

REFLECTING ON YOUR CLINICAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH USE OF A JOURNAL

As a participant in the Legal Assistance Project, you are required to keep a written journal and submit your entries to the clinic faculty every other week. The purpose of the journal is to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your experience as a new lawyer and to express the ideas and feelings that are generated by your participation in the clinic and representation of real clients. It is a good place for you to work through issues that arise in your cases or make some observations about what a particular experience meant in the larger scheme of things. It is also another tool that allows the clinic faculty to stay connected with each one of you and respond as needed to any concerns that you share.

A. Uses and Benefits of Journal Writing

- 1. Promotion of Reflective Behavior:** The journal allows a place for you to reflect about both the products and processes of learning. Journal writing can be a powerful tool for both immediate and long-term self-provided reflective feedback.
- 2. Encouragement of Self-Directed Learning:** A journal can be a place to identify your goals and objectives for your participation in the clinic. You can also use the journal to engage in and become more efficient at self-evaluation as you explore your strengths and weaknesses.
- 3. Improving Higher Order Thinking Skills:** Journal writing encourages you to interact with the materials under study in a deeper and more critical manner. The journal provides a place to articulate what is known as well as what is not known. Because of the limits of short-term

memory, in-depth thinking about any subject requires memorialization in written form to preserve a record and to enable you to engage in complex inquiry.

4. Improve Problem-Solving Skills: The use of a journal can help you work through a variety of problems that you might be called upon to solve or that you identify for yourselves.

5. Enhancing Observation Skills: Rewriting the raw data into a more complete journal entry not only provides a fresh opportunity for recall of additional data, but provides another opportunity to analyze the data.

6. Aiding Communication with your Faculty Supervisors: A journal is not a substitute for personal communication, but it can supplement in-person communication in meaningful ways. A journal entry gives you the opportunity to frame carefully a specific question or concern to which you would like a response from a faculty supervisor.

7. Relieving Stress: Journals can be, and often are, therapeutic. Students often write in their journals about an anxiety provoking experience and many find that by writing about their anxiety they are better able to deal with it.

B. The Specifics of Keeping Your Journal

1. How Should You Keep Your Journal?: You will be required to turn in at least one journal entry every other week beginning on Monday, January 16th (excluding the Monday of spring break), for a total of 7 entries. (1/16, 1/30, 2/13, 2/27, 3/19, 4/2, and final entry.) You may certainly submit more than 7 entries. Each journal entry must be the equivalent of at least one double-spaced, type-written page in length. Journal entries are due on Mondays. Please submit

your journal entries by e-mailing them to each supervising attorney (mcallaster@law.duke.edu, rice@law.duke.edu, and demeritt@law.duke.edu). Please date and put your name on each of your journal entries.

We will each read each of your entries and, when appropriate, make comments or respond to what you have written. Your journal entries will not be graded. There will only be an impact on your grade if you fail to turn in the required minimum number of journal entries.

There is no single best way to create journal entries. A good journal contains frequent entries and contains a mix of short and long entries. The more writing you do at a single sitting, the greater the chance of developing a thought or of finding a new one. A good journal is also organized in a way that is systematic and chronological.

2. How Should You Write? The point of the journal is to think on paper. Write in your own style rather than as you think a lawyer would write. As long as you and your supervisors can understand the points you are making, your journal entry is appropriately written.

3. Privacy: Absent your explicit permission, your faculty supervisors will not share your journal entries with any other person. Your journal is a private dialogue between you and the faculty supervisors. You are in complete control of what you let your supervisors read and we promise to keep strictly confidential all journal entries you share.

4. Getting Started: In your first journal entry (due August 29th), please think about and describe your goals and objectives for your participation in the clinic. If you wish, you may also describe what you are excited about in taking the clinic and what you are anxious about.

C. What are Some of the Topics You Might Cover?

The following is a list of suggestions for journal entries. Your journal will be most

useful to you when you write about events/topics that interest you, but nearly everyone, at one time or another, experiences writer's block. These suggestions may help you if you get stuck for a topic about which to write.

- The events of the week and what you learned from them;
- Patterns that you see emerging in the course of your clinical experience;
- Observations about the legal system;
- Personal reactions to your clinical experience;
- Exploration of ideas, theories, concepts or discussion topics raised in class;
- Reactions to clients, their families or to opposing parties.
- Interviewing problems or techniques--what worked, what didn't work, what would you do differently;
- Your perception of your talents and shortcomings as a soon-to-be lawyer, what you do well or poorly, how you are perceived, how you feel about your own performance;
- Personal reservations about this journal requirement;
- Ethics in practice: identify an ethical quandary or decision that occurred, explain the issue, how it was resolved, and whether you think the resolution was proper and why;
- The stress of having responsibility for making decisions about client cases;
- How to balance professional and personal lives;
- How to give guidance to clients while respecting client autonomy;
- How the clinic experience fits into your future plans, and what have you

learned that will help you make decisions about future employment;

- The place of honesty in relations with the court, clients, and other attorneys;
- How to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships with clients;
- Manipulation by clients;
- How it feels to make decisions where there is no right answer and often, insufficient data;
- Observations about how you might conduct yourself if you had a different role in the legal system: judge, clerk of court, other court personnel, opposing attorney;
- What it might be like to be in your client's shoes;
- Your frustrations with clients, the system, the clinic;
- Anything else that interests you or is important to you.

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