

Law Internship

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1 What are the prerequisites to be accepted on the Law Internship program?

Basically there are two prerequisites. First you must average 60% or better in Law subjects. The average is calculated by taking out your weakest mark; and then total your marks and divide by the number of subjects. If there are two or more subjects at the weakest mark only one is taken out. If the calculation comes out at 60% or more, you satisfy the prerequisite, if it comes out at 59.99% or less you don't. The second prerequisite is that you must be in your final or penultimate year. This means that if you are applying for 2007 Semester 1 you should be finishing your course in 2007 or 2008.

2 How are internships organised?

Internships are organised in two ways. First by the students themselves (about 10% of cases) through contacts they may have. Second, and more commonly, by the Internship Coordinator. The student indicates preferences for area of law and workplace in their application (eg international trade law at DFAT; or commercial law in a private law firm). The coordinator then approaches potential placement sites to see if they are prepared to place an intern. It is important that you have completed relevant subjects in your preferred area of the law because you need to have a demonstrated capacity to do the work. It is wise to pick areas in subjects where you have done well.

3 How are research topics chosen?

While the coordinator tries to accommodate the intern's preference for the area of law and the placement site, the topic is usually chosen by the workplace. What drives this program is that workplaces often have research they want to get done but they do not have the resources to do the work.

This usually means that the internship is working on something topical and of importance to the workplace.

4 Can I do an internship outside Canberra?

There is no geographical limit on where interns can be placed. Interns have been placed as far afield as New York and Ho Chi Minh City. And it is not uncommon for placements to be made in Sydney and Melbourne. It is very important that remote internships be organised early so there is plenty of time to get them organised.

5 What happens when a placement is organised?

Once a placement has been organised and a Professional Supervisor identified, the Coordinator puts the student in direct contact with the supervisor. The student contacts the supervisor and arranges a time to meet. The purposes of this meeting are to discuss and define the research project and settle the internship agreement (as per Attachment B to the Briefing notes). It is important that the student brings to that meeting a copy of the briefing notes (and the three attachments) for the supervisor. It helps to explain the requirements of the program.

6 What are the enrolment requirements?

After applications are received, the program coordinator assesses them for qualification and the suitability of the student to do the proposed placement. The coordinator will notify the student that they have been accepted onto the program. The coordinator also notifies College administration that the student has been accepted. The administration then generates a permission number for the student. The student must obtain this number for the purposes of enrolment.

7 What is the significance of the internship agreement?

Internship agreements are very important for two reasons. First, they define the research topic against which the student will be assessed when the final paper comes in. Second they set out the respective responsibilities of the student and the supervisor. The agreements should provide

for the supervisor and the student to meet at least once every two weeks to discuss progress. The agreement should also provide for the supervisor to go through a final draft about two weeks before the final paper is due. This allows the supervisor a week to read the draft, and then gives the student a week to incorporate the supervisor's suggestions into the final paper.

8 How long should the student spend at the workplace?

It is difficult to be precise about this because much depends on the nature of the project. For example, some projects may require the student to read hard copy of primary material which is only available at the workplace. In these cases, the workplace will provide a desk etc to read the material. Because so much of the research material is now on the Web there is an increasing trend for students to conduct their research off site and come in to discuss progress with the supervisor by appointment. As a rule of thumb, students should not be spending more than nine days in aggregate at the workplace site. Surveys of previous interns suggest that the workload is about the same as a normal unit.

9 What happens if problems occur?

Most internships run quite smoothly. Many supervisors have supervised internships before so they know what is expected. However, sometimes problems can occur where, for example, supervisors get busier or fall ill and access to the supervisor becomes a problem. Also, sometimes supervisors change their minds about the project as it progresses. The first thing is to try to solve problems early before they fester. Students should feel free to contact the Coordinator at any time and he can assist in resolving problems.

10 Are the program dates flexible?

No they are fixed because papers have to be marked and results submitted like any other subject. The deferment of the date of the final paper is only made on grounds which would justify the deferment of an examination (eg health grounds accompanied by a medical certificate).

11 What are the rules on word length?

A tolerance of 5% is allowed on the length of the paper (5700 to 6300). What is included in the count is set out in the Faculty Handbook under Assessment/Word Count. The penalties for excess word length set out in the same section of the Handbook also apply.

12 How are final papers submitted?

Papers are submitted at the Faculty Services Office in the same way as other work such as essays (with the usual front sheet and word count). The paper must be page and paragraph numbered. An important additional requirement is that the student must give the workplace supervisor a copy of the paper on or before the due date.

13 How are papers assessed?

The Coordinator discusses the paper with the workplace supervisor after it is submitted. Both supervisors apply the assessment scale (Briefing Notes -Attachment C). Each supervisor gives the paper a mark and the two are added to reach the final result. The Coordinator makes a short note of the assessment which is available to students if they pick up their paper after results have been published.

14 Is it necessary to include a bibliography?

As internships are practically oriented, bibliographies may not always be appropriate but it depends on the nature of the topic and the kind of research carried out. This is a matter which you should discuss with your professional supervisor. If in doubt, you should also seek my advice.

15 Is it necessary to have Australian citizenship in order to participate in the program?

No.

16 Where do I lodge my application?

At the Services office (if you are outside Canberra you may email it).

17 Can I change my topic after I lodge my application?

Yes, the topic area is nominated by you, but in the final analysis, is chosen by the workplace and will be refined in your internship agreement.

18 Are footnotes included in the word count?

No.

Peter Ford
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