Congressional and Administrative Law Externship

Congressional and Administrative Law Externship

This externship is open to J.D. students in the first or second semester of their third year, as well as to students in the second semester of their second year.

In the Congressional and Administrative Law Externship, students have the opportunity to learn first-hand about the practice of law in the nation’s Capitol. Students — approximately 12 in the Fall and 24 in the Spring — spend their semesters in Washington D.C. and work under the direction of attorneys in a variety of government offices and not-for-profits. Students are also required to enroll in a classroom component, which is held in D.C. and is a three-hour weekly Seminar on American Democracy and the Policy Making Process. The course addresses the major issues and features of the domestic and foreign policy making processes in the U.S. Specific readings and requirements may vary each semester. However, students should expect a workload of reading and written assignments commensurate with any other 400 level course at the University.

Each student admitted to this externship is assisted in obtaining a placement in a Congressional Office, Administrative Agency, or NGO. Admission to the externship is by application only and occurs one year in advance.

Congressional and Administrative Law Externship Aims

Students learn about the legislative and agency process through hands-on experience where they can explore career opportunities unique to the nation’s capitol.

Typical Activities

Congressional:
- Attend congressional hearings and briefings
- Draft talking points and speeches for members of congress
- Meet with interest groups on pending legislation
- Attend weekly staff meetings

Administrative:
- Draft motions and briefs
- Attend court proceedings, depositions and witness interviews
- Conduct legal research and writing
- Attend seminars and conferences provided for in-house attorneys

Student Perspectives

“Participating in the Congressional and Administrative Law Externship was a perfect way to end my law school career! I spent the work week completing interesting and challenging assignments for my internship in the Criminal Appellate Section of the Department of Justice and used my weekends to explore the bustling, vibrant city. Having "summered" at a mid-sized Chicago law firm, I used the [externship] to really explore and compare the differences between private practice and government work before being thrown into the workforce and left wondering if I had chosen the right career path.”

“The [externship] was the highlight of my law school experience. It provided me with opportunities I would have never otherwise had and has provided connections that will be invaluable in my legal career. I would recommend it to anyone interested in having a once-in-a-lifetime experience in a great city at a truly transformative time in history.”

“Living at the epicenter of politics while working at the Department of Justice gave me a perspective of the practice of law that has forever influenced my professional goals. That experience heightened my passion for the law, and the sense of purpose I felt working within the National Security Department has since been unmatched.”
**Prerequisites**

In early February, Professor Mersmann interviews applicants for the Fall semester and Professor Kaplan interviews applicants for the Spring semester; final selections are made based on the interview, faculty references, the statement of interest, the student's resume, and demonstrated academic achievement.

Third-year J.D. students who are taking the D.C. externship in their final semester of law school must have taken a course from the ethics curriculum before starting the program. It is also recommended that students interested in Congressional law have taken a course in legislation. It is recommended that an Administrative Law course is taken for placement within an administrative agency.

It is encouraged that students take preparation courses in the subject area of the agency in which they will be placed.

**The Bottom Line**

- Enrollment is limited.
- Admission is by application only and occurs one year in advance.
- The externship is open to J.D. students in the first or second semester of their third year, as well as to students in the second semester of their second year.
- The externship is worth 11 credits (3 are graded on a modified pass/fail basis and 8 are graded credit/no credit). The American Democracy and Policy Making Process course is worth 3 additional credits.

**Information for Non-U.S. Citizens**

Non-U.S. citizens should note that most federal government offices will only consider externs who are U.S. citizens.

**Congressional and Administrative Law Faculty**

Professor Susan Kaplan
Professor Tomea Mayer Mersmann

---

**Highlights**

- The program has been in existence for almost 31 years.
- Over 500 second-semester 3Ls have acquired hands-on training through the Congressional and Administrative Law Externship.
- Students pursue placement at offices according to their interests, in consultation with the externship professors. Students essentially act as junior attorneys in government venues. Some of the high-profile placements have included:
  - Department of Justice
  - Department of Labor
  - Department of Homeland Security
  - Securities and Exchange Commission
  - Federal Communications Commission
  - House and Senate Judiciary Committees
  - Senate Commerce Committee

**For more information, contact:**

Susan Kaplan  
Email: gocafile@aol.com  
Phone: 314-935-9490

Tomea Mayer Mersmann  
Email: mersmann@wulaw.wustl.edu  
Phone: 314-935-6486

---

**Requirements**

The Congressional and Administrative Law Externship must be taken in conjunction with the American Democracy and Policy Making course, which is taught in D.C. This course satisfies the writing requirement.

Students review goals and office assignments with their faculty supervisor four times during the semester.

As part of their externship coursework, students will be required to write a series of short papers and one longer paper during the semester.