Externship Supervisor’s Assignment Clarification Handout

One of the keys to a successful externship is the ability of the supervising attorney to effectively assign legal research and writing projects. It is important to know exactly what you expect from students and to communicate these expectations. Students are encouraged to seek clarification as needed; it is important to ensure that externs have adequate opportunities to request information and discuss their progress throughout the writing process. Thinking about some or all of the items below may cut down on confusion and increase productivity for everyone.

1. Have you explained each assignment with the relative inexperience of the student in mind?
2. Have you followed up regularly with your student(s) as assignments progress?
3. Have you provided students with feedback on their work?

Some specific discussion items to aid in this process may include:

**Audience and Purpose**
- For whom is the student writing? Will anyone see it but you?
- What is the specific purpose of the assignment? Is it part of a larger project/goal?

**Structure and Style**
- Is there a specific format that you want the student to use? Templates and/or samples may be helpful, if available.
- Discuss the final product (e.g., is this a rough draft or polished draft? Bluebook citations or not).
- Do you want copies of cases, legislative history, or other research materials?
- Have you explained that a rough draft in practice should mean that the student has proofread, and edited the document for your review?
- How might this writing differ from what students are taught in a first year Legal Writing class?

**Research Guidance**
- Is there a particular research strategy you want the student to use?
- Is there a starting point you would recommend?
- Are there specialized sources or materials used by your office with which the student might not be familiar?
- Is there one question on which you want the student to focus?

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1 Drawing from the Greater Los Angeles Consortium on Externships Field Placement Supervision Manual and the Georgetown University Law Center’s Manual for JD Extern Supervisors, we have developed this guidance designed to assist supervisors in providing assignments to their externs.
• Do you want an objective conclusion or do you want the student to advocate for a specific position?
• Do you want the law supporting one side of the issue or both?
• Is there relevant legislative history the student should be informed of or should research?
• What jurisdiction do you want the student to search (e.g., state law, federal law, administrative law/regulations)?
• Are there key stakeholders that should be involved in the development of this project?
• Are there meetings that the extern should attend to gain a better understanding of the interests of all of the parties involved in this issue?

**Background Information**

• Have you provided the student access to information on this client or matter in the office (e.g., a case file or previous research), if applicable?
• Are there meetings outside of the office that the extern should attend, or individuals from other organizations with whom the extern should meet?

**Deadlines & Communication**

*Timing*

• When do you need the assignment completed (e.g., rough draft deadline, final deadline)?
• How should the student prioritize this project relative to other assignments?
• How long should the student spend on the project, and have you taken into account your level of expertise as compared to a student who has completed 2-4 semesters of law school?

*Communication*

• How often should the student check in with you? Do you prefer phone, email, in person?
• Who should the student contact if you are not available?
• Have you checked in with the student to see if he/she has questions or needs clarification?

**Feedback**

• Effective feedback assists the student in producing quality work and improving skill sets.
• Did you provide specific, detailed feedback (vs. simply stating, ‘Good Job,’ or, ‘That’s fine.’)?
• Did you provide examples and/or instructions for how things could be improved for future assignments?