

Externship Programs in a Covid-19 World: How to Adapt and Manage

How to Bring Remote Opportunities to the Law School

Q: Are there any guides to employer outreach for those just starting their programs?

A: Yes--NALP resources include a primer for Employer outreach and the updated version even includes remote outreach. You can access the [CSO Employer Outreach Best Practice Guide here](#).

Q: Is outreach for remote opportunities much different than for traditional opportunities?

A: No, not really, although under some circumstances it will take more effort to get responses.

Q: What is the single most important thing to keep in mind in this unusual time when doing employer outreach?

A: Empathy--the regular modes of operation are not necessarily available and some are struggling. In addition you don't know what that other person at the target employer's situation is--they could be dealing with a lot on top of their job. Recognize your "asks" may not be the priority right now.

How to Support Employers Who Offer and Run Remote Programs

Q: If externs are considering permanent employment after graduation, how can employers give externs a better idea of what the in-person job would be?

A: Ask as many employees as possible to speak to the externs about what the job is like in the office environment. Some employers are able to show videos of the office that were taped pre-COVID to give the externs some idea.

Q: What are some strategies an employer can use to prevent externs from feeling isolated in the remote environment?

A: Employers can facilitate group meetings, organize remote brown bag lunches, and host virtual social gatherings. Employers can suggest daily phone calls with externs to guarantee that they are on the same page for assignments and to replicate "stopping in" to each others' offices.

Q: How can employers foster collegiality and teamwork amongst an extern class in this remote environment?

A: Use virtual "breakout rooms" frequently to encourage students to get to know one another in a smaller setting. Consider having externs work on group assignments and to check in with each other in addition to checking in with supervisors.

How to Help Students and Externship Sites Build Meaningful Relationships During a Remote Experience

Q: What can externs do to set themselves up for success at a remote placement?

A: Clarify communication expectations and platforms either before or on their first day. How do the attorneys prefer they reach out when they have questions about an assignment? Though Slack, emails, calls, Google Chat, etc. Encourage the extern to not be hesitant to reach out to attorneys with questions or to ask for assignments if they are looking for work, even if this is on a daily basis. The extern is not bothering the attorneys.

Make sure that the extern and supervising attorney have at minimum a scheduled 1x1 check-in each week. A weekly scheduled 1x1 check in AND an extern roundtable meeting with all externs each week is even better!

Q: What can externs and supervising attorneys get to know about each other during a remote placement when in-person lunches and networking events aren't an option?

A: Schedule several 20-30 minute “get-to-know-you” sessions over the course of an externship where an extern is paired with an attorney. This may feel awkward at first but it replaces the conversations that would take place in the organization’s hallway or offices if the experience was in person. These sessions can be over coffee or lunch as well. At staff meetings, the externs could be given an opportunity to introduce themselves or share a fun fact about them. Externs should be encouraged to reach out to attorneys on their own and ask for virtual meetings to get to know about their practice, career path, and ask for advice.

Q: How do externs logistically wrap up a remote placement?

A: (1) Make sure the supervising attorney is aware of the extern’s last day well in advance. (2) Make sure the extern has a clear understanding of the assignments they are supposed to wrap up and any transfer memos they may have to complete. (3) Schedule a final wrap up meeting with their supervising attorney. (4) Obtain permission for a writing sample, and references if applicable. (5) Write a thank you note (handwritten strongly recommended) to the supervising attorney thanking them for their extra guidance and support.

How to Help Students Attain and Frame Practical Skills in the Remote Environment

Q: What are the ways students can hone their communication skills virtually?

A: Computer screens can present a barrier to organic lines of communication. It is even more important, therefore for students to be intentional with regular and consistent communication with attorneys in their externship program.

- (1) Students should set expectations at the outset of the semester. Identify goals and objectives to reach those goals, and use a shared document with a supervisor to explore these goals in a conversation.
- (2) Assignments and deadlines should be continually confirmed in writing and repeated back to the supervisor. Students can use this as an opportunity to regularly check-in and clarify requirements.
- (3) Students should be proactive about requesting and offering to calendar frequent and consistent check-in meetings, in whatever modality is preferable for the supervisor (phone/zoom/skype/etc.).
- (4) Video Conference option should be the first preferable option for students, utilizing their cameras. This allows for an additional layer of connection. Varying types of communication is also beneficial (texting, zoom, and phone calls).

Q: How can employers foster a confidential legal workplace for students via a computer? How can students, without hands-on-learning, develop an understanding of the ethical practice of law?

A: Employers can be proactive at the outset of the externship to ensure students understand

policies and protocols. Best practices include providing handbooks, tutorial videos, and resources as well as a mechanism for quizzing students on comprehension. For example, if a training video exists, send a google form with a short set of questions after the fact, to confirm comprehension of the policies. Employers should make time in the initial meetings and trainings to discuss positive hypothetical situations to the student, and review steps required to protect confidentiality of work product and client information remotely. No detail should be viewed as too small in the beginning and students should be assumed not to have the understanding at the outset. Discuss cybersecurity, nomenclature for saving documents, filing procedures, document management, timekeeping software, protecting passwords, etc.

Some student externs may not have had the opportunity to take professional responsibility prior to doing their externship. It is critical that the employer takes the time to review the most relevant ethical rules (confidentiality, attorney-client privilege, etc.) in the beginning, with the extern, as well as model an ethical practice of law. When situations arise where students inevitably make a mistake, employers should take the time to thoroughly review the situation and provide critical feedback to assist the student in improving. Employers should remember that this externship may be the very first legal job that a student has had, and should approach each situation with this lens.

Q: How can students capitalize on the virtual nature of their experience in their future job applications?

A: This is a unique time for students to have legal employment experiences, due to the impact of the pandemic. If students can grab onto the silver lining that these circumstances can provide, the benefits of these remote work experiences can make their applications shine. Instead of apologizing for the experiences being sub-par due to their virtual nature, highlight the *additional* skills the particular experience provided.

- (1) The ability to pivot from an expectation of an in-person externship to a 100% remote semester, gives the student an opportunity to highlight their ability to think-on-their feet and be flexible for a future employer. As the path of a litigious case may often shift on a moment's notice, this abrupt change in circumstances in a student's externship, arms the student with a concrete example of how they are adept at shifting a stance and reframing the narrative.
- (2) Every lawyer has, at some point in their career, lost a case or disappointed a client. When the going gets rough, what matters is having the ability to be resilient. An extern who was suddenly unable to have the in-person, hands-on experience anticipated due to the pandemic, has a specific anecdote to provide an illustration of their drive and resilience.
- (3) Connecting with people can feel natural when you're sitting side-by-side working, talking by the water cooler, or eating lunch together. Building relationships across computer screens, however, is more difficult. Externs who can describe how they took initiative to set up meetings with supervisors and cultivate a mentor-mentee relationship over the course of the semester have mastered the art of communicating, despite barriers in place.
- (4) What better way to emphasize an ability to be creative and strategic than discussing remote-work flow, remote research, writing, client interviewing and remote supervision meetings. Successfully collaborating on a virtual platform is a skill law students can highlight for future employers as a valuable asset.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF

REMOTE SUPERVISION

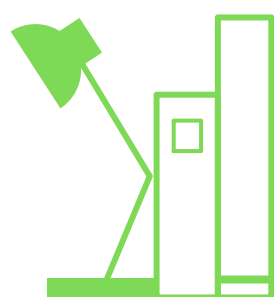
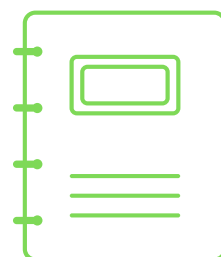


COMMUNICATE CONTINUALLY & CONSISTENTLY

- Clarify scope of assignments and deadlines.
- Increase interactions with externs.
- Use multiple forms of technology to collaborate.
- Calendar frequent and consistent check-in meetings.

PROVIDE POLICIES & PROTOCOLS

- Relay internal handbook and discuss.
- Set rules up front about cybersecurity, naming format, document management, filing procedures, email vs. shared drive, timekeeping, and protecting confidential information.

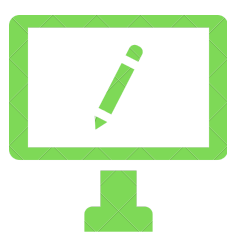


MAXIMIZE MEETINGS

- Make time for extern meetings one-on-one without checking your phone or responding to emails.
- Set agendas for meetings and share screens for effective collaboration.

CONVEY CONFIDENTIALITY IS KEY

- Review rules of confidentiality and attorney client privilege with externs.
- Remind externs to keep client information securely saved.
- Model best practices in virtual collaboration and privacy.

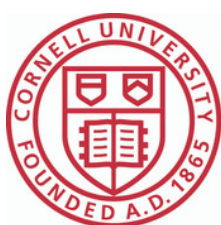
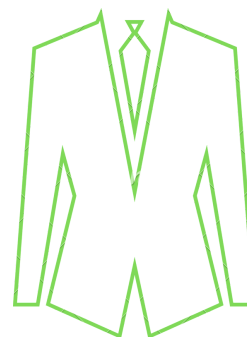


FOLLOW UP WITH FEEDBACK

- Take time to provide substantive feedback in writing and via zoom.
- Use Track-changes and comments for writing critique.
- Discuss written work product and redacting information when using for a writing sample for future use.

TEACH PROFESSIONALISM

- Whenever possible provide opportunities for extern to see workplace and coworkers in person or via screen.
- Set housekeeping rules for extern (no cell phones, no open emails, go on mute, etc. during meetings and hearings)
- Highlight awareness of visual background during video-calls.



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