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Before-the-Job Training

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Jessica Hill was hesitant about participating in the University of Dayton School of Law's mandatory externship program — a semester-long legal apprenticeship to develop practical, professional skills and obtain significant experience in a legal setting.

Now she is sold.

"I quickly recognized what a great opportunity it was for me," said Hill, who graduated in May 2010 and externed with her current employer, Graydon Head & Ritchey in West Chester, Ohio. "The externship program allows you to explore your options in the legal market and practice skills not taught in law school like networking and working with clients and other lawyers."

Others are sold, too. The October issue of *National Jurist* magazine ranked the University of Dayton School of Law 20th in the nation for most externship placements per fulltime students. Dayton ranks third among Catholic law schools.

The Ohio Supreme Court asked 2009 School of Law graduate Nathan Little to speak at a Student to Lawyer Symposium Dec. 3 to discuss Dayton's externship program and his experiences with the Ohio Supreme Court's Lawyer-to-Lawyer Mentoring Program. His goal is to emphasize the importance of preparing students for the practice of law before and after the bar exam and how both programs helped him make his first year out of school a success.

"There is a deficiency in our students, schools and profession when it comes to students being fully prepared to enter the practice of law. The Ohio Supreme Court is interested in learning more about how UDSL externship programs prepare students for more than the hypothetical and traditional world of law school," said Little, who is working at Combs Schaefer & Atkins in Middletown, Ohio. "Not only does the externship prepare students for real-life lawyering, but it helps prep students with the skills needed to get jobs. The externship at UDSL allows you to begin to network with attorneys while getting experience that will last a lifetime."

Dean Lisa Kloppenberg is a frequent presenter at national conferences on the topic of educating today's law students and preparing them for the working world. She just returned from presenting at "The Future of Legal Education" conference put on jointly by Harvard Law School and New York Law School. Some schools approached Kloppenberg at the conference about working with Dayton on curricular innovations.

"We are honored and humbled that national publications, the highest court in the state and the nation's top law schools are taking notice of the way we educate students at the University of Dayton School of Law," Kloppenberg said. "I applaud the effort of our faculty and staff who work tirelessly to help shape the future of legal education and prepare students in the Marianist 'whole-person' tradition to be problem-solving leaders for their clients and communities."

The University of Dayton School of Law started mandatory externships in 2005 when it unveiled its Lawyer as Problem Solver program to meet student and employer demands for a curriculum that included more practical skills needed to deal with real clients.

"UDSL's externships give our students opportunities to learn the behind-the-scenes part of being a lawyer, allowing them to learn from common mistakes and experiences under the guidance of seasoned lawyers and judges," law lecturer and externship advisor Monique Lampke said. "Students get to 'test drive' in the practice of law for a semester. Our students emerge from these externships well-trained and adept at legal analysis, research and writing; with solid experience on their resumes and ample legal writing samples, giving them an edge when it comes to searching for jobs."

The program, which has a two-year option for flexibility, emphasizes service and applying legal education to solve problems for clients, communities and the world. Since the start of the program in 2005, with the exception of one year, job placement rates have increased yearly.

"Lawyers and judges see the strong value in a mandatory experiential learning experience," law lecturer and externship advisor Denise Platfoot Lacey said. "The most common comment I hear from lawyers supervising a student in an externship is that it

should have been a required course when they were in law school."

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