Chapter Three: Academic Rules, Policies, and Procedures

Section 4: Experiential Learning Programs and Student Certification

A. Experiential Learning Programs

Mitchell Hamline students get pro bono experience with real clients with real legal problems starting in their first year of law school. The level of responsibility, time investment, and specialization increase as they progress through their studies. Coursework includes skills training, simulations, and role-playing exercises allowing students to get feedback on your developing legal skills. Experiential learning programs include:

The Legal Practice Center functions as a law office within the law school. Students represent low-income renters, prisoners, nonprofit groups, immigrants, and others. They prepare wills, draft contracts, and file patent applications.

Advocacy refers to the act of arguing in support of a client. At Mitchell Hamline, we train students to tell clients’ stories in ways that matter in the current legal system. Education in the skills of advocacy pervades the Mitchell Hamline curriculum. Those skills are at the core of the three primary relationships involved in the practice of law: with clients, with opposing lawyers, and with decision makers.

Clinics - Under the supervision of professors, students work in 16 clinics with clients who are mothers, fathers, immigrants, leaders of nonprofit organizations, and small businesses. Some clients are elderly. Some are unemployed. Some are accused of crimes. Some want to make the world a better place. All are real people with real legal problems, and our students drive their representation. They gain valuable real-world experience and make a difference in our community by performing legal work for their clients.

Externships - Students work across a range of practice areas and legal settings. They work with public defenders to preserve the rights of the accused, with state and county agencies to shape public policy and protect society’s most vulnerable, with federal judges to ensure the judicial system is just, and with numerous other partners. Students in externships are supervised both by Mitchell Hamline faculty and by attorneys in the field.

Semester Placements - Students in their third or fourth years are offered a variety of opportunities to secure long-term, on-site placements working under the supervision of practicing attorneys. It’s a key part of our bridge-to-practice programming, offering experienced students a close-up look at the world of legal work.

Simulation Courses - Legal practicum and advanced simulation courses immerse students in the areas of general practice and advocacy through innovative hands-on learning exercises pioneered by Mitchell faculty and staff.
Transaction Skills - Lawyers need to know how to argue cases in court, but they also need the skills to negotiate terms, draft contracts and settlements, structure agreements, analyze deals, and manage risk. Students will find these skills woven throughout the curriculum across a range of courses involving contracts, advocacy, and ethical issues arising in a variety of contexts.

Writing & Representation: Advocacy & Problem Solving - Mitchell Hamline’s Writing and Representation: Advocacy and Problem Solving (WRAP) program is a foundational offering, required for all first-year students, intended to master fundamental client representations skills. Students meet in small groups to practice interviewing and counseling clients, writing memos and letters, researching the law, negotiating contracts and settlements, reasoning about a client’s situation in light of the law, settling cases, and arguing motions.

The Minnesota Justice Foundation (MJF) is committed to promoting social justice and improving legal services for those who have been under-represented by the legal profession. Through MJF, students—starting in their first year—have the opportunity to work with lawyers in a variety of legal advice settings or to complete research projects for lawyers who have taken clients and cases on a pro-bono basis.

B. Student Certification by the Minnesota Supreme Court

The Student Practice Rules are located in *Minnesota Rules of Court*. Eligible students may be certified by the Supreme Court to perform activities of an attorney in representing and appearing on behalf of a client. The Administrative Coordinator for Clinics and Externships handles these requests. To be eligible, a student must be currently enrolled, have completed the equivalent of two full semesters of full time study, and be in good academic standing (minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 or 2.2, depending on applicable rules).

There are two rules under which students may be certified in Minnesota (students seeking certification from a jurisdiction other than Minnesota should contact the Externship Director):

Rule 1. General Student Practice Rule

Applies to eligible law students who appear on behalf of any state, local, or other government agency, or any indigent person who is a party to a civil action or who is accused of a crime or a petty misdemeanor. The request for certification must be made by the government agency, organization, or person representing the indigent client. A written request with the student’s name and a statement that the student will be properly supervised should be sent to the Administrative Coordinator for Clinics and Externships. Students certified under Rule 1 will remain certified for one year. If certification will expire between the end of the semester and the student’s graduation from Mitchell Hamline, the student must have their employer write the law school clinic administrator requesting recertification prior to the graduation ceremony to continue as a student attorney. It is the responsibility of the student to track the expiration date.
Rule 2. Clinic Student Practice Rule
Applies to eligible law students who are enrolled in a law school clinic course where representation of a client may occur. Students do not need to request certification. Names are submitted automatically through the clinic.