

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

Externship Program Policies

Mixed faculty and administrative policy.

Revision history: Revised May 2024 to address the Online J.D. Program; technical edits made in August and November 2024; revised in December 2025.

Related policies: [J.D. Learning Outcomes](#); SCALE Program Policies; Grading and Scholastic Honors; Student Honor Code; Code of Student Professionalism and Conduct; Determination of Credit Hours for Coursework; Student Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedures (Including Complaints Implicating ABA Standards); Master of Laws Programs Policies

Related form: Externship Agreement

Scheduled Review Date: May 2027 (Externship Co-Directors)

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A. Purpose and Goals of the Externship Program

Southwestern's Externship Program offers high-quality experiential education to a large percentage of the student body in line with the law school's core value of producing profession-ready lawyers. The Externship Program offers students the opportunity to gain legal education through real-life practice experiences by externing at approved off-campus placements with governmental agencies, public interest entities, state and federal judges, the legal departments of select organizations, and select law firms. The Externship Program enhances students' legal education through hands-on experience and the ability to observe the practice of law, with structured and appropriate supervision. Externships afford students the opportunity to refine educational goals, test career goals, and build a professional network. The goals of the Externship Program are to help students:

1. Demonstrate the ability to learn from experience by identifying specific personal learning goals and then tracking and assessing their progress (LO1);
2. Develop professional skills (LO3, 6);
3. Develop the ability to handle legal issues and problems in real-life situations (LO3, 4, 5, and 6); and
4. Demonstrate the ability to reflect on their values, learning, and performance as it relates to their responsibilities as professionals to continuously learn, evolve, and achieve self-fulfillment (LO1).

B. Administration of the Externship Program

1. **Director:** A full-time faculty member directs the Externship Program. The Director reports to the designated Vice Dean. If at a given time, the Externship Program has Co-Directors, all references to the Director also mean the Co-Directors.
2. **Administration:** The Externship Program is administered consistent with the policies set forth in this document.
3. **Exemption and waivers:** The Externship Program Director has the authority to waive or grant an exemption from any requirement in the Externship Program Policies.

All requests for exemptions or waivers must be in writing and detail the basis for the requested exemption or waiver. The decision whether to grant or deny an exemption or waiver is solely within the Director's discretion.

4. **Externship faculty:** The externship courses are taught by adjunct faculty members.

C. General Provisions

1. Externship Course

The externship course is graded Credit/No Credit and has two components—the fieldwork component and an academic component taught by an adjunct faculty member. Students must timely and satisfactorily complete all components of the course, per the course syllabus, to receive Credit.

2. Curriculum relationship

All externship placements will relate to the J.D. and LL.M. curricula offered at Southwestern.

3. Unit credit for part-time placements

- a. Fall and spring semesters:** Part-time non-judicial externship placements are for three units of credit. Part-time judicial externships are for four units of credit; these judicial externships include placements with the California Superior Court, the California Court of Appeals, U.S. bankruptcy courts, and state trial and intermediate appellate courts in other jurisdictions.
- b. Summer sessions:** Part-time summer externships are for two, three, or four units of credit.
- c. One-credit externships:** A special one-unit externship is available during fall, spring, and summer for part-time students who have full-time or near full-time work obligations that would prevent them from participating in higher-unit externships. The externship can be short-term (minimum four weeks) and more flexible than regular externships. The one-unit externship requires 60 hours of fieldwork. Enrollment requires pre-approval of the Externship Program Director. Details are available on the Externship Program portal page.
- d. Unit limits:** See Section E below for unit limits for certain externships.

4. Unit credit for full-time placements

- a. Fall and spring semesters:** Full-time externships are for ten units of credit. These are typically limited to California Supreme Court, U.S. District Court, and U.S. Courts of Appeal externships.
- b. Summer sessions:** Full-time summer externships are for five units of credit.
- c. Quarter 8:** Q8 externships for SCALE II students are for five units of credit.

D. SCALE Externships

This policy also applies to SCALE students. SCALE II students may be approved for two externships in private law firms – one during the summer and one during

the required Quarter 8 full-time externship. See Section E.4. This exception is made for SCALE II students because they have limited opportunities during their time in law school to gain real-world legal experience, test career goals, and explore post-bar job opportunities. The hours requirement for SCALE II full-time externships is 300 hours over the course of Quarter 8.

E. Non-Attorney Supervision; Paid Externships; and Law Firm Externships

1. Non-attorney supervision

In certain circumstances, students may complete an externship under the supervision of a non-attorney who is otherwise qualified to supervise a law school externship. Examples include fieldwork in policy, contract administration, and compliance. This type of externship is limited to three units (e.g., one fall/spring/summer externship). This type of externship requires special approval from the Externship Program Director.

2. Paid externships

In August 2016, the American Bar Association lifted the ban on “paid externships.” Accordingly, at Southwestern, students may receive both compensation and school credit for externships in certain circumstances. In addition to Sections E.2.a and E.2.b below, students receiving school credit for externships may be compensated for transportation or lodging associated with the externship (e.g., in the case of an out-of-town placement).

- a.** Students may receive externship school credit for paid positions that otherwise meet the Externship Program’s requirements (e.g., in-house position or public-sector work that pays the student for their work).
- b.** Students may receive externship school credit for public-interest and public-sector externships for which the student also receives a grant or scholarship.

If a student is seeking a “paid externship” (i.e., the student will be receiving any kind of compensation for the externship), regardless of pay status, the student and supervisor must agree to abide by all requirements governing externships in the applicable Institutional Policies, this policy, the course syllabus, the Externship Agreement, the SoCalEx Supervisors Manual, ABA Standards for field placements, and any other documentation provided by Southwestern.

3. Entertainment law firm externships

Students should apply for entertainment law firm externships through the Externship Office.

Students may enroll in an entertainment law firm externship in addition to two other externships (subject to the 22 Credit/No Credit unit limit noted in Section F.3.a).

Questions about entertainment law firm externships should be directed to the Associate Dean of Biederman Entertainment, Media, and Sports Law Institute ("Biederman Institute") or the Externship Office.

4. Non-entertainment law firm externships

- a.** This section, E.4, applies only to non-entertainment law firm externships.

Subject to Section E.4.b below, non-SCALE students may participate in only one three-unit law firm externship during the course of their law school education. For the summer session, SCALE students may participate in a four-unit law firm externship.

Students interested in a law firm externship as their first externship are required to connect with an alum via the Alumni Resource Network ("ARN mentor") to discuss educational and career goals and reflect on why a law firm externship might present a good learning opportunity. The alum must have been a practicing attorney for at least two years and not a member of the firm that the student would like to join for the externship. The outreach to the alum should cover the following to be included in the student's request to the Externship Program Director for approval of a law firm externship:

- The student's general areas of interest and desired practice setting (e.g., private or public; litigation or transactional; civil or criminal; specific practice area such as family law, immigration, workers' compensation, etc.);
- How a law firm externship will help the student's educational goals at this point in their legal education (e.g., given the classwork the student has completed, other legal experiences, etc.); and
- Two or three major takeaways from the meeting with the ARN mentor.

- b.** Non-SCALE students interested in a second non-entertainment law firm externship, including a repeat externship, may petition for approval. The Externship Program Director will evaluate the request, considering the following factors:

- Significantly different practice setting compared to the first law firm externship;
- Significantly different practice area compared to the first law firm externship;
- The second law firm externship's fit with the student's educational goal(s) (e.g., completing a concentration) and career goal(s) (e.g., potential employment opportunities); and

- The student's participation in judicial, public sector, or public interest externships.

F. Student Eligibility and Application Requirements

1. Academic standing

Students must be in good academic standing in the semester preceding their participation in the Externship Program. Some externship placements require top class ranking (e.g., top 10% for the 9th Circuit Court of Appeal and the California Supreme Court, and top 10-30% for other federal judicial and government); please check with the Externship Office and the placement descriptions. These requirements apply whether the externship application is submitted through the Externship Office or directly by the student. In addition, the Externship Program Director retains the discretion to base program admission on the student having compiled an academic record that exceeds the good standing requirement. A student who is placed on academic probation while participating in an externship may continue the placement, barring extraordinary circumstances.

2. Eligibility

Full-time students may apply for an externship beginning their first summer. Part-time students may apply for an externship beginning their second summer. Students must complete their externship in the semester or term they begin it. A student who has failed to complete an externship or who receives a grade of No Credit will not be permitted to enroll in another externship.

3. Credit/no credit cap and number of externships

a. Credit limits: Students are limited to two externships and may not take more than 22 units of credit/no credit work (e.g., Moot Court Honors Program, Law Review, TAHP, Trial Advocacy, Negotiation Honors Program, Externship, January Intersession courses), excluding those earned by transfer credit courses taken at another law school. A student may petition for a third externship, explaining the anticipated educational benefit derived from the third externship.

b. Repeat placements: A student who would like to return to the same placement for a subsequent semester/session (e.g., continue with the same D.A. unit or with the same judge) must petition for this second term, explaining the educational benefit or potential employment opportunities derived from a second term at the same placement. For repeat non-entertainment law firm externship requests, see Section E.4.

A student who would like to return to the same entertainment placement for a subsequent semester/session must petition for this second term, explaining the educational benefit or potential

employment opportunities derived from a second term at the same placement. The Associate Dean of Biederman Institute will assess the request.

4. Pre-application requirements

Before applying for a placement, students must thoroughly familiarize themselves with this policy and educate themselves about the various placement opportunities (e.g., through various informational events at the law school and extensive materials available at the Externship Office and online). Students should also meet with Externship Office staff or the Externship Program Director for counseling.

Students should apply only for opportunities that they would accept without hesitation if offered a position.

5. Student applications

This section governs students' applications for externship opportunities through the Externship Office. Students may also apply directly, through the Career Services Office, Public Interest/Public Sector Career Fair, and similar opportunities. However, for the opportunity to count for school-credit externship, it must be either already approved by the Externship Office or vetted and approved by the Externship Program Director for externship course credit. See Section H.5.

Students must apply for an Externship Program placement by filling out the Externship Application Form available online and in the Externship Office, Room W231. Students must email their resume, cover letter, and writing sample (if required) to externoffice@swlaw.edu to complete their application. Students applying for a judicial externship must submit a writing sample; some non-judicial placements also require a writing sample, so please check with the Externship Office. A cover letter is required for all placements. Finally, some placements require a transcript, which the student may submit directly to the placement, or the Externship Office will provide it to the placement. Because placements periodically revise their application process, such as writing sample or transcript requirement, without notifying Southwestern, students should visit the placement's website for updated information before submitting their application materials to the Externship Office.

a. Timing and deadlines

For judicial and federal government externships as well as the California Attorney General's Office, students should submit applications no later than:

- **September 1** for spring placements
- **September 22** for summer placements
- **March 1** for fall placements

For all other externships, students should submit applications no later than:

- **October 1** for spring placements
- **January 22** for summer placements
- **April 15** for fall placements

Some externships—such as federal judicial and government placements and placements in the legal departments of entertainment organizations—are highly competitive. Also, some placements require a security clearance (primarily judicial and government), a process that may take up to two months. Finally, some placements require certification by the state bar (e.g., the Preliminary Hearing Unit of the District Attorney's Office). Therefore, early planning and submission of the application are necessary.

Students may submit their application materials to the Externship Office earlier than the deadlines, but the Externship Office typically waits until the deadline to submit all applications together for a given position.

The above timelines for early application are specific to the placements noted above. Students should consult with the Externship Office and the placement they are interested in to determine whether early application is required.

b. Prerequisites

Some placements have prerequisites. For example, students wishing to participate in entertainment externships must have completed Copyright Law. This requirement applies regardless of whether the placement is obtained through Southwestern's Externship Office or through the student's own efforts. In exceptional circumstances, the Externship Program Director, in collaboration with the Biederman Institute Associate Dean, may waive the requirement.

6. Placement interview and commitment to placement

Almost all externship placements require that the student be interviewed by the placement supervisor. The placement supervisor will typically contact the student directly. Upon scheduling an interview, the student must notify the Externship Office. Once an interview is scheduled, the student must complete the interview, accept the position if offered, and arrange an appropriate work schedule for the semester. The student must immediately advise the Externship Office of the outcome of each interview (i.e., offer accepted or no offer).

Once a student accepts an externship, they must successfully complete

the required hours of the externship and all other course requirements. Any proposed change of plans or any complications, at any time, should be reported immediately to the Externship Program Director or Externship Office staff.

G. Standards for Selecting Students for Externships

All placements are at the discretion of the Externship Program Director. In exercising that discretion, the Director will consider the following factors:

1. **Ability to extern at the placement:** Is the placement a good fit for the student? Does the student have the legal and professional skills for a productive externship experience in the particular placement? The Director will make this determination on the basis of the student's transcript, and, where appropriate, may request a meeting with the student, seek input from faculty members, and review the student's performance in other externships, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities.
2. **Reason for wanting to participate in the placement:** Does the placement fit into the educational goals and career interests of the student?
3. **Compliance with requirements and prerequisites:** Has the student complied with all placement and Externship Program requirements and prerequisites?

H. Approved Placements and Evaluation of Placements

1. List of approved placements

The Externship Office maintains a list of approved placements and placement descriptions for students' review. The list is updated annually in late summer. Please check the Externship portal page or with the Externship Office for revisions and additions during the course of the year.

2. Placement selection and approval

Placements are with governmental agencies, public interest entities, state and federal judges, the legal departments of select organizations, and select law firms. Approved placements are ones compatible with the purpose and goals of Southwestern's Externship Program, detailed above. In addition, to be approved and continue to be part of the Externship Program, placements are screened to ensure that:

- The placement has sufficient staff resources to assign the student to a particular attorney or judicial officer for supervision;
- The supervising attorney or judicial officer is aware of their teaching and supervisory responsibilities, including providing the student with a variety of opportunities for hands-on legal experience as well as observation of law practice, exposing the student to a range of legal projects, training the student, assisting the student in the assigned

tasks, and observing and critiquing the student's performance; and

- The supervising attorney or judicial officer will verify the accuracy of the student's time sheets throughout the period of the placement and complete a detailed evaluation of the overall student performance at semester's end.

Southwestern's ability to approve a placement outside of California might be limited due to various jurisdictions' requirements; this is also true of externships outside the United States. Currently, Southwestern can approve externships in U.S. jurisdictions listed under "Locations where Online J.D. students may reside during the program" provided [here](#), except as noted on that list (e.g., those that include the "***" designation). To discuss the possibility of international externships, students must meet with the Externship Office at least three months prior to the Externship Program application deadline for the respective term.

3. Placement evaluation

The Externship Program Director is responsible for overseeing the evaluation of placements. Every placement is evaluated by the Externship Program Director or a member of the Externship Committee (a standing committee that supports the Externship Program Director in maintaining an educationally rich Externship Program) through periodic on-site visits or their equivalent. Prior externs' input is also considered.

4. Placement termination

An externship placement may be terminated as an approved placement if, after a placement evaluation, the Externship Program Director deems it unsuitable for continued placement of Southwestern students.

5. New placements

Law school encourages new placements that will enhance educational opportunities for students.

Students should not commit to a new placement and then request unit credit. Rather, students should first provide the following information to the Externship Program Director, via a Petition available on the Externship portal page and the Externship Office, who will determine whether to approve the placement:

- Details about the proposed placement (including nature of organization and its legal work, number of attorneys);
- Details about the proposed supervising attorney (min. five years in practice, whether experienced in supervising externs, contact information);
- Range of contemplated legal projects for the extern; period and hours (e.g., 8- or 10-week summer commitment, xx hours per

week);

- Confirmation that the student has discussed with the supervising attorney the educational nature of the externship;
- If the proposed supervisor is not an attorney, a detailed explanation of the supervisor's qualifications to supervise a law school externship; and
- Explanation of how the externship at the proposed placement fits with the student's educational and career goals.

I. Student Requirements after Accepting a Placement

1. Acceptances

Once a student accepts an offer, the student must advise the Externship Office staff. If the student has been in contact with other placements, they should immediately contact the other placement(s), explain they have accepted another externship, and withdraw their application.

If a student is selected for an externship and accepts the offer, they will not be able to withdraw the commitment except for compelling reasons. To obtain permission for withdrawal, the student must immediately, upon the knowledge of such compelling reasons, petition in writing to the Externship Program Director before starting the externship. The petition must specify the compelling reasons for withdrawal. Failure to petition and receive approval may jeopardize the student's chances of being considered for a future externship placement.

2. Externship Agreement

Once a student accepts an offer from an approved placement, the student must complete and sign the Externship Agreement, present it to the supervisor, and submit the fully-executed copy per instructions in the syllabus.

3. State Bar certification

Several placements require state bar certification or offer opportunities for certified student fieldwork (e.g., the Preliminary Hearing Unit of the District Attorney's Office). Students should take the necessary steps to be certified in time for the beginning of the externship semester or session, where pertinent to the individual placements. Please visit the website for the State Bar of California, <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/>, or the jurisdiction in which student certification is desired, and search for "Practical Training of Law Students" or the equivalent. Please submit the form to the Student Services Office for the school's sign-off.

4. Hours requirement

The following minimum hours requirements apply to the corresponding

externship units. Hours are computed on the basis of a regular semester and the eight-week Quarter 8 and summer session. Students must complete the minimum hours on a weekly basis for the duration of the semester or eight-week summer session.

Fall/Spring semester:

1 unit – (60 hours total; min. 4 weeks)
2 units – 8.5/9 hours/week (120 hours total);
3 units – 13 hours/week (182 hours total);
4 units – 18 hours/week (252 hours total);
10 units – 40 hours/week (560 hours total).

Quarter 8:

5 units – 40 hours/week (300 hours total)

Summer session:

1 unit – (60 hours total; min. 4 weeks)
2 units – 16 hours/week (128 hours total);
3 units – 23 hours/week (184 hours total);
4 units – 32 hours/week (256 hours total);
5 units – 40 hours/week (300 hours total).

Except for one-unit externships, externs will receive 15 hours of credit for timely and satisfactory completion of the academic component of their externship, which counts toward the hours requirement.

5. Schedules

Students must arrange their fieldwork schedule with their placement supervisor. Students are expected to abide by their schedule. Gross, unauthorized deviations from the schedule will be cause for termination of the externship, assignment of a failing grade, or both.

Authorization for deviations from approved schedules requires the consent of the placement supervisor and the Externship Program Director.

Students are expected to abide by their fieldwork schedule even when there are no Southwestern classes (e.g., during Spring Break or a holiday observed by Southwestern but not by the placement) or when Southwestern moves in-person classes online (e.g., due to a weather event), unless the student timely and professionally makes other arrangements with their placement. If the student is sick and cannot meet their fieldwork obligations, the student must promptly advise their supervisor and arrange for other opportunities to fulfill their fieldwork hours.

Students must immediately report to the Externship Program Director if any prolonged illness or other unexpected situation may prevent them from performing their fieldwork for more than one week.

When requesting permission to take another course (e.g., Constitutional Law) in another program (e.g., full-time residential students in the Online J.D. Program) due to conflicts between the externship schedule and their regular curriculum, the student must seek and obtain approval from the Student Services Office.

All externships run concurrently with the applicable semester/session. Summer externships are concurrent with the eight-week summer session and will not be tailored to individual schedules.

6. Placement requirements

Externs must comply with all working hours requirements and professional expectations of the placement. Students must be present for the fieldwork and remain with the placement according to the dates and times specified by the placement. Placements generally run from the first day of instruction through the last day of instruction of the semester or session. The student is required to be at the placement each week of the semester or summer session. See I.5 for holidays or school closures.

7. Academic component

In addition to the satisfactory completion of the fieldwork hours, externs must also satisfactorily complete the course academic components, described in the syllabus. These components include orientation (for first-time externs), class sessions, reflective exercises, timesheet submissions, and other work product. Full-time externs must also submit a six-to-seven-page paper at the conclusion of their externship.

8. Confidentiality and professional conduct

Students are expected to hold in strictest confidence all information and communications received in the course of the externship placement that are not matters of public record or knowledge and to adhere fully to the standards of professional conduct.

Students must exhibit professional conduct at all times during their externships. Any extern failing to demonstrate an acceptable level of professionalism, in the sole judgment of the Externship Program Director, may have the academic credit for their placement reduced or eliminated, with no tuition refund.

9. Unlawful practice of law

At their placement, students may have the opportunity for contact with clients or potential clients, the court, other attorneys, etc. Students should be extremely cautious in their communications so that they are limited to and do not overstep the scope of work that they are authorized to

perform. All communications should be prefaced by disclosing the student-extern status.

J. Grading and Evaluation

A grade of Credit or No Credit (or partial credit) is determined by the Externship Program Director at the recommendation of the adjunct faculty member for the particular extern. The grade is based upon satisfactory and timely completion of the requisite externship hours and the academic component requirements, the evaluation of the placement supervisor, and the student's compliance with all course requirements.

Any student enrolled in an externship who fails to comply with any requirement of the Externship Program, this policy, the Student Honor Code, the Code of Student Professionalism and Conduct, the Externship Agreement, or rules and regulations governing the profession, may, at the discretion of the Externship Program Director, be assigned a No Credit and be barred from further participation in the Externship Program.

Any student who does not satisfactorily and timely meet the academic component requirements will be subject to point deductions, impacting course credit, unless a compelling excuse applies. See the course syllabus for specifics regarding point deductions and the impact on course credit.

K. Policy Revisions

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without notice.