

# UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON | LAW CENTER

## Judicial Externship Program Overview

In the Judicial Externship Program, J.D. students work directly for federal or state judges, where they gain invaluable experience in research and writing and courtroom observation. (LLM students may be eligible for the program on a case-by case-basis, but are limited to 2 or 3 credit hours.)



**[The benefits of a judicial externship](#)**

**[When and where to apply for an externship placement](#)**

**[How to apply for a placement](#)**

**[Applying to the UHLC Judicial Externship Program](#)**

**[What to expect as an extern](#)**

**[Assignments for receiving academic credit](#)**

**[Need Additional Help?](#)**

## THE BENEFITS OF A JUDICIAL EXTERNSHIP

### What is the benefit of a judicial externship?

#### *Perspective*

Although you are taught objective legal argument in law school, the primary thrust is to train you as an advocate. The greatest benefit of a judicial externship is for students to view advocacy – both good and bad – through the eyes of a judge. Gaining the perspective of the judiciary helps you to become a better attorney.

#### *Exposure*

Working with a court allows you to view documents and observe hearings on a greater number and variety of legal actions than you would with a firm, public interest organization or government agency.

#### *Résumé Value*

Legal employers respond very favorably to seeing judicial externships listed on a résumé. Additionally, many judges consider judicial externship experience as a factor when selecting their post-graduation law clerks.

#### *Networking*

Besides networking with the judge and his/her staff, externs may also have opportunities to meet legal practitioners with business before the court.

## WHEN AND WHERE TO APPLY FOR A JUDICIAL EXTERNSHIP PLACEMENT

### When should I apply for a judicial externship?

Students must have their externship secured before applying for academic credit. As a general rule:

For fall externships\* - Apply by July 1

For spring externships\* - Apply by November 1

For summer externships - Apply by February 1

Different courts have different deadlines. Please check a judge or court's website for specific information or call directly for additional information.

(\*Note: If a student does not seek/receive an externship in the summer, he/she should consider doing one in the fall and/or spring semesters. Many judges and other placements take externs year-round, and fall and spring positions are less competitive than they are in the summer.)

## **Do I have to remain in Houston to be a judicial extern?**

Students may work for credit in courts located both inside and outside of the Houston area. If you are interested in a non-local court, Please email Bill Powers (wapowers@Central.UH.EDU), to ensure the placement meets the Law Center's requirements to receive academic credit.

## **What courts should I consider?**

You may receive credit for state courts at the county court level or higher, (including Probate Courts). (Whether a Juvenile/ Family Court placement is credit eligible will be determined in a case-by-case basis.) You may also receive credit for externing with any federal court, including federal magistrate and bankruptcy courts. Contact Externship Program Director Kristina Van Arsdel to learn more about past student experiences within different chambers.

Determine the type of experience and exposure you would like to receive. For instance, appellate courts help hone your research and writing skills. Trial courts generally have limited research or writing opportunities, but allow for a good deal of litigation observation and interaction, both with the court and practicing attorneys. The federal district courts, on the other hand, offer opportunities for writing, research and litigation observation in civil and criminal areas of the law. If you know you are interested in a specific area of the law, consider externing with a "specialty court," such as probate, bankruptcy, or immigration.

## **May I work for the same judge for credit for more than one semester?**

No. The goal is for students to gain experience with *different types* of courts and judges during a second judicial externship; therefore, students may not receive credit for a judicial placement for which they have previously worked.

## **Externship placement resources**

For information on how to contact a court, please see:

<http://www.law.uh.edu/externship/judicial.asp>.

Other placement options can be found on the Symplicity website:

<https://law-uh-csm.symplicity.com/index.php/pid773916?>

## **What if the placement I am interested in is not on your resource list?**

If you are interested in a placement that is not on the list, please email Bill Powers (wapowers@Central.UH.EDU), Director of Internship & Externship Programs, to ensure the placement meets the Law Center's requirements for academic credit.

## HOW TO APPLY FOR A PLACEMENT

### How do I obtain a judicial externship?

Prior to applying with judges, students are strongly encouraged to meet with Bill Powers (wapowers@Central.UH.EDU), Director of Internship & Externship Programs, to discuss which chambers would best meet your career goals and objectives.

Next, students must contact, interview and secure a position at a court.

Finally, go to the online application at [www.law.uh.edu/externship/forms/judicial.asp](http://www.law.uh.edu/externship/forms/judicial.asp) to apply to the Judicial Externship Program.

You should check with the court for specific application requirements, but most federal and appellate judges will require the following information:

- Cover Letter

- Résumé

- Writing Sample (a writing Sample from LARC class is fine)

- Transcript (unofficial)

State trial level judges usually require only a student's résumé and cover letter to begin the application process.

### Is there a certain etiquette when applying to a court?

Students should not turn down an offer from a judge. You may apply to several judges/courts and even accept interviews from several judges; however, you must accept an offer from the first judge who presents you with one.

Once you have accepted a judicial externship, contact the other courts to which you applied and withdraw your name from consideration (and cancel other interviews, if necessary). Keep a record of your communication with the courts, even if it is verbal, so there is no question of your adherence to proper etiquette.

### What will the interview be like?

Depending on the court, you may interview with a law clerk, a staff attorney, one or more judges, or a combination. No matter who interviews you, always display respect towards everyone, and be sure to conduct research on the judge prior to the interview.

## **What should I wear to an interview?**

Always wear formal business attire when interviewing. The key is to dress conservatively. This includes dark suits, white shirts, and conservative ties for men, and dark suits, collared shirts, and pantyhose for women.

*[Return to top.](#)*

## **APPLYING TO THE UHLC JUDICIAL EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

Through participation in the Judicial Externship Program, students can earn academic credit working in judicial chambers.

### **Are all placements in judicial chambers eligible for academic credit?**

No. Verify with Director Bill Powers that your placement meets the guidelines for academic credit. For a list of guidelines for seeking academic credit through the Externship Program, visit <http://law.uh.edu/externship/Guidelines-for-seeking-academic-credit.asp>.

### **I tried to enroll through PeopleSoft but could not find the course. How do I enroll in the Program?**

Students cannot enroll themselves in the externship courses; rather, they must apply through the Externship Program's online application found on the Externship webpage at [www.law.uh.edu/externship/forms/judicial.asp](http://www.law.uh.edu/externship/forms/judicial.asp). Once your application is reviewed and accepted by the Director, he will request your enrollment to the externship course with Student Services. You will be copied on this email so you know your enrollment is in the works. If you have any question regarding your enrollment status, contact email Bill Powers ([wapowers@Central.UH.EDU](mailto:wapowers@Central.UH.EDU)).

### **When can I apply to the Externship Program?**

Applications for the Externship Programs are available year-round. The Judicial Externship Program application is available online:  
<https://www.law.uh.edu/externship/forms/judicial.asp>

### **Do I have to attend the Externship Orientation?**

**All accepted first-time externship students will meet for a mandatory orientation** to review the nuts and bolts of the courses' requirements, discuss matters of ethics and

professionalism, and address any initial student concerns/questions. The date, time, and location of the orientation will be made available to students in advance via email. *(Students are on notice to check their UH email regularly so as not to miss such announcements.)*

[Return to top.](#)

## **WHAT TO EXPECT AS A JUDICIAL EXTERN**

### **What do judicial externs do?**

The experience will vary between courts and judges, but most tasks will involve legal research and writing; some include courtroom observation, as well.

#### ***Appellate Courts***

In an appellate court, a student may cite check opinions, observe oral arguments, research points of law and write judicial memoranda to be reviewed by the deciding judge(s). These courts handle both criminal and civil appeals. In some courts, students are permitted to sit in on judicial conferences where the judges discuss their decisions.

Most of an extern's time, however, is spent researching and writing. When reviewing the trial court's record during the writing process, students learn a great deal about procedure and evidence. During their time observing court, students learn about courtroom decorum, how lawyering skills differ, and which type of attributes best display professionalism.

#### ***Federal District Courts***

Federal District Courts are trial level courts. When working with federal district judges and Magistrate judges, students will observe numerous proceedings, both civil and criminal, as well as have the opportunity to research and write.

Unlike state trial courts, federal trial courts issue written opinions to the litigants (some of which are published). This practice enables students to fine-tune their writing skills.

#### ***State District Courts***

In smaller counties, district courts hear civil and criminal cases. In larger counties, such as Harris County, courts have either civil or criminal jurisdiction. In courts with civil jurisdiction, students are often assigned to review motions, such as motions for summary judgment, and write memoranda to the judge advising him/her of the controlling authority. Criminal courts do not have as many written motions, so those externships are frequently more observation-oriented.

At any level, a judge may have a particular issue he or she would like an extern to research and address either verbally or in a written memo. Additionally, externs may be asked research material for CLE articles or speeches for the judges.

### **How many credits may I earn for working at my placement?**

For externships during the **fall, spring, or entire summer**, students may select to earn 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 credit hours.

For externships during **abbreviated summer sessions**, students may select to earn either 2 or 3 credit hours.

(LLM students may earn either 2 or 3 credit hours only.)

**Note:** All externship credits count towards the 12-hour, non-substantive credit cap.

### **How many hours must I work at my placement?**

You are responsible for working out your schedule (number of hours per day, number of days per week, number of weeks per semester) with your placement supervisor.

### **How many working hours must I work for each credit hour?**

Each credit hour requires 60 on-the-job hours. In other words, multiply your requested hours by 60, and that will give you the total minimum number of hours you will need to work at your placement over the semester. (For example, for 3 credits, you must work a minimum of 180 hours.)

### **What types of activities count towards the required minimum number of hours?**

- Time actually working\* (writing, observing, etc.)
- Time while at placement, but awaiting assignment (within reason)
- Orientations provided by your placement
- Any outside research assigned by supervisor/judge
- Luncheons and other events **ONLY** if attended with on-site supervising attorneys and/or a judge

(\*Note: Students should be performing substantive legal work, and not be used primarily for secretarial or administrative work. Contact the Externship Director immediately if you have a problem with this at your placement.)

### **What types of activities do not count towards the required minimum number of hours?**

- Time spent completing your time log or journaling
- Lunch on your own or with other interns (without a supervising attorney or judge along with you)

- Drive time/parking time
- Any days off due to government shutdowns
- Days off due to illness or holidays (government holidays included)

### **I would like to change the number of credit hours I initially enrolled in for my placement. Can I do that?**

Following your official program enrollment, you have until the last official day to add a class for that semester. (Check the official academic calendar for the exact date:  
<http://www.law.uh.edu/calendar/academic-calendar.asp>)

### **How do I keep track of the hours I work during my placement?**

All students must keep track of their daily and weekly hours in a time log, which should look similar to the template you will receive by email before school starts (or at orientation). Students must scan/email their faculty instructor their time log, along with journal entries and/or reflective writing assignments (see section “*Assignments for receiving academic credit*” below for details). Your final time log, which shows your total hours, is to be signed by your supervisor, and may be scanned/emailed or sent to your faculty instructor via regular U.S. mail. (Only the final, cumulative time sheet must be signed by your supervisor.)

### **What happens if I do not complete my hours by the end of the semester?**

Students should think thoughtfully and carefully when determining the number of credits in which they choose to enroll in for a particular externship. Unlike in years past, now students who do not complete ALL their required working hours during the semester in which they are enrolled in an externship will no longer be permitted to take an “Incomplete,” and have up to a year to complete those hours. Students must now COMPLETE ALL THEIR REQUIRED NUMBER OF HOURS, along with all other assigned coursework, *no later than the official last day of classes for the semester.*

[\*Return to top.\*](#)

## **ASSIGNMENTS FOR RECEIVING ACADEMIC CREDIT**

In addition to submitting your time logs to your externship faculty instructor, you must also complete the following to receive academic credit for participating in the Externship Program:

### ***Required Meetings***

At the midpoint\* and end of the externship, a student will have a one-on-one meeting with the Externship Director to discuss the student’s progress and any concerns s/he might have at his/her placement. These meetings will be scheduled individually in consultation with

the Director. (Conferences for students working outside of the Houston area will be held telephonically or via Skype.)

(\*Note: Externships occurring over an abbreviated summer session will only have an end-of-term meeting.)

### ***Journaling/ Reflective Writings***

Prior to the semester's start, students will be informed whether they must submit journal entries and/or reflective writing assignments based on a prompt (a specific topic). Please use these writings as a way to reflect on what you are learning, what has surprised you about your placement, different lawyering/judging styles you witness, etc. **Failure to submit journal entries (and time logs) will result in you not receiving credit.**

### ***Evaluations***

Students must complete a placement evaluation at the end of the semester (which will not be shared with the placement) which is meant to assist future student externs when deciding where they might wish to apply. You may choose to remain anonymous on this form.

Your instructor will email your supervisors asking them to complete a brief online evaluation of your performance. Supervisors are encouraged to review their evaluation with you.

### **How will I be graded?**

You can expect to receive a passing grade for your Externship **IF** you complete your required number of hours and fulfill the other requirements listed here and in the course syllabus. If you do not do all of these things, you will not receive credit for your externship.

### **Still feel like you need more guidance or information?**

Please email Bill Powers (wapowers@Central.UH.EDU), Director of Internship & Externship Programs, for more information about the Programs.

[\*Return to top.\*](#)