A clinical program targeted at helping Servicemembers and Veterans that allows students to gain hands-on legal experience working with real clients under the supervision of the Clinic Director and practicing attorneys.

Clinic Director and Supervising Professor:

Laurie Forbes Neff
Email: lneff@gmu.edu
Phone: 703-993-8179

Course & Credit Options:

Law 309: 2 credits. This is a letter graded course. The fall/spring semester clinic awards in-class credit; the summer clinic awards 1 in-class and 1 out-of-class credit.

Overview

The Mason Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic (M-VETS) is dedicated to providing veterans and active-duty members of the armed forces, and their dependents with free representation in matters of clear injustice or those matters where they could not retain counsel without undue hardship; and law students with hands-on experience working with real clients and an opportunity to learn about, interact with and give back to the military community. Students have represented clients from all armed services in civil litigation, consumer protection, administrative law, bankruptcy, family law, landlord-tenant, contract, military law, and entitlement matters in federal and state fora. Students are supervised by Professor Laurie Forbes Neff and other attorneys in private practice with specific subject matter expertise, and receive weekly classroom instruction on legal ethics, client interviewing, procedural and substantive issues relevant to their cases, and other issues relevant to the unique client population M-VETS serves.

Students will be selected to participate in M-VETS through an application process prior to class registration. Although not required or dispositive, preference may be given to applicants who 1) are taking M-VETS for a second semester; 2) possess or are able to obtain a Third-Year Practice Certificate*; and/or 3) those that anticipate participating in M-VETS for consecutive semesters. Students must contribute a minimum of 120 hours of combined in-class, out-of-class, and office hours to M-VETS to obtain credit and commit to managing all cases they are assigned until handed-off to another M-VETS student in the subsequent semester. Students must also attend a four-hour mandatory training session at the beginning of the program and weekly class meetings.

Updated February 2015
Educational Objectives of M-VETS

M-VETS is designed to meet the objectives of the American Bar Association’s Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar for professional skills training, live-client or other real life experiences, and study outside of the classroom. The teaching of “professional skills” involves teaching and evaluating law student performance on real cases or problems, with the goal of mastering basic lawyering skills, professional responsibility, substantive and procedural law and the theory of legal practice.

Student Requirements & Responsibilities

1. No compensation may be received for work performed during the program.

2. Application and permission of Professor Neff is required for registration in M-VETS. Applications for the clinic will be solicited before the opening of each semester’s registration period. Students will be notified, via the student listservs, of the date when applications may be submitted. Applications will include, but are not limited to, the student’s updated resume and the M-VETS Student Advisor Online Application found at www.mvets.law.gmu.edu/students/. Applications will be considered as received. Preference may be given to applicants who 1) are taking M-VETS for a second semester; 2) possess or are able to obtain a Third-Year Practice Certificate*; and/or 3) those that anticipate participating in M-VETS for consecutive semesters. If accepted, students will be enrolled by the Records Office in the course.

3. Students must contribute a minimum of 120 hours of combined in-class, out-of-class, one-on-one meetings, and office hours to M-VETS to obtain credit and commit to managing all cases they are assigned until handed-off to another M-VETS student in the subsequent semester.

4. Students must attend a four-hour mandatory training session either prior to the start of the semester or at the beginning of the semester.

5. Students must attend a once a week, two-hour course at the law school. Classes will be devoted in part to instructional topics including clinic operations, professional skills development and case theory (client interviewing, client development, case management), and substantive and procedural law unique to the military and veteran communities. In addition, students are expected to participate in class discussions on the instructional topics.
6. Students will work under the supervision of Professor Neff and the private practitioners who act as supervising attorneys on assigned cases.

7. Depending on the complexity and the status of the cases being handled by the clinic, students are typically assigned three to four cases to work on during the semester. Students may also be involved in assessing M-VETS applicants and making recommendations as to whether M-VETS should take the case.

8. Students must submit Weekly Status Reports (WSR) to the professor and weekly timesheets, with time allocated by each student between casework and classroom/preparation and attendance.

9. Students shall be graded on attendance, written and oral presentations, and professional responsibility. Written work shall include WSRs which describe the nature of the case, status, current issues, deadlines, and next steps; memoranda on legal issues related to the case; memos documenting conversations with supervisors, clients, clerks of court, or tribunals; regular email traffic back and forth between clients or applicants; trial pleadings, appellate briefs, demand letters and transition memo(s) if the case is ongoing past the end of a semester. Oral presentations include discussions in class relating to ongoing cases and lecture topics; individual meetings with the professor, and applicant and client interviews and meetings; performance at motions or trials, as applicable.

10. M-VETS work requires students to be attentive to all aspects of legal representation such as responsiveness to supervisory direction, clients and applicants; judgment in case management; effort and allocation in time management; maintenance of electronic and paper files (including use of standard clinic forms); and relationships with supervising attorney(s).

* To obtain a Third Year Practice Certificate a student must have completed the equivalent of four semesters and Criminal Law, Evidence, Professional Responsibility, and either Criminal Procedure or Civil Procedure. (For more details, see Rules of Virginia Supreme Court Pt.6, §IV, Para. 15.) Third-Year Practice Certificate applications can be obtained at www.law.gmu.edu/records. Whether a student is able to practice under a Third-Year Practice Certificate is a decision to be made by the Clinic Director and/or the Supervising Attorney.