

Mason Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic (M-VETS)

Antonin Scalia Law School

George Mason University

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Section 309-001, Spring 2024

*subject to change w/o notice

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Mission Statement

The Mason Veterans and Servicemembers Legal Clinic (M-VETS) mission is to provide free legal representation to active-duty members of the armed forces, veterans, and their families while offering law students the opportunity to receive supervised, practical legal experience by advocating for those who serve or have served in our armed forces.

Summary

General. This multidisciplinary clinic qualifies for the law school's national and homeland security concentration and criminal law concentration if placed in an approved position. Access to M-VETS is by security code which will be given out, along with computer and phone passwords, at the first class meeting.

Casework. The focus of clinic students' efforts is casework on applicant and client matters, primarily accomplished outside the classroom. Students must submit weekly status reports (WSR and time sheets saved to the "T" Drive) and should be prepared to discuss the same for that evening's class. You are responsible for your assigned cases/intakes until the start of the summer 2024 semester.

Classwork. In addition to casework, M-VETS students will meet each Wednesday during the term, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the law school, to which normal academic rules apply.¹ Classes will be partly devoted to instructional topics, drawn from the blocks of instruction set forth below, partially to a status roundtable, and to scenarios selected to enhance the instructional topics.

¹ Attendance regulations are set forth in Academic Regulations 4-1 through 4-1.4.

Course materials (provided or online) will be selected for review and classroom instruction at a schedule determined by class progress on casework.

At the outset of the term, time and attention will primarily be devoted to orientation to clinic operations and administration, a review of status reports, archives, time sheets, and a military history, status and law overview. As the semester progresses, attention and instruction will turn to areas related to the substantive casework stemming from the intake of matters and how to develop a case, ethics and conflicts, client interviewing and counseling, as well as other legal developments that may have an impact on Servicemembers and their families.

In-Clinic Requirement. In addition to the proscribed class time on Wednesday, students are required to spend a minimum of two (2) additional hours per week performing office hours in the M-VETS's office. Students will sign up for a regular time at the beginning of the semester. This time shall be used for intake, electronic and hard copy client file maintenance, and other assigned tasks.

Grades. There will be no exam. Students will be subjectively graded on written work, oral presentations, and professional responsibility. *Written work* will relate to matters for which you have primary responsibility (weekly and final status reports, factual and assessment memoranda, understanding and analysis of legal issues, court filings, substantive communications with clients, supervisors and adversaries (letters, emails, etc.), and other written assignments, as needed). *Oral work* will be based on class participation and your oral presentation of your status reports during weekly meeting, discussion of associated legal issues, as well as subjects of instruction and discussion of assignments in individual meetings.

Other Grading Factors. In the work of M-VETS you will need to be attentive to aspects of legal representation such as responsiveness to supervisory direction, clients and applicants; judgment in case management; effort and allocation in time management (including timesheets); maintenance of electronic and paper files (including use of standard clinic forms); and relationships with supervisor(s).

Every student will arrange a final, individual transition meeting with the Director at the end of the semester to review case files (hard copy and electronic), activity logs, final correspondence and transition memoranda.

Furthermore, the law school rule of thumb that each credit entails approximately 60 hours of work applies.

Office Hours/Contact. I am regularly available in my office for meetings and discussions with students. I am also available by appointment and will typically be available via phone and email for questions that may arise outside normal working hours.

Blocks of Instruction

Clinic Operations. *E.g.*, organization (law-firm model), history, resources, procedures, students, support, and publications.

Professional Skills. *E.g.*, client interviewing, client development, case and file management, and supervision.

Substantive Law. Virginia Practice and Procedure: Discharge Upgrades; Medical/Physical Evaluation; Veterans Benefits; Domestic Relations; Professional responsibility (*e.g.*, confidentiality, conflicts, communication and competence); and case-related substantive law (*e.g.*, administrative, consumer, contracts, benefits, and landlord-tenant).

Relevant Communities. *E.g.*, military, veterans, legal services, and clinical.

M-VETS Cases. *E.g.*, status, lessons, supervision, questions, and next steps.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this course, students should achieve the following learning outcomes:

- 1) Develop interviewing, investigating, and counseling skills. Interview clients/applicants to gather relevant information relating to a legal matter and objectively analyze the facts, pertinent documents, and applicable law to assess the strengths and weaknesses in a case and effectively counsel a client based on the legal analysis, litigation risks, client objectives and other relevant practical considerations.
- 2) Become proficient in managing legal matters and exercising sound judgment with respect to case management, including analyzing relevant legal issues and proactively suggesting courses of action to advance the representation based on the client's goals and available legal remedies.
- 3) Communicate effectively, professionally, and collaboratively with clients, supervising attorneys, members of the military community, administrative boards, courts, and opposing parties.
- 4) Become zealous, creative, and thoughtful advocates on behalf of clients, advising them with respect to the legal and practical implications inherent in their legal matters.
- 5) Demonstrate thorough, accurate legal research skills that draw on relevant case law, statutes, regulations, and other relevant resources in a variety of areas of practice and an ability to draft legal documents that are well written, thorough, and persuasive.
- 6) Understand a lawyer's professional responsibility to his/her client, adversaries, the court and other legal bodies.
- 7) Develop an understanding of military culture and the issues facing the military community and their potential impact on a client's legal matter.

Notice of Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Assault, Interpersonal Violence, and Stalking

As faculty members, we are designated as “Responsible Employees,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (703) 380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (703) 993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling (703) 993-8730 or emailing cdc@gmu.edu.