MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Mason Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic (M-VETS) is to provide (a) active-duty members of the armed forces, their families and veterans with free representation in matters of clear injustice or in which they could not retain counsel without undue hardship; and (b) law students with hands-on experience working with real clients and an opportunity to learn about, interact with and give back to the active-duty military and veteran communities.

SUMMARY

A. General. This multidisciplinary clinic qualifies for the law school’s national and homeland security concentration. M-VETS student offices are located in Room 430 on the 4th floor of Hazel Hall. The M-VETS suite is accessed by use of a security code, which will be given out, along with computer and phone passwords, at the first class meeting.

B. Goals for the Student. In this course, you will learn practical skills that you will be able to transfer to your own legal practice. Whether you hang out your own shingle or work for a firm, the government or a non-profit, the goal is for you to leave this course with an idea of the real-world practice of law, practical application of law to fact and skills that increase your marketability. You will learn how to interact with clients, manage client expectations, organize case files, strategize, analyze unique situations, investigate facts, negotiate and advocate.

Moreover, by the end of the semester, you should transition from someone who simply performs a task, to someone who completes a task while thinking about the larger questions and charting the longer path for the matter. This is your challenge this semester. You will be expected to approach cases with an eye towards resolution, and come up with how to proceed either from intake or the point to which the case has progressed. This will require that you familiarize yourself with the factual scenario(s) presented, perform legal research into potential

1 The location of the M-VETS office may change during the summer term.
remedies and procedures, and propose a course for resolution. Through this, you will be applying what you have learned so far in law school to real-world situations, and be held to the standard of a first-year associate. Hopefully, you will also come to appreciate some of the power an attorney can wield on behalf of those who have no voice themselves.

**CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND CLIENT SERVICES.**

A. **Classroom Instruction.** M-VETS will meet most weeks of the semester (see schedule below) for in-class hours. As the semester progresses, attention and instruction will turn to areas related to the substantive casework stemming from the intake of matters and how to develop a case, ethics and conflicts, client interviewing and counseling, as well as other developments that may have an impact on servicemembers, veterans and their families.

Students are required to submit weekly status reports (“WSRs”) via email to their supervising attorney for each applicant or client for whom they are responsible prior to their weekly director meeting.

Each student is to be prepared to discuss their cases during class time and present one challenge (legal, client or otherwise) that they were faced over the previous week, and lead the group in a discussion as to how to solve the issue (or if it has been solved, potential alternative solutions).

Course materials (provided or online) and selected readings may be given for review at a schedule determined by class progress on casework.

B. **Time Outside of Class.** The focus of clinic students’ efforts is casework on applicant and client matters, which are primarily accomplished outside the classroom.

Completion of M-VETS Summer 2016 awards 1 in-class and 1 out-of-class credit. In order to complete the 2 credit hours, student advisors must complete 120 hours of class time, office hours, and casework. Therefore, in addition to class time, students should expect to spend 10-15 hours outside of class throughout the summer working on intake, client matters and other matters, as assigned. With client work, it ebbs and flows—some weeks will be busier than others.

1. **Client Work.** Student advisors will perform the following tasks:
   a. Perform intake, review intake applications, and interview applicants.
   b. Draft intake memoranda, which recite the facts, analyze applicable law in relation to the presented facts and conclude with a proposed course of action and a recommendation to the supervising attorney on whether to accept the applicant into M-VETS.
   c. Correspond (verbally and in writing) with applicants, clients, supervising attorneys, opposing parties (only if unrepresented) and counsel, and government agencies.
d. Conduct legal and factual research and analysis.

e. Draft weekly status reports on each matter assigned.

f. Draft memoranda on specific topics as assigned by the supervising attorney.

g. Prepare documents for court or agency filings.

h. Maintain paper and electronic case files.

2. **In-Clinic Requirement.** In addition to the proscribed class time on Wednesdays, students are required to spend a minimum of 1 additional hour per week in the M-VETS office, although 2-3 hours is a more realistic picture of the time necessary to complete mandatory tasks. This time shall be used for intake, electronic and hard copy client file maintenance, and other tasks as assigned. This time is included in the hours required to meet the credit hour requirement.

a. **Weekly In-House Meetings:** In addition to class time and office hours, you will be required to sign-up for weekly status meetings with your supervising attorney. They can take place before or after your weekly office hours or at another time, provided that time fits within your supervising attorney’s office hours. The first meetings will take place the week of May 23rd.

i. Every student will arrange a final, individual transition meeting with your supervising attorney at the end of the semester to review case files (hard copy and electronic), activity logs, final correspondence and transition memoranda. At the time of your assigned meeting, all files should be in order, all transition memos completed, and all final or transitioning correspondence ready for review and mailing.

b. **M-VETS Assistance:**

i. **Administrative:** There is a “to-do” box in the M-VETS student advisor office. During your weekly office hours, you are expected to check to see if it contains anything. If so, please conduct the task (filing, intake, administrative matters).

ii. **Office Cleanliness/Tidiness:** It is your job to keep the office neat and in a professional manner. Please clean up after yourself and keep work areas neat and clutter free. All work stations are shared by all M-VETS participants.

iii. **Supplies:** If you see that there is a need for clinic supplies, please email that request to Professor MacArthur or Professor Winstead.
**Grades**

M-VETS is a graded 2 credit hour course. There will be no final exam. Grades will be based upon attendance, participation, written work, oral presentations, and professional responsibility and will be out of 100 possible points, with 5 additional points available.

Individual assignments are not graded and, while feedback is provided, it is not assigned a grade during the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, all of the student advisor’s work (written submissions, notes taken from weekly and other meetings, class and court/hearings, and input from any supervising attorney) is reviewed by the student’s supervising attorney, and points are assigned to each student based upon his/her cumulative efforts as delineated below. After all points are tallied for all clinic participants, the raw scores are curved per the law school’s academic regulations, and letter grades issued.

1. **Attendance/Participation (15 points)**
   - a. Attendance and participation in weekly class meetings
   - b. Completion of weekly office hours
   - c. Attendance, punctuality and preparedness for weekly meetings
   - d. Attendance at client and/or supervising attorney meetings, court dates, etc.

2. **Written work (Client/Legal Writing/Correspondence) (50 points)**
   - a. Weekly status reports
   - b. Factual and intake/assessment memoranda (analysis of facts & issues, proposed steps towards resolution)
   - c. Court filings and other written advocacy
   - d. Communications with clients, supervisors, opposing counsel and adversaries, and the courts (letters, emails, etc.)
   - e. File Maintenance (hard copy and electronic)
   - f. Time Sheets

3. **Oral Presentations (15 points)**
   - a. Oral presentation and discussion of associated legal issues, subjects of instruction and other assignments during class and in office hours
   - b. Participation in class discussions
   - c. Communications with clients, supervising attorneys, opposing counsel and the court

4. **Professional Responsibility (20 points)**
   - a. M-VETS students should be familiar with the Virginia State Bar Rules of Professional Responsibility, as applicable. M-VETS student advisors work under the direction of a supervising attorney. Compliance with the Rules of Professional Responsibility requires (though is not limited to) the following:
     - i. Professional conduct and courtesy
     - ii. Responsiveness to supervising attorney instruction and guidance, and client inquiries
iii. Communications with clients, opposing counsel, and supervising attorneys
iv. Sound judgment in all aspects of the case and with regard to case management
v. Bi-weekly communications with clients

b. It is each student’s responsibility to communicate effectively with his/her supervising attorney regarding assigned matters. M-VETS students MUST NOT communicate with an applicant or client, adverse unrepresented parties, opposing counsel, other involved parties/individuals/organizations, or government agencies without a supervising attorney’s prior approval. Please remember that you are not licensed attorneys and are not yet authorized to practice law.

c. Each student advisor is responsible for safeguarding all privileged and confidential information in the possession of M-VETS. Best practices to protect confidential information include, but are not limited to:
   i. Use of VPN/Remote Terminal Access and CLIO
   ii. Adherence to Electronic Document Access & Use Policy
   iii. Password Protection of Documents
   iv. Communication with applicants & clients via authorized methods

5. Extra/Misc Points (5 potentially available)
   a. Attendance/Participation in outside events
   b. Completing greater than 120 hours of clinic work
   c. Going “above & beyond” in client or M-VETS related matters

TIMESHEETS

M-VETS does not have a minimum “billable” hour requirement, outside of the required 120 hours of combined course/class/outside work necessary to meet the minimum credit hour requirement. Students are expected to “bill” their time weekly by entering it into an Excel spreadsheet, by applicant/client. Each discrete task for each client should be entered as its own time entry and detailed information about what was entailed in the time claimed should be recorded. Each week’s time must be submitted to Professor MacArthur via email prior to your weekly meeting in order for the hours performed that week to be credited towards the 120 hour requirement.

CLIENT COMMUNICATION

By and far the greatest complaint from clients is about their attorney’s failure to communicate. To establish good habits, each student is required to write a LETTER or email, if authorized, to each assigned client every two weeks, if you have not otherwise been in regular communication during that time. These letters should tell the client what has been done on his/her case in the intervening two weeks, and what will be upcoming. Even if there is NOTHING to report, you are to communicate telling them what you are waiting on in order to
proceed. In the beginning, a first draft of each letter (your introductory letter) should be sent to the supervising attorney for review, every other Wednesday of the semester, with the first due Wednesday, May 25th. They will be sent back and can be then transmitted to the client and should then be scanned or saved into the client file, with a hard copy placed in the matter’s hard copy file.

**APPLICANT/CLIENT FILES**

1. **Access to Files.** All applicant/client files are maintained in the M-VETS office in hard copy and on the case management system (CLIO). Older files and sample forms and information may be found on the T:// drive. You are only authorized to access the CLAS portion of the T://drive via the computer in the M-VETS workspace or via Virtual Private Network (VPN) Access. **Use of Personal Computers to conduct M-VETS Business.** A separate policy will be distributed.

2. **Removal of Files.** It is the policy of M-VETS that no client files are to leave the M-VETS office space without the **express approval** of a supervising attorney. In the event that you are approved to remove a hard copy file from the M-VETS office space, it must be signed out with a RED card. The file should be returned to the office as soon as practicable.

3. **Transition Memos.** All files (hard & e-files) shall contain a copy of the transition memo by the time of your exit interview with your supervising attorney, with no exceptions.

4. **Copies of Correspondence.** Copies of all correspondence and communications need to be placed in the files, including copies of all email communication with the client, any substantive emails with supervising attorneys, and all communications with any other person, party or agency contacted with regard to the matter.

   A supervising attorney should be copied on ALL communications with outside supervising counsel AND/OR the applicant/client. **THIS IS NOT NEGOTIABLE AND YOUR REPEATED FAILURE TO DO SO WILL BE REFLECTED IN YOUR GRADE.**

5. **Memos of Phone Conversations.** Following any phone conversation made in each matter, a short memorandum should be added to the file describing the conversation. The memo should include the date, time, the parties on the call and a brief description of what was discussed and/or questions asked and answered.

**OFFICE HOURS/CONTACT**

Professor MacArthur’s contact information and office hours will be provided during our first class meeting. Professor Winstead is available Monday-Friday, from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. or by appointment. Professor Winstead can be reached via email at lwinct2@gmu.edu or by phone at (703) 993-8210 (O).
SUMMER 2016 WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Wednesday, May 18): BOOTCAMP/Orientation to M-VETS/Interviewing/Client Counseling/Communication

Week 2 (Wednesday, May 25): Virginia Courts: Overview of Civil Litigation Practice

Week 3 (Wednesday, June 1): Domestic Relations Practice in Virginia: Divorce/Adoptions/Support

Week 4 (Wednesday, June 8): The VA/Disability Compensation/Benefits

Week 5 (Wednesday, June 15): Discharge Upgrades and Record Correction

Week 6 (Wednesday, June 22): Motions Practice in Virginia

Week 7 (Wednesday, June 29): Wrap-up; Case Rounds; Professionalism

July 5-August 17: No class—However, student advisors are required to continue working on assigned cases, complete office hours, and meet with their supervising attorneys as necessary to complete assigned tasks. Turn over will be assigned the week of August 8, to be completed by Wednesday, August 17th.

Week of August 8: Exit Interviews

August 15-August 18: Turn over, as necessary, to Fall 2016 Student Advisors

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2 Class schedule subject to change.
3 Handouts/short reading assignments may be assigned for each class and can be found in the “Class Readings/Handouts” folder on the T drive.