

Washington Semester Internship Program
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Public Law Internship Program

Daniel M. Freeman
Assistant Professor

Welcome to Washington, D.C. and the American University's Semester Program in Public Law. This semester offers the possibility of some exciting experiences for you. There's no better way to gain the hands-on experience and contacts you need to move your career forward than through a professional D.C. internship.

When you complete the program you should have:

- 1) an overview of the types of work that are carried out by government staff and others involved in public law;
 - 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

The search for an internship should already have begun. Washington Semester Program does a fantastic job of making internship information available. It will be most helpful to you to have a full internship package about yourself to deliver which includes the following: your resume, a cover letter, and reference list, and a short (less than 5 pages) writing sample.

**There is an internship Bazaar tomorrow from
10:30 to 12:00. in the Bender Arena**

The hardest part is sifting through the myriad opportunities. However, always be prepared.

Some helpful HINTS:

- Be open to any possibility. The best laid plans “oft go astray”. Have multiple choices of internships in areas which you might be interested in pursuing.
- Remember you are not the only student in Washington looking for an internship. If you make calls and do not get a response, call back. A slammed out email filled with typos and grammatical errors will not do it. Check your work. There is a fine line between being persistent and being a bother. That line will move from office to office. Try to be aware of whether you are about to cross that line. Never burn bridges. You never know when your paths will cross again.
- Some internships require security clearances. If you have such a clearance make sure the organization knows about it and make sure it is up to date.
- Make every effort to secure an internship in the Public Law area. After all, the internship is supposed to augment your class work.

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.

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. 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. Also, it is a good interviewing tactic to ask the interviewer what they do, and how they got where they are.

Although there are certainly no guarantees, some internship sites have offered full-time positions to their former interns after graduation, so it is always a good idea to make a good first impression.

Finally, you should make clear to the interviewer that the Washington Semester program allows you two days per week to intern. You should also inform the interviewer at the outset about any holiday breaks when you plan to be away. 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.

My role

As your internship professor, I will be wearing three hats: advocate, advisor and teacher. As your advocate, whenever there is a problem at your office (e.g. harassing behavior, not enough substantive work) that you cannot handle, I will seek to solve the problem. However, part of your responsibility is to try to resolve the problem yourself in a professional way before seeking my assistance. As soon as a problem arises let me know immediately and do not let it fester. As your advisor, I will attempt to help you come up with ideas to deal with the matter on your own.

As your teacher, I will not only grade your work as an intern, but conduct our regular internship classes which will take place approximately every two weeks depending on the academic calendar. Attendance at these sessions is **mandatory**.

The internship component is graded; therefore, in order to receive credit for your internship program, not only must you complete your actual internship program, but also all of the classroom requirements. I will weight your grade 60-40: 60% by me and 40% by your site supervisor. My 60% will be based on the following:

- 25% class participation (i.e. attendance and participation in class discussions)
- 25% written work
- 10% promptness

Your most important written assignment will be to keep a journal of your internship. While there may be other written assignments, the journal is the most important. This must be a contemporaneous journal—not something you cobble together at the last minute. At the end of each internship day you should set aside some time to collect your thoughts about your experiences that day. Topics could include:

- Does this internship meet your expectations?
- What are your day-to-day responsibilities?
- How does what you are doing contribute to the success of the mission of the organization?
- What is the organization's effectiveness?
- What could it do to be more effective?
- Should it expand or contract its public law focus?
- How effective is the management of the office?
- How effective are my supervisors in maximizing everyone's job satisfaction?
- What would I do if I were in charge to make it better?

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.

The more assertive you are about letting everyone in the office know you want to be part of the team, and you want to learn. Ask questions of everyone without becoming intrusive.

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 press releases; 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.

The following is an outline of topics to be covered during our meetings:

- I. Overview of the internship - what to expect, what mistakes to avoid
- II. Discuss employment cases that arise out of difficult workplace situations
- III. Discuss readings about the law
- IV. Meet in small groups to discuss internships to date
- V. Hypotheticals, ethical considerations in the workplace
-field notes project should be complete or nearly so
- VI. Guest speaker, probably from law school career services office

Success in this class is completely up to you. Go to work with a pleasant attitude, trying to maximize your learning experience every day. Keep entering your thoughts in your journals every day. Participate in class.

Always read the small print. Be professional, be enthusiastic, and make the most of your experience.