The St. Thomas University School of Law is committed to training students to be effective and ethical advocates, and to instill in them a devotion to justice and a desire to provide legal services to underserved communities. To this end, the law school offers a wide variety of clinical, externship and internship placements taught by current practitioners who are board-certified in their areas of practice. These instructors bring invaluable real-world perspectives and up-to-date examples of issues and situations that students may face; they give students the guided reflective opportunity to work through what is in the best interest of the client. Their skills are unparalleled and their enthusiasm is contagious.

At St. Thomas Law, all students who wish to participate in a clinic may do so. No limit is placed on the number of times a student can participate. Typically, the student-to-professor ratio is eight-to-one or better, and students receive careful, individualized attention from full-time and adjunct faculty.

Together, instructors and students constitute a powerful force. For all those involved, the experience is intense.

Come see for yourself.
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Participating in St. Thomas Law’s clinical program is enriching, demanding, riveting – sometimes exhausting. It is invariably an eye-opening experience. Welcome to the real world.
The Appellate Litigation Externship familiarizes students with the types of substantive criminal law issues that arise, as well as the procedural requirements and the appellate advocacy skills needed to brief and argue a case in an actual appellate court.

“The exciting thing about the Appellate Externship is that it gives students the opportunity to brief and argue a real case in a real appellate court. Our students do six cases in the clinic, and each year one of those cases is argued in the Third District Court of Appeal at St. Thomas Law. It’s always very exciting for the students. One of our former students had a particularly rewarding experience arguing a case in the Third District Court of Appeal. The opinion issued in that case has been cited many, many times, and established legal principles the former student has used to support arguments presented on behalf of clients whom she now represents as an attorney in the Public Defender’s Office.”

– Howard Blumberg,
Assistant Public Defender in the Appellate Division of the Public Defender’s Office,
Adjunct Professor, Appellate Litigation Externship
“My experience with the Appellate Externship was one of the best training tools I was given before heading out into the real world as a lawyer. The clinic helped me improve my research, writing and speaking skills, and I have been able to apply all those skills to my everyday work-life as a trial attorney.”

– Aileen Penate, Appellate Litigation Extern
“Participating in the clinic was a great experience. We were able to meet with clients and walk them from start to finish through the Chapter 7 process. We reviewed their documents and filed petitions. The people who are referred to us come through Put Something Back, a pro bono project of Miami-Dade County, so they are underserved. It felt good to help and it was really good to have the actual legal experience. I feel that bankruptcy by the book is very different from actual bankruptcy practice – the hands-on experience was really beneficial.”

— Tricia Hefflinger, Bankruptcy Extern
The Bankruptcy Externship offers a comprehensive set of legal services to assist and empower low-income individuals in their interaction with the bankruptcy system. Supervised by adjunct law faculty, attorneys at Put Something Back and mentors from the local bankruptcy bar, law students represent debtors in bankruptcy cases and proceedings.

“All of our clients come in through legal aid and have very little; they are going through a very difficult time in their lives, and when you take this weight off of them they feel such relief and see that the legal profession can be compassionate. The students have the opportunity – privilege, really – of helping someone. I try to bring home to my students the fact that they have so much, in the hope that it will encourage them to have compassion.

“Especially in today’s economic climate, students who take a substantive bankruptcy course and then get hands-on experience stand a very good chance of getting a job afterward. And even if they don’t go on to practice bankruptcy law, it is very probable that at some point in future they will handle a case affected by bankruptcy – in family law, corporate law – even if not necessarily through the bankruptcy filing itself.”

– Maggie Abdo-Gomez, Esq., Adjunct Professor, Bankruptcy Externship
Externs are immersed in the practice of civil law. They are placed with practicing attorneys in the public sector – Legal Aid, the Attorney General, Human Rights Institute or other public sector agencies. Students refine their experience; they learn defenses unique to public agencies, represent clients in landlord-tenant matters, and observe administrative hearings.

“When I arrived at the City of Miami Attorney’s Office, they told me ‘Every day is different.’ It was true. I’ve done everything from researching property deeds to arguing code enforcement cases. I attended negotiations to use Bayfront Park for a New Year’s Eve party, and learned about the intricacies of how things work and what needs to be done on both sides in terms of avoiding liability in order to get it approved. The Government side of this internship was more hands-on – going and doing. The most interesting part was preparing for and attending City Commission meetings, and seeing how this city truly is run.”

– Ari Neimand,
Civil Practice Extern
“Students at St. Thomas Law who are afforded an opportunity to participate in the civil externship program derive a win-win situation. First and foremost, the students are allowed to work closely with practicing attorneys in diverse governmental entities that allow the students to apply their ‘school book teachings’ to the practical everyday trials and tribulations of a law profession. The students work closely with attorneys and, through their diligent work, are allowed to view the overall picture of the practice of law. The students receive a great deal of hands-on work, which in most cases affords them the opportunity to see their work in some form of a legal/judicial proceeding.”

– Tim Martin,
Martin, Lister & Alvarez, PLC,
Adjunct Professor, Civil Practice Externship
“The criminal practice externship was great – they give you a lot of responsibility and you’re accountable for what you’re doing. I had to go to jails and interview clients, which pushed me out of my comfort zone. On my first visit, I had to go to the hospital ward and interview a client there; it was a little nerve-wracking. That’s what is valuable about the externship: it exposes you to things you’ve never seen before in your life and pushes you into situations you might not even want to be in, but you get over that intimidation. When you realize that you can be effective in that situation, it gives you confidence and you hone your skills.”

– Tamara Pallas, Criminal Practice Extern
Students experience the practice of criminal law and the workings of the criminal justice system. They are given a docket of cases and, under the supervision of an Assistant State Attorney or Assistant Public Defender, engage in plea bargain negotiations and try cases. They learn investigative and trial techniques, alternatives to incarceration, and creative approaches to sentencing.

“Student attorneys are immersed in real life, they deal with real issues, and encounter real victims and defendants; they experience first hand the practical application of criminal law through the eyes and practice of an Assistant State Attorney or Assistant Public Defender. As a prosecutor, the students learn what it takes to put a case together, from interviewing law enforcement officers, victims, expert witnesses, making charging decisions and then representing the state through pre-trial proceedings, trial and sentencing. Student attorneys are advocates for the state and effective law enforcement in their community. As a defense attorney, the students representing indigent clients conduct interviews, depositions, pre-trial proceedings, and then represent their clients through trial and sentencing. Their charge is to vigorously represent their clients to ensure the state meets its burden of proof. Student attorneys gain experience in all facets of trial work, learning what it means to represent real people in real-life situations.”

– Ken Noto, Esq., Adjunct Professor, Criminal Practice Externship
Students learn about the growing legal needs of the elderly and gain direct experience in Elder Law through placement with regional probate judges and their staff counsel. Students work one-on-one with judges, review case files and petitions and conduct legal research; they explore ethical issues raised in representing the elderly.

“Externship students acquire direct insight into probate and guardianship cases and other important elder law issues and challenges. More important, students gain direct experience with – and a sensitivity to – legal challenges faced by elders, the disabled and the mentally incapacitated, and their families. Students serve the community by providing valuable practical support to a beleaguered court system and to the often-troubled parties involved in elder law proceedings. The Externship trains a generation of lawyers to address the complex needs of a growing elder population.”

– Jacqueline Schneider, Board Certified in Elder Law, Adjunct Professor, Elder Law Externship
“The Elder Law Externship is far broader than its name would suggest. It touches all of us and includes areas of law such as guardianships, wills and trusts, estate planning, as well as involuntary commitment because of incapacity as well as addiction. The latter had the greatest impact on me. Seeing the court save people’s lives and helping them deal with issues of incapacity through commitment and long-term care gave me new appreciation for what we do as interns and later as attorneys. At the end, knowing that what you do makes a real difference is the greatest reward of all.”

– Vadim Fesenko, Elder Law Extern
“In this externship you handle your own cases: you prepare for and try them on your own from initial intake right up to injunction. I was placed in the Domestic Violence Unit. It’s a very intimate experience: the clients tell you secrets they have been hiding throughout their entire relationship. One case in particular was with a girl my age. She had recently had a baby with her boyfriend, who would drink and become violent. He locked the baby in the closet, pulled an ax on her and held her hostage for 24 hours. Once he fell asleep she called 911. We got a permanent restraining order for six years, so he can’t go anywhere near her or her child. You feel like you’re making a difference; you’re helping someone’s life, their kids’ lives … you’re helping to break the cycle.”

– Lisa Marie Lucena, Family Court Extern
Domestic violence affects every community regardless of race, social and economic background, culture, religion and sexual orientation. Many victims cannot afford legal representation and without legal assistance, victims are in jeopardy. The Family Court Externship affords victims effective legal assistance to promote safety for themselves and their children.

“Our students have a very real and positive influence on individual lives. For instance, one of our students represented a client who had been trapped in a violent relationship, was not allowed to work or drive and was raising her five children. One day neighbors heard gun shots and called the police. The husband, in a usual abusive rage, had been violent with the client and after beating her, pulled a loaded gun on her, the kids and his brother. Although he did not shoot at them, he put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger. The gun malfunctioned, giving his brother an opportunity to wrestle the gun away from him. During the struggle, the gun fired two or three times into the ceiling. Our client fled with the kids and hid until the police arrived. Our student was successful in obtaining a permanent protection against the respondent, child support and temporary spousal support. The client was overwhelmed at receiving help and protection, and was grateful for our student’s representation.”

– Brenda Rivera,
DV Supervising Senior Attorney, Legal Aid Society, Adjunct Professor, Family Court Externship
The intern experiences the practice of law in the State’s capital, working as a law clerk to an individual justice or as a central staff law clerk working for all of the justices, reviewing and making recommendations on petitions for discretionary review, attorney discipline matters, and extraordinary writ petitions; and conducting legal research and preparing memoranda on pending cases.

“We focus on the Court and its role in affecting people’s day-to-day lives, including how it interacts with the Florida Bar and Legislature. The focus is on the ability to listen and create a desire for service. While they are at the court, students see both Judicial and Attorney disciplinary hearings. They work for Justices who have committed their lives to public service and see the importance of being a leader, given the challenges of today. Hopefully they end up with a commitment to be involved in more than just their everyday practice.”

– Cece Dykas, Associate Dean, St. Thomas University School of Law and Clinical Program Director
“The Florida Supreme Court internship is such a unique experience; it gives students a behind-the-scenes perspective of the Court before they start practicing law. The ability to say, ‘Good morning’ to the Justices in the hall, or to discuss cases with them is an incomparable experience. The interns get the first look at the cases, and our recommendations are read by some of the best legal minds in Florida. This internship has affirmed my desire to practice appellate law one day, and I have sincerely enjoyed observing and contributing to cases that affect the entire State of Florida.”

– Bethany Carlson, Florida Supreme Court Intern
“Last semester, my partner Jeremy and I represented an indigent lawful resident in a deportation proceeding and argued for cancellation of his removal from the U.S. In addition to learning the immigration law concerning cancellation, I learned invaluable skills of client interviewing, direct and cross examination preparation and managing client expectations. Our client was so grateful and the experience made me feel like I really affected someone’s life in an extraordinary way. I cannot say what a great impact this experience has had on my life. I will always desire to assist people in this capacity.”

– Rose Brill, Immigration Intern
The Immigration Clinic serves uprooted persons at the margins of society, and provides students with the tools to challenge those human structures and institutions that divide communities and foster discrimination against newcomers.

“Recently students argued a case of Cancellation of Removal for their client. It was a very difficult hearing, as the client was not obviously endearing – toughened by poverty. At a break, the opposing counsel told the students, ‘You’ve done great work and are doing a nice job, but sometimes you just don’t have a good case.’ He was probably right, but our students prevailed: they conducted another hour of rehabilitation of the witness and directed excellent testimony of the client’s closest relative; they had the daunting job of closing argument. Adapting on the fly, the students disregarded half of what they planned, based on the needs of the moment, and did an excellent job of contextualizing, humanizing and arguing the case. I’m incredibly proud. We consider this a hard-earned victory for a very vulnerable client.”

– Michael Vastine, Associate Professor of Law, Director, Immigration Clinic
The Judicial Internship puts legal subjects and substantive classes into context. Interns are able to hear arguments, to discuss cases with judges and to apply research and writing skills to real facts. They work closely with supervising staff attorneys, judges and clerks and receive expert instruction.

“It’s one thing to take Criminal Procedure, Evidence, Constitutional Law, but once you’ve seen how these things apply in the real world it makes it a lot more meaningful. The clinic helps students see what the courthouse is truly like. They get a behind-the-scenes view of how the court functions from a judge’s perspective. Students witness how judges make their rulings and what influences them. An added bonus is that the clinic gives students the opportunity to make a lot of contacts that will serve them in their professional lives.”

– Judge Michele Towbin Singer, Adjunct Professor, Broward County Judicial Internship

“If I could make only one recommendation to a 1L, it would have to be ‘do not graduate from law school without taking advantage of the judicial clerkship offered through the school.’ My participation in this program was by far the most beneficial experience I had during law school. I was taught the importance of professionalism, proper courtroom etiquette and given the opportunity to put theory into practice.”

– Brittany Orlando, Judicial Intern
“Students have the opportunity to work with judges and see how they reason and decide cases. Clinical students observe lawyers at work and see how legal craft should be done – and on occasion, not be done, because lawyers are also critiqued in chambers by the judges and by the clerks. The experience is invaluable because, even more than giving students something they can use on their resume, they learn first hand how to practice law effectively.”

-Judge Peter R. Lopez, Adjunct Professor, Miami-Dade County Judicial Internship
“The Internship Program at the United Nations Headquarters in New York is intended to develop leaders for a new global paradigm based upon justice, peace and sustainability. Students who have participated are now conscious of themselves as integral members of a world community.”

– Mark J. Wolff, Professor of Law, Director, Pax Romana U.N. Internship
The Pax Romana United Nations Internship shapes global legal leaders by instilling in students knowledge of international relations and the functioning of multilateral organizations, and a desire to use law to assist the world’s most vulnerable. Interns obtain access to meetings, events and discussions available only to diplomats and delegates.

“Some have characterized the Palestinian bid for U.N. membership as a historic moment; President Abbas made the big announcement during the General Debate of the 66th session of the General Assembly – it happened when I was an intern at the United Nations. Heads of State and Government flew to New York. The momentum had built up so much that most major countries addressed the issue of a possible bid or of the Palestinians going through the General Assembly option. We weren’t sure which option Palestine was going to go with. The news also highlighted how some major powers were trying to pressure the Palestinians to take a different route. The Security Council’s Committee on the Admission of New Members issued a report that discussed whether Palestine was peace-loving, Charter obligations and the Montevideo Convention requirements of statehood – a topic that I had seen in international law. As an intern, I was in the middle of everything that was happening. I had a truly amazing experience doing this internship. There are always so many different meetings going on about different topics that one learns an immense amount on a range of transnational issues.”

– Pia Lestrade Dahms, Pax Romana Intern
The mission of the Tax Clinic is to educate and inform low-income taxpayers, particularly those for whom English is a second language, of their rights and responsibilities, as well as provide legal aid in tax matters to the Greater Miami community.

“To make the mission of the Tax Clinic a reality, we receive referrals from the IRS, Legal Aid of Miami, Legal Aid of Broward, United States Tax Court – and then we get to work. During the past 12 years, with the assistance of 75 students, we have helped more than 800 low-income taxpayers. By participating in this program, the students get a better understanding of the tax system and how it affects low-income taxpayers.”

– Larry Fedro, Director, Tax Clinic
“At the clinic, we prepare tax returns. All of our clients make less than $50,000 a year – most make well below that – and typically that includes a spouse, and sometimes children. For a family of four just barely above the poverty line, a refund of $3,000 can be a real game-changer. It could be a couple of months’ rent, or a few car payments. It could literally be the difference between putting food on the table or not. We’re all trained by the IRS, we have the technology and the know-how to prepare their return correctly. I don’t know that many people who enjoy doing taxes – and none who enjoy paying them – but all of our students in the clinic enjoy tax law and enjoy serving the community through something that we’re skilled to do. For me, the big difference is that you’re actually having a positive impact on somebody’s life.”

– Joe Hunt, VITA Senior Site Coordinator
About St. Thomas Law

Founded in 1984, the St. Thomas University School of Law is located on the University’s beautiful campus in Miami Gardens, Florida. The School of Law includes a multi-level library, a moot court amphitheater, faculty and administrative offices, a computer lab, classrooms, and offices for student organizations. The architectural combination of buildings and breezeways provides a comfortable setting for the study of law.

St. Thomas Law is fully accredited by the American Bar Association and a member of the Association of American Law Schools.

Located between vibrant legal communities in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, St. Thomas Law offers clinical, externship, internship, and part time employment opportunities that enable students to be engaged in the legal profession while in law school.

St. Thomas Law takes its commitment to diversity and service into the world and has a major impact on the South Florida community. Each year, law students volunteer over 16,000 hours of law-related services to the underprivileged as part of the Pro Bono Leadership Program and the Human Rights Institute provides legal services to over 6,500 immigrants.

St. Thomas Law has been nationally recognized for the sense of community among its students and the diversity of its student body. The shared commitment to professionalism and small class size make studying law at St. Thomas Law a unique and enriching experience.

We encourage you to visit us and learn more.