

Resolving the Tension Between Career Development and Reflective and Substantive Externship Pedagogy

Avis L. Sanders
Director, Externship Program
American University
Washington College of Law

What is that tension?

- - Pedagogy takes second place to job placement.

or

- Job placement jeopardized by concerns about quality of the learning



Hidden Agendas

Using career development to introduce important reflective skills in a way that engages students.

Why Bring Career Development Into the Externship Program?

**Our students need to leverage their
externship experience.”**

**“They need to learn:
What they want.
Why they want it.
How to get it.”**

Professor Johanna Leshner, AUWCL

Experiments

at American University

Washington College of Law (AUWCL)

- Pairing career development with traditional externship pedagogy
(Professor Johanna Leshner, AUWCL)
- Including classes dedicated solely to career development as it relates to externship
(Professor Chris Gowen, AUWCL)

Developing a Plan for Getting the Most From the Field Placement

- 1) Information Gathering
- 2) Self Assessment/Goals
- 3) Acquiring skills, often transferable skills, in the externship (through observing and doing)
- 4) Acquiring knowledge needed for specific areas of law (through observing and doing)
- 5) Focus on how to bring knowledge and skills from externship to job search. Resumes/Cover letters/Social/Media/Interviews/Networking/Mentors.
- 6) The next steps after the externship.

Setting Goals: Sneaking in *Our* Pedagogical Goals

- The 2 year plan
- Career modeling
- Drafting resumes backwards
 - (before they start)

The 2 Year Plan

- Your job is going to end in two years.
- What do you think you might like to do then?
- What do you want to learn by then?
- What would you like to accomplish by then?
- Who do you need to meet?
- **WHAT WOULD YOU DO THAT YOU ARE NOT DOING NOW?**



Career Modeling

- Have the students select an attorney who they consider to be successful and a role model (someone they know personally or have only heard of).
- Research what this person did in law school (internships, etc.), fellowships, and each successive job to get where they ended up.
- Pair this EXERCISE with Professionalism and Confidentiality

The backwards resume: (sneaking in goals)

Draft description they want to include in their resume at the conclusion of the field placement. This does not just help them articulate their goals; it provides them with a **roadmap** for the skills and knowledge they need to acquire.

- Requires information gathering and planning.
- What specific skills and knowledge do they need for the area of law in which they want to practice?
- How are they going to gain these in their externship?
- Alternatively, what skills and knowledge are transferable?
Leads to discussion of MacCrate Report.



Practice Areas: Selecting a Venue in Which to Practice:

- Simulation:
 - Negotiation of case involving many parties

Pair with:

- Discussion of application process for different types of employers
 - Revolving Door between government and private practice



Information Gathering and Self/Assessment

- What knowledge, skills (competencies) are needed for specific types of jobs:
 - to do job competently?
 - to be marketable?
- Does the student possess those knowledge, skills?
- What is necessary to bridge the gap?

Bringing knowledge and skills from externship to job search

- Resumes
- Cover Letters
- Social Media
- Interviews
- Networking
- Reccomendations

Resumes

Use resume as vehicle for students to think about goals for this and other externships and appreciate usefulness of reflective journals.

- How will they describe their experience and its applications; what are their legitimate “responsibilities” and “accomplishments”?
- Journal is a goldmine.
- Have them draft resume at beginning and in the middle of the semester.

Cover Letters

- Great place to sneak in reflective skills and advocacy skills.
- Research the employer
 - Research employer on Web
 - Do quick Lexis search.
 - EXERCISE: write a general cover letter to employer they might actually be interested in applying to. Then do research on firm through Lexis and web and redraft making it all about the employer. Break up into pairs to review letters and discuss.



Social Media

- Social Media:
 - Students know less than they think
 - How do employers search for information on applicants?
 - Challenges and benefits in job search
 - EXERCISE: Search for themselves on the internet. What positive is missing? What negative needs to be cleaned up?
 - **Pair with:**
- Simulation: Case in which attorneys were disciplined for public postings

Interviews

- Elevator Talk
- Table Talk
- Information Interviews
- Actual Formal Interviews
- Meeting Strangers

Values Clarification

- Simulation: Students argue a case in which attorneys represented awful clients.

Pair with:

- Values Clarification:
 - Lawyer as mouthpiece?
 - Work only for clients whose values are aligned?



Interview Preparation Simulation (Written)

- Students select a place to apply.
- Outline for professor how they would prepare for the interview.
Students have to provide:
 - Position description;
 - The research they undertook;
 - How they will use that information during the interview;
 - Anticipated issues, and strategy for dealing with them;
 - Questions for interviewers.
- Professor Johanna Leshner, AUWCL



Mock Interviews

- Students as interviewers and applicants
- Outside attorneys conduct interviews; students observe and critique

Networking

- Crucial during field placement
- Address negative impressions/limited conceptions
- EXERCISE (word association) on networking to start discussion.
- Discuss networking not just in job search but in effective legal practice.

Networking: Being the validator

- Being the validator
 - What is it?
 - Exercise: Identify opportunity to act as a validator.



Networking Exercise

- CLASS EXERCISE:
 - Students break into small groups. Identify networking challenges in field placement.
 - Each student presents a challenge and group selects one to address and brainstorm on solutions.
 - Bring back to full group to discuss.

Recommendations

- Discussion of importance of recommendations (validators) in job search.
- What if supervisor asks student to write his or her recommendation?
 - Importance of the reflective journal.
 - Exercise: At start of semester, students write recommendations they hope to receive. Share with supervisor and return to it mid-semester. Provides guidance on status of skills and knowledge development and professionalism issues.

Where they go from here?

- Repeat the cycle:
- Consider career goals
- What knowledge to they have and what do they still need?
- What skills do they have and what do they still need?
- Who do they need to network with?

Tricky questions

- *A student asks to stay in an externship for another semester because there might be a job opening there; if all you cared about was putting someone in a job, then you would say, “yes” because you are more likely to get a job there if you stay for a full year.*
- *Should you allow students to work in a placement where they are NOT doing substantive legal work and/or NOT supervised by an attorney but where they might get a job?*

More Tricky questions

(Skills Development)

- *Should the student be focused on their own goals and what they want to get out of the externship or the employer's goals?*
- *To what extent should students be encouraged to take on tasks that build networking and contact with attorneys even if they do not add to skills base*