

VERMONT LAW SCHOOL



INFORMATION FOR ATTORNEYS (MENTORS) INTERESTED IN HOSTING A VERMONT LAW SCHOOL SEMESTER IN PRACTICE STUDENT

1. Basic Description of the Program

The *Semester in Practice (SiP)* is a full-time externship program in which second- and third-year law students earn academic credits as they apprentice full-time with experienced attorneys in the field. Student can participate in the program in either the fall semester (August to December) or the spring semester (January to April).

The structure of a *SiP* encourages a one-to-one relationship between student and mentor, a relationship that gives students an unmatched opportunity to participate in and learn from the working life of experienced attorneys.

2. What You Can Expect From Students

Students who enroll in a *SiP* spend fifteen weeks on-site working full-time as legal apprentices without compensation. Students earn 13 academic credits, 11 of which are based upon their work on-site and two of which are based upon their participation in the corresponding classroom component.

3. Types and Locations of Placements

Students apprentice with mentors in all types of practice settings, not only with mentors in government, non-profits, and NGO's, but also with mentors in corporate practice, private practice and in state and federal judicial chambers. Students also work with mentors in state legislatures and in Congress. *SiP* students are placed in all regions of the county as well as internationally.

4. Requirements to be An Attorney (Mentor)

We use the word mentor to suggest a relationship that is more than that of supervisor/supervisee. The mentors we seek are attorneys: (1) experienced in their chosen specialty (we don't have a strict rule, but prefer lawyers who have 10 or more years of experience); (2) respected by the legal community; and (3) interested in the never-ending process of improving the profession through the training and mentoring of soon to be lawyers.

We encourage attorneys to participate in our program if they:

- a. Can provide students a real-world environment that is educational;
- b. Can provide hands-on legal assignments to externs that are educational and will help them in their future career;

- c. Have sufficient space to accommodate an extern in the office;
- d. Have sufficient time to meet with externs each week and provide constructive feedback on performance.

5. How To Become a Supervising Attorney/Mentor

The externship faculty at VLS is constantly developing the pool of interested supervising attorneys (mentors). Developing new mentors can begin with an inquiry from the mentor him/herself or from VLS faculty approaching a potential mentor. After identification of potential mentors we contact the mentor directly to discuss the various components of the *SiP* program. If the potential mentor is interested, we send a site description form, to be completed by the mentor, along with additional information about the *SiP* Program and VLS. The site description form asks supervising attorneys (mentors) to detail the work of the office and what students can expect from the experience. When completing the site description form, mentors are strongly encouraged to be specific regarding student qualifications they would like to see in candidates. These qualifications may include, but are not limited to, specific course work, pre-law experience, or a second language. When the mentor completes the site description form and returns it to VLS, faculty compare the mentor's interests with the qualifications of student applicants.

If you are interested and have not had an inquiry from our office, you can request a copy of the site description form from our program administrator, Shannon Leach (sleach@vermontlaw.edu)

6. Placement Process

When a student expresses initial interest in the *SiP* Program the faculty member who serves as director provides and/or oversees pre-enrollment counseling. The counseling process allows the student to explore the role a semester-long practicum might play in the student's legal education, and how it could influence the student's choices and decisions following graduation. It is the pre-enrollment counselor's responsibility to get a snapshot of each student's academic and career goals at the time of the match; to explore the student's prior experience and current ability to contribute to the work of a mentor as the student learns; to work with the student to identify potential mentors with whom the student might apprentice; and to work with the student until an appropriate match between student and mentor is made.

After the counseling process is concluded for all students, the externship faculty meets to assess the students' interests both geographically and substantively. The actual match between student and mentor usually begins with a phone call or letter from the pre-enrollment counselor to the mentor. The counselor describes the particular student interested in the placement and asks if the mentor might be interested in hosting a *SiP* student. If a match appears possible, we send a copy of the student's resume, list of references and one or more writing samples. After reviewing the student's supporting paperwork, if the student/mentor match still appears to be a good one, we strongly encourage a personal meeting between mentor and student. If that is impossible due to conditions of distance and timing, we recommend a telephone interview. After the mentor and student meet, the pre-enrollment counselor talks with them both. If they are both pleased with the proposed match, VLS sends a letter of confirmation.

For more information please contact:

Visiting Professor Christine Cimini, Director of Externships, Semester in Practice Programs

802-831-1281, ccimini@vermontlaw.edu or

Shannon Leach, Program Coordinator, 802-831-1259, sleach@vermontlaw.edu