

BYU Among the Top Law Schools in the Nation for Externship Programs

In recent years, law schools across the country have seen a notable increase in the number of students participating in their externship programs. A new study published in the December issue of the *Clinical Law Review* examines characteristics of the law programs contributing to this growing trend.

According to data gathered by the American Bar Association (ABA) and the Law School Admissions Council in the 2008 Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools, Brigham Young University's J. Reuben Clark Law School and the University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law report student participation in their programs at 81 percent and 73 percent, which ranks them third and fourth in the nation, respectively, in participation rate. Only 43 law schools have more than 35 percent of their eligible students participating in field placements; 18 have more than 50 percent.

"Giving students learning experiences through practice-related externships is a valuable component of legal education and one that can and should be extended to virtually all law students," said James Backman, Stephen L. Richards Professor of Law at BYU and author of the study.

Backman found the national trend is due not only to increased student interest, but also to innovative program adjustments that allow for greater student participation. He reviewed data gathered by the ABA and Law School Admissions Council and conducted interviews with externship faculty and directors from the 43 schools with widespread externship participation. Backman then identified the following characteristics that contribute to a program's success:

- Special accommodations for summer externships,
- Widely dispersed geographical locations for externship placements,
- Approved placements with private law firms and for-profit corporate legal counsel positions,
- Reduced importance of classroom instruction through use of reflective journals and individual meetings between faculty and students,
- Use of equivalent means to satisfy the purpose of site visits, such as telephone interviews and other methods of evaluation.

The ABA modified its standard governing externships in 2005, allowing law schools to adopt many of these innovative program adjustments. According to the study, it is likely the number of students involved in externships will continue to significantly increase under the new standards.

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