



Experiential Learning Programs

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLINICS, FIELD PLACEMENT, AND PRO BONO

GW Law offers a wide and exciting array of experiential opportunities. These opportunities allow you to hone your practice-readiness and professional identity as well as gain insight into various areas of law. They allow you to take advantage of our location in Washington, D.C., to enhance your education with practice experiences available only here. Although there is overlap between these three programs – all of them allow students to provide assistance to individuals in need of legal advocacy or to work in the federal, state, or local government – they differ in fundamental respects.

Clinics are courses that are taught by Law School faculty in which students are certified by the Court to represent clients in real cases. Clinics have both a classroom and practice component. They are generally graded credits. Field Placement is, as the name implies, work done “out in the field” either for a government, judicial, or non-profit agency, under the supervision of a licensed attorney, on a credit/no credit basis, with a required graded co-requisite course. Pro bono refers to work undertaken without course credit or payment in which a student works under the supervision of a lawyer on a purely voluntary basis. Both Field Placement and Clinics enable you to gain credits toward your 6-credit experiential learning requirement.

Clinics

The Law School is home to approximately 17 in-house Clinics and one off-site Clinic, Rising for Justice Housing Advocacy. Most of the Clinics offer second and third-year law students the opportunity to practice as lawyers under the supervision of Law School faculty for academic credit. Once enrolled in the Clinic and certified to practice, Clinic students represent clients in legal matters. They appear in court and other tribunals, argue motions, present trials, draft and file briefs, negotiate contracts, provide legal advice, advocacy, and lobby legislative bodies. One of our Clinics, Domestic Violence Project, provides students with an intensive academic curriculum focused on domestic violence, and a concurrent placement at an organization or government office to work on domestic violence issues. Our cClinics span many practice areas including health, family, public benefits, immigration, human rights, criminal defense and criminal appeals, vaccine injuries, intellectual property, non-profit and business transactions, access to justice. Students can find a description of the Clinics [here](#).

Each Clinic involves a classroom component in which students learn the skills and law necessary to handle their case work. In the seminar, students might also hear from guest speakers such as judges and other advocates and conduct case rounds. Clinics are a significant time commitment, usually involving 4-6 credits and with a couple of exceptions, they are taken for a letter grade. Students who exceed the required number of hours on their Clinic work may receive pro bono credit for those additional hours worked.

Clinic work, with the exception of the Domestic Violence Project which operates as a hybrid, differs from pro bono or field placement experiences because students act as lawyers on their cases. They do not support the work of other lawyers, nor do they act as paralegals as they may do for field placement or pro bono work. Instead, Clinic students directly represent clients and act as the primary lawyers on their cases. Their work is supervised and supported every step of the way by their Clinic professors who review drafts and accompany them to all official appearances and most client meetings.

In the course of their Clinic work, students develop their lawyering skills, their insight into the legal system's successes and failures, consider their professional identity and engage in marketable career development. Students work in an 8:1 student/faculty ratio environment in which faculty members engage deeply with students in their case work and in preparing them for practice and for the job market. Clinics also expose students to judges, and lawyers at government agencies, firms, and non-profits who may play influential roles in job placement.

Field Placement Program

The [Field Placement Program](#) ("Program") provides students with the opportunity to work closely with judges or practicing lawyers as legal externs in unpaid externships with qualifying governmental, judicial and non-profit organizations while earning academic credit. The Program is designed to enhance the educational experience of its students through exposure to the actual practice of law.

The primary educational objectives of the Program are to provide students with the opportunity to gain experience in different substantive areas of law and legal process and reflect upon their professional development; to develop legal research, writing, interviewing, counseling and investigative skills and engage in reflective lawyering; to deal with issues of professional responsibility in a practice setting and give thought to an attorney's ethical and moral choices and obligations; and to consider cross-cultural competency within the context of client representation and an attorney's role in creating a legal system providing equal access and eliminating bias, discrimination, and racism in the law. JD students who have completed the law school's full-time first-year curriculum, LLM, and MSJ students may participate in the Program.

The Field Placement Program requires JD students to enroll in two courses: Field Placement (for their externship work in an in-person, hybrid, or remote format) and a corequisite course. The Field Placement course requires students to complete 60 hours of work and 5 pages of original and substantive writing for each credit requested and is graded on a CR/NC basis.

The corequisite course is taught by adjunct faculty who are all either judges or practicing attorneys engaged in legal work. The course connects the student's externship experiences with academic concepts they are learning in law school. Students participating in the Field Placement Program for the first time will earn a letter grade in their corequisite course.

The Field Placement Program differs from Clinics in that placements are not associated with the Law School, there is a much wider range of possible placements, and students support lawyers and judges but do not represent clients themselves. Additionally, the parameters of the Program afford students a degree of flexibility, within program requirements, to establish their weekly schedule for the semester. It differs from pro bono in that students earn academic credit for the work performed. Students who wish to participate in both a Clinic and Field Placement in the same semester must obtain the express written permission of both instructors.

Pro Bono Program

Although the Law School creates and/or facilitates some pro bono projects, pro bono can happen entirely on the student's own initiative, whereas the Law School oversees and administers both Clinics and field placement. Thus, any student can do pro bono work with no involvement of anyone at the Law School although to obtain pro bono recognition, a student must meet certain standards outlined on the back of the Pro Bono Hours Sheet. For students who perform 50 hours or more of pro bono, they are honored at a pre-graduation celebration with the Dean's Certificate and a listing in the graduation program, with additional recognition of a silver Public Service cord and Presidential Volunteer lapel pin for those who surpass 100 hours.

Additional Clinic or Field Placement Hours. GW does not count as pro bono time spent in an activity for which the student receives academic credit. Regardless, we are aware that some students spend many more hours in their Clinic or field placement than is required by the ABA, and – in many cases – those additional hours can count as pro bono. Further, many students stay in their field placements after they no longer receive credit because they find the work rewarding, for which they could receive pro bono credit as well.

Pro Bono Projects. The [Pro Bono Program](#) hosts several regular projects for student participation. In addition, students can find pro bono work on their own, working for a non-profit organization in an area in which they have a particular interest or for a government agency that offers a chance to learn about its work on an unpaid and not for credit basis, often in the summer after the first year of Law School. Students can engage in this group of pro bono activities at any time, whereas Clinics and field placements are open only to students who have completed their first year, and Law School sponsored projects require one semester of Law School. Interested students can join the pro bono listserv to receive announcements on such project.

For further information, please contact:

For Clinics:

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<https://www.law.gwu.edu/Clinics>

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