



Civil Poverty Field Placement

Possible Placements: Legal Aid Society of Orange County; Legal Aid Society of Seminole County; Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida; Legal Advocacy Center of Central Florida.

SUMMER: 5 Credits–35 Hour Week–10 Weeks–Total 350 Hours plus a Weekly Seminar

FALL: 5 Credits – 25 Hour Week – 13 Weeks – Total 325 Hours plus a Weekly Seminar

Placement Requirements: Students placed in a not-for-profit law office, such as the Seminole County Legal Aid Society, Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association or Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, Inc., provide legal services to this community's disadvantaged and must meet the following criteria – Have completed 4 semesters and received not less than 48 credit hours. Have a 2.0 or higher cumulative grade point average and completion of Professional Responsibility and Evidence. Students are required to spend a minimum of 25-35 hours per week at their placement, depending on the semester, and receive five hours of credit for satisfactory completion. Attendance at a weekly seminar is also required. The seminar portion of the externship is graded; the field portion is pass/fail.

Students participating in the Civil Poverty Externship can be certified as legal interns (CLIs) in order to represent live clients.

Objective I: Understanding the legal issues surrounding poverty. This placement provides students with the opportunity to learn about how poverty leads to legal problems for our community's less fortunate citizens. Students are required to focus on the difference between the causes and effects of poverty and how this cycle might be broken. Working with experienced attorneys, students are exposed to the most common problems facing the disadvantaged: divorce, guardianship, child custody, landlord-tenant, consumer, bankruptcy, health care, elder care, and small claims court issues. Students explore administrative and legal solutions to these issues as well as conduct research and appear in judicial and administrative proceeding on behalf of their clients.

Objective II: Developing Attorney-Client relationship skills. Because the attorney-client relationship is so important in dealing with disadvantaged clients, this field placement requires students to learn interviewing and counseling techniques that are particularly sensitive to the educational and experiential background of their clients. Being able to form an attorney-client relationship and obtain the client's confidence in this practice can also be very challenging. By first observing experience lawyers and then advising their own clients, students develop appropriate interpersonal skills and legal techniques.

Objective III: Implementing negotiation and mediation skills. Litigation is generally not in the best interests of disadvantaged clients. As a result, discovering alternatives to litigation will most likely produce the best results. In resolving the problems mentioned in Objective I above, students learn how to use their negotiation skills in formulating compromises and other resolutions short of litigation.

Objective IV: Improving research and writing skills. Students learn how to use local, state and federal laws to assist clients in resolving difficult legal problems. Often this process requires students to take novel or creative approaches to traditional issues. Under the guidance of experience lawyers, students draft memorandum, court papers, or other documents necessary to support or implement the solution produced by their research. Similarly, students provide research materials for their supervisor's cases.

Objective V: Gathering and using facts. As with other placements, a vital skill for lawyers concerns their ability to collect and use facts crucial to the outcome of their case. In poverty law areas, students must often formulate unique means for identifying the source of needed information, and then implement both formal and informal techniques for securing that information. How to use interviewing techniques and formal and informal discovery techniques are perfected in this process.

Objective VI: Understanding the requirements of Florida's Rules of Professional Conduct. It is particularly important for students working in agencies that help the disadvantaged to be sensitive to ethical constraints because such students are often confronted with very emotional and heart rendering problems which call out for solutions, but to which no legal solution may be available. Under those circumstances, poverty lawyers must maintain the discipline required of our profession while finding solutions that are within the law and within our ethical structure. Placements like legal aid offices provide students with wonderful role models for how to use the law without overstepping or compromising.