INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the University of Mississippi School of Law, thank you for accepting students as externs in your office or chambers. I am Professor Hans Sinha, and I direct our for-credit externship program.

Our externship program has grown into a vibrant bridge between the academic and the actual practice of law. As we seek to educate the next generation of attorneys, we are acutely aware that we could not provide them a true introduction to the practice of law without your help.

For the time and effort you devote to training, supervising, and mentoring our students, we are truly grateful.

We recognize that as our program has grown, so have the parameters surrounding it. This short video is designed to introduce you to the program, provide answers to questions you may have, and assist as best we can, as you mentor our students.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Our externship program is a for-credit component of our law school curricula. As such, it is both guided by the overall law school goal of providing a comprehensive legal education to our students, and governed by the American Bar Association Standards pertaining to field placement programs. As part of this credit-earning program, students can be placed in public service, not-for-profit, and government offices, as well as state and federal judicial chambers.

We do not place students in for-profit law firms or organizations. All of the matters I will cover in this video, are also explained and discussed in our Externship Manual and Field Placement Supervisor Handbook.

Cover of Externship Manual
SELECTION PROCESS

Students seeking to participate in our externship program typically begin the selection process by submitting an application to me. I review such, and then have a face-to-face meeting to discuss possible and suitable placements for the student. Sometimes the student knows precisely what office he wants to extern in; other times the student may only have a general idea, or a geographical setting in mind. Typically, however, after our meeting, we jointly identify a suitable potential office placement. I say potential because the final say in whether a student externs in an office, always lies with the office.

Once an office has been identified, the student drafts a cover letter introducing himself to such office and expressing his interest in being placed there as an extern. I forward such cover letter and resume to the office for review, and if the office informs me the student is preliminarily acceptable, I ask the student to contact the office in order to schedule a formal interview. Once the interview has taken place, and the office lets me know the student is welcome to extern in such office, I coordinate with the student to get him registered for the externship course.

Sometimes a student may contact an office or judicial chambers directly, and be pre-approved for such placement. If that is the case, and assuming it is an office where we can place for-credit students, I will confer with the student, and confirm with the placement office or chambers, and then coordinate with the student in terms of the course registration.

PLACEMENT OFFICES

Considering that we have had a robust externship program for some time now, most of our placements are offices or chambers where we have placed students on an ongoing or regular
basis. In such offices, there usually is one person who serves as the contact person with the law school. However, every semester we typically place a couple of students in new placements. In such a case, I will confer with the student, and then talk with that office’s designated person in charge of their externship program, or if they have not had externs in the past, the person who will serve as the student’s on-site supervisor. Often times I also visit the placement office as part of this initial coordination. I have found that face-to-face meetings go a long way in establishing a working relationship.

We welcome new offices to our placement list. Besides the public service, governmental, or judicial component, what we look for are offices that have the resources, time and desire to teach, supervise and mentor our students. Should you wish to host students and be placed on our list of approved placements, please contact me and we will begin the process.

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

Once a placement for a student has been confirmed, I draft a proposed Memorandum of Understanding to be executed by the placement office, the law school externship program, and the student extern. This MOU outlines the parameters of the placement, as well as the responsibilities and expectations of all three parties, including the nature of the work the student is expected to perform. An example of an MOU can be found in the Externship Manual. Once the MOU has been drafted and reviewed by the placement office, I circulate a copy for all three parties to sign.

**MOU**
OFFICE SUPERVISION

Typically, each office has one person who serves as the designated extern coordinator. In larger offices students often work with and under the supervision of several attorneys in addition to the office extern coordinator; in smaller offices, the extern coordinator may be the actual on-site supervisor for the student. Regardless of whom the student works with, the key is for the students to be engaged in, as the ABA terms it, substantial lawyering work. We have never found this to be an issue, with offices and chambers consistently providing excellent work assignments and supervision of our students. The ABA in using this terminology is simply making the important point that there is a distinction between a paid law clerk who can be assigned non-educational and tedious tasks potentially lacking an educational benefit, and for-credit externs whose overall goal should always be for them to further their legal education. Thus, as much as possible, we ask that our students’ work and assignments be geared towards substantial lawyering tasks.

TIME LOGS AND EVALUATION FORMS

Recognizing that supervising and mentoring our students takes time and effort, and genuinely being grateful for such, we seek to streamline and make any paperwork associated with the program as minimal and non-onerous as possible. That said, there are two categories where we ask the on-site supervisor to complete certain forms. The first involves the student’s initial Placement Plan and Weekly Time Logs, the second consists of a Mid-Term Evaluation and a Final Evaluation. Both these set of forms can be completed using digital on-line documents.

PLACEMENT PLAN AND WEEKLY TIME LOGS
At the outset of an externship placement, the student is asked to author a Placement Plan wherein she puts down what she wants to accomplish during her externship placement. The student is asked to review this plan with her on-site supervisor at the beginning of the placement. The goal and hope is that this will permit the student and the supervisor to be on the same page in terms of the student’s aspirations, and if appropriate, for the supervisor to further guide the student in terms of what can be accomplished and what may not be realistic, as well as to provide guidance regarding additional goals. Once the student and supervisor has reviewed the student’s Placement Plan, the student signs and the supervisor initial in the appropriate place. The student is asked to review her plans mid-way throughout her externship placement to see if she is meeting her goals, and to make any necessary adjustments going into the second half of the placement.

**Placement Plan**

The student completes her Placement Plan using an on-line Google Document shared between the student, the office supervisor and myself, providing all access to such document. This Google Document also contains a configured Weekly Time Log wherein the student keeps track of the work she does. In our accompanying seminar class, we discuss the importance of accuracy in time record keeping, as well as confidentiality in terms of the students not disclosing confidential matters in the time sheets. Once the student completes her time log for one week, she will ask her supervisor to review such, again using the on-line Google Document, and initial the form indicating that the noted hours are accurate. The review by the on-site supervisor should ideally be done on a weekly basis. However, we recognize that there are
times this may not happen, and as such ask that the time logs be reviewed on a regular and frequent basis. I likewise review the weekly time logs on a regular basis both to ascertain what the student has been working on, and to gauge their path to a successful completion in terms of required on-site hours.

**Weekly Time Log**

### Credit hours and On-site hours

With regard to the latter, students have to complete a certain number of on-site hours corresponding to their selected and enrolled number of academic credit hours. A typical externship course enrollment is between three and six law school academic credit hours, which equates to 135 and 270 on-site hours. In certain cases, and after approval by me, students may enroll in as many as twelve credit hours, which equates to 540 on-site hours. High credit placements, are unusual, need pre-approval, and entail additional requirements for the student, such as the selection of an outside text reading and enhanced learning objective. As such, they are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

### Feedback, Critique and Evaluation forms

The third and final category of forms we ask our on-site supervisors to complete consist of a mid-placement and a final evaluation pertaining to and of their extern’s performance. Both of these evaluation forms can be completed on-line. As a whole, one of the main benefits students get from externing in a real-world environment, is the opportunity receiving critique and feedback from practicing lawyers and judges. Students tend to take such feedback to heart,
more so than they would critique or suggestions at, for example, law school sponsored competitions. In other words, your suggestions truly matter to our students, and are much appreciated. With this in mind, please seek to provide feedback and critique to our students as they perform different tasks throughout their externship placement.

The mid-evaluation form is designed to provide a formal opportunity for the on-site supervisor to provide an evaluation in the middle of the placement when there is still time for the student to adjust in order to get the most out of the placement. This form is succinct, the main intent being to provide an avenue for formal evaluation, ideally in addition to the continuous critique and feedback provided to the student throughout the placement. The final evaluation provides an opportunity for the on-site supervisor to provide a more extensive evaluation of the student’s overall performance. Please seek to provide as much information as possible in both of these evaluations, and if possible, use the completion of such forms as a jumping off point for a sit-down meeting with the student to discuss how he is doing, and or did, as well as – and more importantly, how he can improve going forward. Both of the evaluation forms are on-line and accessed through a link that your student will provide you.

Feedback, critique, and constructive suggestions how to improve, are both critical to a budding neophyte attorney’s development, and something students crave and appreciate. I cannot emphasize enough how important this is to our students. 

Mid and Final Evaluation forms – first pages of each
Seminar class component

Contemporaneous with our students spending time learning the actual practice of law through their externship placement, the students are also enrolled in my seminar course. In such course we study various concepts associated with experiential learning, ethics, and other related issues and topics. As part of the seminar course, the students do readings, author several short essays on assigned topics, and keep a contemporaneous journal of their externship experience. With regard to the latter, one of the ethical issues we discuss in depth, is the concept and importance of confidentiality. In light of the ubiquitousness of social media today, we specifically read about and discuss the importance of confidentiality in all aspects of life, including journaling and social media.

Our seminar class is scheduled for Wednesday afternoons during the fall and spring semesters. If a student is placed locally or close to Oxford, MS, she attends the class live; if the student is placed away from Oxford, she may attend the class via an internet based meeting program. Similarly, in the summer term, while all students attend the seminar class live, they do so through a webinar presentation program.

SITE VISITS

Finally, as our regular placement offices know, I seek to visit our placements each semester. I do so to check-in, not check-up, and find this is great time to exchange information regarding our students’ performances, as well as for me to gain insight from you in terms of what works and may not work with our program as a whole. I am always seeking to improve upon and make ours the best possible for-credit law school externship program. That, of course, could
not be possible without your time, help, supervision, mentorship and guidance. For this, and for everything you do, I and the law school remain grateful.

Conclusion

These are just some of the major points pertaining to our for-credit externship program. Again, a more detailed look at our program, including suggestions for supervision and mentoring, can be found in our Externship Program Manual and Field Placement Supervisor Handbook, a copy of which is provided to each of our placement offices. That said, should you at any time have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

Again, thank you for all you do for our students.