Satisfying the Upper Level Writing and & Upper Level Skills Graduation Requirements
Updated June 2017

This document is a supplement and guide to selecting courses based on the Law School’s writing and skills credit requirements. The writing credit and skills rules can be found here.

General Information about the Graduation Writing Requirement (GWR).

Students must enroll in two (2) intensive writing courses to satisfy the GWR. To be clear, you cannot satisfy this requirement by taking a single WI course for which you earn two (2) academic credits. You must enroll in and complete two (2) courses or other writing opportunities that offer intensive writing credit. The fact that a course involves writing does not mean that the course satisfies the GWR. Only those courses/writing opportunities designated with the letters “WI” on the Alpha schedule meet the strictures of the requirement.

In a small number of cases, law journal students who are doing work supervised by a faculty advisor may satisfy one (1) of the writing course requirements at the discretion of the supervising professor. Similarly, students can elect to earn writing intensive credit for completing a directed research (“DR”) project under faculty supervision. In either case, only one (1) directed research project or faculty supervised note can be counted toward the GWR.

Although there is no limit on the number of writing courses any student may take, it is wise to space out writing courses so as not to create too onerous a burden in any single semester. Except upon consultation with the Vice Dean, a student must complete the GWR before the start of the student’s last semester at the Law School, unless the student intends to satisfy the requirement in the last semester by taking a course designated as a WI course (in other words, not a law journal note or a DR project). Students may not earn writing and skills credit for the same course or enterprise.

The Goal of the GWR

A course carries writing credit and will be designated as WI when the goal of the writing assignments is the development of writing proficiency. Students must write work that totals six-thousand (6,000) words exclusive of citations/footnotes. That work can be a single long piece or a sequence of writing assignments. The students complete multiple drafts of the assignment(s), and the professor provides individualized feedback to each student and opportunities to re-write. In either case, the final product(s) must demonstrate a facility in legal writing appropriate to upper-level law study.
Overview of Available Intensive Writing Course Options

Numerous courses offer students the ability to work on their legal analysis, research, and writing skills at a variety of levels. Students can build doctrinal knowledge and also work on their writing skills in a variety of different ways at the law school.

Professors have latitude in how they offer writing credits, whether optional or mandatory, and through one long piece of writing or multiple smaller pieces. The types of writing projects vary greatly within courses and reflect the different creativities and pedagogical goals of our faculty. Some professors have students write short research or reflection papers. Other professors may have students work on legislative drafting projects or simulation scenarios. Others use a modified seminar paper model. No matter the particular format, all courses that satisfy the GWR are clearly indicated on the Alpha schedule for each semester and the summer session.

There are a number of specialized courses and opportunities that regularly offer writing credit:

Seminars provide students with the ability to work in depth in a particular area of law. The small class size of seminars, no more than twenty (20) students, offers a unique opportunity for more extensive and thorough interaction with the professor. Depending on the course, students will work closely with the professor on drafts of an academic-style or response paper. Those paper topics are often generated individually by the student, with professor input. Students in seminars often have the opportunity to present their work to their classmates. Courses of this type are not specifically designated as seminars on the alpha schedule, but this description captures what most people mean by seminar. If a student desires this course experience, she should check the course description of a WI class to see if this is how the professor intends to teach the course.

Upper-level writing courses are, by design, heavily engaged in the writing process itself. Many of these courses discuss writing in the practice-based context. Several focus on a particular writing skill in practice (Advanced Brief Writing, Advanced Legal Research, Transactional Drafting). Others may allow students to reflect on previous writing experiences and to completely rewrite those documents using the particular skills taught in the courses (Advanced Legal Writing). Some courses may involve strengthening practice-based writing with overlays of interdisciplinary persuasive theories (e.g., Persuasion in Legal Writing). Each of the upper level writing courses are writing-intensive courses, meaning they will involve multiple drafts of documents, with opportunities for students to receive feedback from the professor on drafts.

Skills courses. Some skills courses are also writing courses. The best examples are the clinical courses, which involve a great deal of practice-based writing. Clinical courses also may offer optional writing-intensive credits. Look here for detailed descriptions of clinics and externships, including the location and work requirements of approved externship placements.

Directed research (“DR”) projects are individual projects taken on by students and supervised by a professor. There are limits to the number of students a professor may supervise in a given semester. Because of these limitations, students are advised to seek out a professor with expertise in the area of research as soon as possible. A student must seek permission from the Vice Dean to do a DR project with adjunct faculty and that permission is granted very sparingly.

Law Journals. Some students will elect to complete one (1) of their writing experiences by the completion of a law journal note or comment. Law journal writing involves in-depth research and analysis of a student-chosen topic, similar in some ways, to DR projects. In order to pursue this
option, the student must secure a faculty advisor who will supervise the student’s work over the course of the semester or year. A student must also be enrolled in a journal for at least two semesters. Students may also submit their completed work for publication consideration in their journals.

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General Information about the Upper Level Lawyering Skills Requirement (“Skills Requirement”)

Each student must earn a minimum of six (6) credits in designated skills courses as a condition of graduation. Courses that satisfy the Skills Requirement are designated with an “S” on the Alpha schedule. To be clear, students do not need to take six (6) courses that offer skills credit. Rather, students must take skills designated classes whose credit offerings equal six (6). For instance, a student who takes a single clinic that offers six (6) credits will satisfy the Skills Requirement as will a student who takes three (3) skills designated classes that each offer two (2) credits.

The Goal of the Skills Requirement

The Skills Requirement provides students with a substantial lawyering experience involving real or simulated clients. To qualify for a skills designation, a course, clinic, or practice externship must involve instruction in lawyering skills that is directly supervised by a professor or by a field supervisor. These courses are capped at no more than twenty-four (24) students and provide repeated opportunities to practice a skill or a sequence of skills and get individual feedback, and (if the course is graded) consider these skills performances as a portion of the grade. Students can review the rule in full, with more detailed descriptions of how skills performance instruction is provided in various types of offerings (simulation courses, doctrinal courses with skills components, clinics, externships) in Academic Rule 7 and Appendix C of the law school rules. Note that some offerings may fulfill both the Skills Requirement and the GWR, a student may not receive skills and writing credit for the same course or enterprise. It is, nevertheless, our recommendation that you take full advantage of the skills and writing course offerings and plan to pursue one or more lawyering skills courses, as well as intensive writing credit courses for the additional educational value they offer. Note also that first year courses do not fulfill this requirement, even if they feature some attention to skills.
Overview of available opportunities
Numerous courses, clinics, and externships offer instruction in lawyering skills; clinics, practicums, and externships also provide opportunities for supervised practice experience. You can build skills by enrolling in experiential lawyering courses as an upper level student.

Simulation courses concentrate on a particular skill (Negotiation or Persuasion), sequence of skills (Trial Advocacy), or an integrated immersion in the problem-solving, skills, and doctrine of a practice setting (Bankruptcy Workshop or Pre-Trial Litigation). Some courses will make use of real case materials or clients for a portion of the lawyering performances that are assigned. For most, simulated realistic lawyering problems are used to be sure that each student has opportunities to perform and be critiqued on the targeted skills.

Clinics/Practicums provide students with real client and case experience under the supervision of clinic faculty or adjunct faculty and in collaboration with other students. As third year students, you can represent a client in all phases of a case pursuant to the New Jersey Student Practice Rule. Most of our clinics are specialized by practice area.

Practice Externships allow students to work in civil or criminal law settings outside the law school under the supervision of practicing attorneys. Placements include legal services, prosecutors, public defenders, United States attorneys, state or federal government agencies, hospital or university counsel office, and many other locations. These placements may provide Skills Credit or writing credit at the discretion of the Director of Externships. To participate in a practice externship, students must be certified under the student practice rules of New Jersey or Pennsylvania.

Prerequisites and Recommendations
The Professional Responsibility course is a prerequisite for clinic, practicum, or externship, and the Evidence course is a prerequisite for students representing clients in court in either clinic or practice externship. We strongly recommend that you look ahead to the clinic or externship you are interested in and enroll in substantive law courses that will prepare you with respect to the doctrinal issues to be addressed in the clinic or externship.