Overview

The Domestic Relations program has both an externship component and a clinical component and offers students the opportunity to work on an array of domestic relations matters. In the externship component, students are assigned to a supervising attorney who is an expert in domestic relations law and will work in the supervising attorney’s office on all manner of domestic relations issues and cases. Students may perform research and writing, assist with the discovery process, and observe court proceedings. Additionally, if they have their Third-Year Practice Certificate*, some students may even have the opportunity to argue motions for support or minor property determinations.

In the clinical component, students have a unique opportunity to assist pro se litigants in obtaining uncontested divorces in Fairfax Circuit Court. Pro se litigants who already have initiated the divorce process in Fairfax Circuit Court but have been unable to complete the process due to difficulties with filing the necessary documents, are referred to the Domestic Relations program by the Court. In the clinical component, students are given their own case load of litigants to assist and may meet with clients, draft pleadings, review documentation and appear in court for ore tenus hearings before a Fairfax County Circuit Court judge. It is preferred, but not mandatory, that students (1) have taken Family Law or be enrolled in the class, and (2) have obtained their Third Year Practice Certificate so they may appear in court.

Students must work a minimum of 180 hours for the Supervised Externship & Clinic – Domestic Relations and manage all cases until handed-off to another student in the subsequent semester. Students must attend a two-hour mandatory training session at the beginning of the program and one Supervised Externship classroom tutorial during the semester.

Students are free to structure their hours in consultation with their site supervisor. Most site supervisors want students available for meaningful blocks of time. As a guideline: in the Fall or Spring program, students must work an average of 13 hours a week for 14 weeks to earn three credits for field work. In the Summer program,
many students elect to work full-time for several weeks (though they may earn no more than three credits for their work). Other students may work part-time at the externship while working at another job or unpaid opportunity. Regardless of how the hours are structured, students are required to maintain accurate time sheets, which must be verified and turned in to the professor before credit will be awarded.

**Educational Objectives of the Supervised Externship and Clinic – Domestic Relations**

The Supervised Externship and Clinic – Domestic Relations 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. Students must have completed one academic year of legal education to participate in the program.

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

3. Applications for the program will be solicited either prior to or shortly after the opening of each semester’s registration period. CAAS will notify students, via the student listservs, of the date when applications may begin to be submitted. Students will use the law school’s Symplicity system to submit application materials. Application materials include:
   a. A cover letter setting out
      i. a brief synopsis of your legal interests and background;
      ii. whether you have taken Family Law and/or if you have obtained your Third Year Practice Certificate (or will do so shortly); and
      iii. the days you anticipate you will be able to work at the externship.
   b. Resume.
   c. Unofficial law school transcript.
   d. Writing sample.

   Applications will be considered as received and interviews scheduled as part of the selection process. Students will be informed whether they are accepted into the program shortly after the interview. As space is limited students are encouraged to submit their application materials promptly once notified that applications are being collected.

4. After acceptance into the program, students must submit a signed pre-course certification form agreeing to the terms of the externship. (p. 5)

5. At the beginning of the semester, students must attend a two-hour training session conducted by the professor that will cover major topics in domestic relations practice along with relevant rules and
procedures. During the semester of the program, students must also attend one classroom tutorial offered in conjunction with the school’s Supervised Externship programs.

6. Each student must have a mid-semester consultation with Professor Leslie Alden to discuss the experience thus far and the work being accomplished. In addition, students are responsible to keep in weekly contact throughout the semester with Professor Valerie Hughes as to the status of clinic matters.

7. At the end of the program, students must submit to Ilissa Belanger a
   a. time sheet, approved by their supervisor, showing the hours worked (see p. 6);
   b. sample of their written work product of any length (with the supervising attorney’s permission; redactions are acceptable to preserve confidentiality);
   c. written summary of the legal skills enhancement resulting from their field experience. The summary should be 2-3 pages in length and must include a description of:
      i. the work accomplished in the program;
      ii. the skills developed through the program;
      iii. the extent and nature of the student’s interaction with and feedback from supervisors and other attorneys;
      iv. any recommendations to future students interested in the same or a similar opportunity;

8. Students must ensure that their site supervisor submits a timely evaluation (p. 7) by the end of the semester.

   An “incomplete” will remain on a student’s transcript until all of the above requirements have been met and the documents reviewed by the professor.

NOTE: Students shall be listed in an externship directory so that future externship participants can contact them and speak with them about their experience. Students will be listed with their name, placement, and GMU email address in this directory. Students wishing to “opt-out” of this directory must send an email to lawcareer@gmu.edu indicating that they do not wish to be listed.

**Supervisor Commitment & Responsibilities**

1. Supervisors commit to providing supervision, logistical support, and mentorship to students working through the Supervised Externship & Clinic – Domestic Relations.

2. Supervisors must provide the student with vocational opportunities and skills instruction in a reasonable number of appropriate activities.

3. Supervisors must sign a volunteer agreement prior to the start of the externship.

4. Supervisors must approve the student’s time log and submit a written evaluation of the student’s performance at the end of the externship. These documents must be received by Ilissa Belanger before credit is given.
5. Supervisors must make themselves available for periodic phone calls and, in some cases, site visits by the program’s professor.

6. If at any time the supervisor experiences difficulties working with the student, the supervisor is encouraged to have a candid discussion with the student. If the situation is not promptly rectified, the supervisor should contact the program’s professor. Supervisors should not wait until the end of the program to inform the student or school of problems.

7. George Mason University School of Law has an Honor Code and Academic Regulations articulating minimum standards for student conduct and procedures for handling allegations of Honor Code violations. Supervisors with concerns about unethical student behavior are encouraged to contact the Assistant Dean for Management and Planning, Richard Kelsey, at 703-993-8973 or rkelsey@gmu.edu.

* 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 supervising attorney.
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
SUPERVISED EXTERNSHIP & CLINIC – COURSE CERTIFICATION

I ________________________________ hereby represent as follows:

(Print Name)

1) I understand that it is my responsibility to comply with all of the requirements of the program as set forth in the Supervised Externship & Clinic – Domestic Relations Information Packet.

2) I further understand that if I experience any difficulties or unmet expectations in my externship it is my responsibility:
   i. to initially discuss such issues with my supervisor;
   ii. if any such issues are not promptly rectified, to promptly inform a supervising professor by email of the situation so that appropriate steps may be taken to address my concerns.

3) I will send an email to Ilissa Belanger within the first two weeks of beginning work with my anticipated work schedule agreed upon by my supervisor, which I will also provide to my supervisor in writing.

__________________________________________
(Print Student Name)

__________________________________________
(Student Signature)

__________________________________________
(Date)
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
SUPERVISED EXTERNSHIP & CLINIC - RECORD OF HOURS WORKED

Students may use this form or substitute their own timesheet. Timesheets must be approved by the supervisor.

Fall / Spring / Summer (circle one)  Year ______

Student: ______________________________  Attorney: ________________________________

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Total Hours: _______
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
SUPERVISED EXTERNSHIP & CLINIC – SUPERVISOR APPRAISAL FORM

(Use of this form is optional; appraisal may be written on official letterhead or emailed to professor.)

Student’s Name: __________________________________________

Attorney’s Name: ________________________

Firm: ________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________ Phone: ________________________

Please provide a written evaluation of the student’s performance, including the student’s application of legal skills and how the student progressed in the utilization of those skills:

Attorney signature: __________________________________________ Date: ________________