

Guidelines for Working with Remote Externs

We sincerely appreciate your interest in hosting a UB Law student. UB Law students are eager for rich experiential learning opportunities, and we could not provide students with these types of experiences without you.

With every challenge comes opportunities for learning, and the evolution of law practice in the age of COVID-19 is no exception. As all institutions are shifting online, law offices and courts are adapting to a new way of practicing law. As educators, we recognize that this transition offers us a chance to better train our students how to work effectively in a remote context, and that will become a central learning objective for our externship program. We are optimistic that remote externships can provide exciting multidimensional experiences with the right planning and implementation strategies.

To help externs be as successful as possible and to help support you as their supervisor, we share the following tips and best practices for working with remote externs. We are committed to helping students and field placements in making this externship experience successful. If you have questions, concerns, or need help in navigating this new dynamic, do not hesitate to reach to me by email or phone.

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Orienting a New Student Online

- Since students' externship experience may begin online, think about how you will orient the student to the office's work. Face to face contact through videoconferencing is a great way to establish a more personalized connection. All UB Law students have Zoom accounts and can set up online meetings if your office does not have another preferred platform.
- Creating a sense of community is hard in an online setting, and integrating a new student adds an additional challenge. Consider setting up an online team meeting to introduce your student to other staff members and students so that the extern can feel part of the team.
- If externs need access to a shared drive or email account, try to set this up in advance so that they are ready to work. If any tech issues arise, be sure to let them know who to contact.

Set up Regular Check-Ins

- We always recommend that supervisors have weekly meetings with externs to help answer questions, deliver feedback, and give new assignments. This practice has never been more important. We recommend that you schedule a weekly meeting with your extern(s) via a video conference or phone.
- To help make these meetings most efficient for you, consider asking the extern to send you an agenda of what they want to discuss, which you can add to. That way, the meeting is as focused as possible and everyone can prepare in advance.

Have the Student Set Up a Work Schedule

- Students tend to work better when they have a defined schedule. We strongly recommend you have the student set a schedule of what days and time blocks will be devoted to externship work.
- Having a set schedule will allow you to know when a student is available to take new assignments as they arise. It will also let the student know when you are available for questions as they arise.

Try to Include the Extern in Virtual Meetings and Client Work

- Remote work eliminates your ability to pop by an extern's desk and invite them to a meeting. Externs will really miss the camaraderie of an office and the ability to "tag along" with supervisors. Try to plan ahead and notify the extern of virtual meetings they can attend.
- As the legal profession shifts online, exposing students to virtual client meetings, settlement conferences, and court/administrative hearings will teach them about how law practices adapt.

Setting Deadlines and Supporting Goals

- Students are encouraged to set goals they wish to accomplish on specific days and during an entire work week. You can help them do this effectively by setting up clear deadlines. Even soft deadlines are critical to help keep externs focused and motivated, and will provide them guidance in prioritizing assignments from multiple supervisors.
- Consider asking externs to share their daily or weekly work plan with you in advance so you know they are on track and to encourage students to hold themselves accountable.

Continue to Share Feedback

- Externs really want to learn and hear your thoughts about their work. The weekly check-in is a great time to discuss how the extern is progressing. Other types of feedback include sharing the final documents that are filed/submitted, and (when possible), inputting track changes/comments into their documents. Seeing your edits can really help students learn and improve their work product.
- Reviewing constructive feedback over email without any context can be difficult. Consider sharing constructive feedback via a video conference so you can share your screen and review the document.
- Tell students about the impact of their work. Students may not be able to find out how a case turns out during a regular office interaction. By remembering to engage students in the long-term outcomes, you will help motivate them so they do not feel like they are working in isolation.
- There are a few aids to help guide feedback included at the end of this document.

Consider Including Externs in Online Networking, Mentoring and Training Events

- Externs cherish the professional development, networking, and career guidance they receive from supervisors and team members. Consider hosting a session over the lunch hour to share about your own career, inform students of useful connections and associations, and offer other networking and mentoring advice to externs.
- If your organization or local bar associations are holding virtual events that the extern could benefit from attending, please consider inviting them.

Check In On Any Real Life Constraints the Extern May Have

- Externs may have other responsibilities during this crisis, including caregiving responsibilities. Understanding their situation can help you get to know them better and to adapt expectations if appropriate and needed.
- If personal circumstances arise that make it difficult for a student to complete their externship requirements or for you to continue supervising the student, please let me know so that we can find a workable solution.