to get these forms to me by January 31 so that we know where you are working and can locate you on your internship days if necessary. If for some reason there is a delay in getting the forms signed, however, such as waiting for a staff person to get through his or her in-box, please e-mail to me the name and number of the internship supervisor so that I will have a way of contacting that person.

Before you start - how to select an internship

You should already have in your possession a copy of the internship databases for the Washington semester. Other sources are the Internship Bazaar, the guide to Congress, various directories of firms and associations, and the Internet. Student evaluations of prior internships are available in the reading room in Federal Hall, and they can be quite helpful. As you can see, there is a wide variety of possibilities and you should think carefully about what interests you.

There are a few guidelines that are important. The first is that you should go to at least **three interviews**, even if you believe that you know exactly where you want to work. The reason for this is that this will give you more opportunities to hone your interviewing skills. Every interview is different and allows you the chance to inquire not only about a different kind of workplace but a different kind of interviewer. **N.B.:** If you secured an internship before you arrived in Washington, be sure that you go to the worksite and meet with the person who will be your supervisor before the starting date of the internship. This will greatly help to avoid any misunderstandings about what your position and duties will be.

In addition, be sure to investigate organizations that are smaller but perhaps more interesting. A well known name may appear impressive on a resumé, but may not necessarily offer you the chance to do meaningful work with some responsibility. You should think about where you will have the chance to have the most worthwhile opportunity for learning and to make a positive contribution.

Interviewing

There are a few rules for interviewing. In general, of course, be prepared. Know as much as possible about the organization before you go to their office. Although this is not going to be a permanent paid career position, you will get the most benefit out of this experience by showing that you are familiar with the office's mission, and that you can make a contribution to it.

When you go to the interview, be on time and build extra time into your plans if you are unfamiliar with the route. (Again, we're here to help.) Wear appropriate office attire. You may find later that the office culture is more or less formal, but wear business attire for the interview.

Bring with you your resumé, as well as a transcript and writing sample if requested.

Ask probative questions about the organization. Since you already know its mission from your research, ask about current projects. Find out as much as possible about what you would be doing if you worked there. Be prepared to talk about yourself, your educational background, interests, and especially why you are interested in that particular organization.

Finally, you should make clear to the interviewer that the Washington Semester program allows you two days per week to intern, which for the Justice program are Monday and Tuesday. You should also inform the interviewer at the outset about any time such as spring break when you plan to be away. Offices do not generally go on spring break, so you do not want your supervisor to be surprised by this academic custom. Since this internship is only for two days per week, attendance is very important. Neither you nor the supervisor will gain much from your experience if you miss more than a few days.

The Description of Duties Form (DDF - also known as "the contract")

When your internship supervisor fills out this form, pay particular attention to the description of your duties in order to avoid misunderstandings. The supervisor may not be entirely familiar with the Washington Semester program, so you may have to clarify some aspects of it. In particular, note that the program requires that no more than forty percent (40%) of your work may be devoted to routine clerical tasks. The description will form the basis for the work performance evaluation form that the supervisor will complete at the end of the semester. Also, bear in mind that the person who signs the initial DDF may not be the person who completes the evaluation at the end of the semester. Be sure to let me know if the name of your supervisor changes. At the end of the semester you should get an evaluation from someone who is familiar with your work.

On the Job

When you begin the internship you may be assigned to routine administrative tasks until you gain experience with office procedures. Consider these part of the learning experience, bearing in mind the 40% rule above. Ask questions of your supervisors and co-workers so that you can learn as much as possible about how and why the organization operates as it does.

Employers are encouraged to give you as much substantive work as possible. Examples are: research using the Internet, Lexis-Nexis, and other sources; taking notes at Congressional hearings; drafting legal documents such as motions or complaints; editing or proofreading articles and speeches; maintaining databases; assisting with client interviews. Some of these tasks may seem small, but each is important to the work of the organization. Employers appreciate interns who are helpful and responsible.

You are expected to work two days per week. You may work additional hours, but this must not interfere with the seminar, your research project, or an elective course. If there are any concerns, contact me immediately so that we can resolve any problems quickly. I will be checking with each of your supervisors during the course of the semester to make sure that things are going smoothly.

Course Requirements

As noted above, there will be class meetings over the course of the semester, where we will discuss as a group various aspects of the internship process. Class attendance and participation will account for 10% of your overall grade. There will be assigned reading handouts that I will distribute, and these will be the subjects of class discussion. In addition, there will be four written assignments, as follows:

I. Field notes - an edited journal of your experiences, duties, and learning opportunities during the first eight weeks of your internship- to be posted on Blackboard every two weeks for the first eight weeks- 10% of your grade

The purpose of this exercise is to allow members of the class to share their experiences, so that each person can have the benefit of learning about a broad variety of work sites. The journal entries may be of any length, but need not be more than two paragraphs per week. The journal should reflect your observations, successes, missteps, lessons learned, and so forth. It should not include speculation, gossip, confidential, or proprietary information. Note that the journal need only cover the first eight weeks. Nevertheless I encourage you to continue recording your observations for your own edification.

If you have difficulty using Blackboard, you may submit your field notes in writing. Also, if your home school requires a journal, you may submit that to satisfy the field notes requirement.

II. A paper of three to four pages about the organization where you are interning -20% of your grade- due March 1.

This paper should include the following:

- the name and location of the organization
- the purpose or mission of the office
- the management structure of the office, including the size of the staff, lines of supervision, levels of review, and the management style or office culture (e.g., formal, informal, autocratic, laissez-faire, etc.)
- why you chose this organization
- what specific goals you intend to achieve by working there for the semester (more than just a general idea about office work)

III. A paper of two to three pages about office communication - 10% of your grade - due March 23.

In the day-to-day life of an office, not all supervisors have the time to explain assignments in great detail to someone who has just joined the office and who is unfamiliar with routines and the background of pending cases. In this paper you should pick an example from your internship of an assignment that you received. Were you given enough information to complete the assignment in an adequate manner? If not, what did you do to follow up and make sure that your understanding of the assignment was correct? Did you know where this assignment fit in to a larger project that the office was managing? Were you able to anticipate what the next step in the project would be? How easy or difficult was it to find out what was going on in the office? Where criticism was offered, was it in a manner that was constructive

and did you have an opportunity to correct mistakes? We will discuss your examples in one of the class sessions.

IV. A two page paper about an interview with your supervisor or another staff person in the office where you are working - 10% - due April 27.

One of the reasons for doing the internship is to meet people who work in the field where you may one day make your career. At some point during the semester, preferably during the second half of the semester when you have had a chance to meet people at your office, ask for a short informal interview with one of the staff members. This is an opportunity to learn how others have planned their careers or are going about that planning. I would suggest that you ask what the person's initial career goals were, how they came to work at the office where they are now working, what they particularly like about the work that they are doing, and in what direction they think that their careers will head in the future. If you have the opportunity to interview a senior person, that is all to the better, but you can benefit from talking to mid-level personnel as well. If you interview a fellow intern, that will not count. Your paper should be a brief record of your conversation, but as with the field notes, it should not include gossip or inside information.

V. Supervisor's evaluation - 40%

The internship supervisor will complete a Washington Semester evaluation form at the end of the semester. This evaluation will cover such attributes as diligence, initiative, dependability, and the ability to work with others. Ideally, your supervisor should complete the form with you, but in any event you should make sure that you have the opportunity to meet with your supervisor to discuss the entire internship experience. You should get a critical evaluation of your work, which can be very helpful. If your supervisor gives you a general letter of recommendation, you may include a copy of the letter with the evaluation form, which will be placed in your Washington Semester file. If for some reason the supervisor does not wish to show you the evaluation form, please ask him or her to call me.

At the end of the semester I will have another opportunity to meet with you individually and you will have an opportunity to discuss the supervisor's evaluation with me.

Class Schedule

NOTE: The class schedule will be distributed at the beginning of the semester, and it may change during the course of the semester if there are changes to the schedule of seminar meetings. Reminders and any schedule changes will be sent by e-mail and posted on Blackboard.

In general, we will meet every 2-3 weeks. The following is an outline of topics to be covered.

- I. Overview of the internship - what to expect, what mistakes to avoid
- II. Discuss employment cases that arise out of difficult workplace situations
- III. Meet in small groups to discuss internships to date.
- IV. Discussion of office communication

V. Hypotheticals, ethical considerations in the workplace
-field notes project should be complete or nearly so