

PARALEGAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM SUPERVISING ATTORNEY INFORMATION

The Paralegal Department of Minnesota State University Moorhead greatly appreciates the support of the attorneys and offices who provide an internship experience for its students. This invaluable exposure to the workings of a law office helps prepare the intern to be a vital part of the legal profession. Any questions about the internship program should be addressed to:

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1. Purpose of Internship

All paralegal students are required to complete an internship prior to graduation. The internship is designed to orientate the student to the real world of law practice by actually working as a paralegal under the supervision of an attorney. The student gains experience by applying knowledge from prior classroom training, and the law office gains an eager worker.

2. The Intern

Students working as interns will be in their junior or senior year. At a minimum, they will have completed the following prerequisites: a full year of extensive legal research and writing, at least one methods course, client interviewing, and legal ethics. The students will also have had a number of other classes in a variety of legal subjects. The curriculum and course descriptions are attached. When seeking an internship, the student should indicate to you which of the courses they have completed.

We take a practical "hands-on" approach to the education of paralegals. Our goal is to not only teach concepts and theory, but to equip the student with the skills necessary to begin work in a law office. This philosophy is reflected especially in our methods courses, research and writing, and the internship experience. Our classes are taught by experienced attorneys and paralegals/legal assistants, who bring a current "real world" orientation to the classroom.

3. The Internship

Students must earn a minimum of four internship credits, but may earn a maximum of twelve. Each credit requires forty actual work hours. The hours worked will normally be completed within one semester (about 15 weeks) or during the summer months.

The intern must have at least one licensed attorney at the job site to supervise the work. It is, however, acceptable (and desirable) for the intern to work closely with a paralegal/legal assistant in the office, so long as there is an attorney who has ultimate responsibility.

The intern should be assigned tasks which any paralegal/legal assistant might do, such as research, drafting of correspondence and pleadings, factual investigation, interviewing clients and witnesses, summarizing depositions, gathering and organizing documents, etc. Observation at hearings and depositions is also very beneficial to the intern. (Attached is a set of definitions of a paralegal [or legal assistant].)

The intern should have a set schedule of days and hours, to be agreed upon by the supervising attorney and the student.

4. Salary

Compensation is not required, but is encouraged because the firm will derive some benefit from the intern's time. Some firms have compensated the intern by reimbursing the student for the cost of tuition for the internship credits, or by giving a stipend of some other type. The matter of compensation is negotiable between the intern and the supervising attorney.

5. Supervising Attorney Responsibilities

The following are the primary responsibilities of the supervising attorney:

- a. Develop an internship agreement with the intern before work begins. The student will provide the form for the agreement, which serves as an outline of the types of experiences the intern will have, such as legal research, client contact, contact with others outside the office, and other specific projects and skills.
- b. Review and sign weekly time reports which will be maintained by the intern on forms provided by the Paralegal Department.
- c. Evaluate the intern's performance at the end of the internship, on a form to be provided by the Paralegal Department.
- d. Delegate work to the intern, and provide guidance and supervision.
- e. Spend time with the internship faculty supervisor during an informal site visit. This will be an announced scheduled visit. The goal is to have the site visit by about midway through the internship. The visit lasts from a half hour to one hour.

DEFINITIONS OF PARALEGAL

“Legal Assistant” (or paralegal) means a person who assists lawyers in the delivery of legal services, and who through formal education, training, or experience, has knowledge and expertise regarding the legal system and substantive and procedural law which qualifies the person to do work of a legal nature under the direct supervision of a licensed lawyer.

--North Dakota Rules of Professional Conduct, Terms, amended March 1, 1997

Legal assistants (also known as paralegals) are a distinguishable group of persons who assist licensed attorneys in the delivery of legal services. Through formal education, training, and experience, legal assistants have knowledge and expertise regarding the legal system, substantive and procedural law, the ethical considerations of the legal profession, and the Rules of Professional Conduct as stated in chapter 16-18, which qualify them to do work of a legal nature under the employment and direct supervision of a licensed attorney. This rule shall apply to all unlicensed persons employed by a licensed attorney who are represented to the public or clients as possessing training or education which qualifies them to assist in the handling of legal matters or document preparation for the client.

--South Dakota: SDCL 16-18-34 (1997)

[Minnesota has not adopted a definition either by statute or court rule.]

A legal assistant or paralegal is a person, qualified by education, training or work experience, who is employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity and who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible.

--American Bar Association (1997)

Legal assistants are a distinguishable group of persons who assist attorneys in the delivery of legal services. Through formal education, training and experience, legal assistants have knowledge and expertise regarding the legal system and substantive and procedural law which qualifies them to do work of a legal nature under the supervision of an attorney.

--National Association of Legal Assistants (1984)

A paralegal/legal assistant is a person, qualified through education, training, or work experience to perform substantive legal work that requires knowledge of legal concepts and is customarily, but not exclusively, performed by a lawyer. This person may be retained or employed by a lawyer, law office, governmental agency, or other entity or may be authorized by administrative, statutory or court authority to perform this work.

--National Federation of Paralegal Associations (1987)