Questions and Answers Sheet: LA 245—Supervised Legal Work Experience (SLWE) & LA 285—Internship

1. **What are these classes and why do I have to take them?** LA 245 is a mandatory component of the Paralegal & Legal Nurse Program, and LA 285 is a specialty elective, which means it is a discretionary choice class for the student. LA 245 is mandatory because an education which is entirely in the classroom does not fully equip the student to successfully transition to the workplace. Thus the purpose of LA 245 is to put the student in the workplace(s) so the student can apply his/her classroom learnings in the world of work, practice professional skills, observe other professionals at work, and otherwise prepare for his/her first professional opportunity post-graduation.

2. **How many college credits are these classes?** LA 245 and LA 285 can be taken in one or multiple credit increments. The student must complete a total of 8 credits of LA 245 prior to graduating in order for the student to receive his/her degree or certificate. The 8 credits can be taken all at once in one quarter or spread out over several quarters (ex., 1st quarter 2 credits, 2nd quarter 3 credits, 3rd quarter 3 credits, total =8 credits, etc.). LA 285 is a maximum of 3 credits, and can also be taken in one or multiple credit increments. LA 285 is designed to supplement LA 245. In other words for the student who wants more than 8 credits of field (office/professional) experience, the student can enroll in LA 285 for up to 3 additional credits of field experience. Those same credits of LA 285 are a specialty elective, so these credits assist the student in satisfying the credit requirements for the specialty elective portion of his/her degree or certificate. In sum, LA 285 is not required, but is an option for that student desiring more time in a professional office.

3. **What is the formula of work hours to college credits?** This formula is set by Washington State and is not negotiable. The formula is 33 hours of work in one quarter = one college credit. Since a Washington State college quarter is approximately 10.5 weeks in duration, a good approximation formula is 33/10 = 3.3 or rounding = 3.5. Thus if a student works about 3.5 hours per week in a professional setting for the duration of one college quarter the student will earn one college credit. The arithmetic to compute the hours of work from 1 to 8 credits using the above formula is straightforward.

4. **Am I paid for this professional experience?** No. By state regulation your pay as a student is the college credits you are earning. Thus the employer who takes you on as a student intern is not obligated to pay you a wage/salary. On the other hand if the employer chooses to pay you a wage/salary, you do not have to turn it down, but may accept the compensation.

5. **If I already have a job in a professional setting related to the law or in a law office, may I earn these college credits at my existing job?** Yes. So long as your job affords you the opportunity to gain meaningful exposure to professional level job duties, the answer to this question is yes.

6. **What do I have to do to earn these credits?** LA 245 and 285 are regular college classes. Thus you enroll for them just like any other college class, except you need the instructor/program coordinator’s signature on your registration form. Additionally the instructor will ask you to complete and sign a Memorandum of Agreement in which you state you will commit to doing the work necessary to earn the requisite credits. Additionally there will be reporting requirements and an employer evaluation submitted to the instructor.

7. **How do I find a field experience so as to satisfy these credit requirements?** You should treat finding your field experience just like a real job hunt, and search accordingly. Neither the college nor the instructor will find you a field experience, just like neither could be expected to find you a job. The instructor/program coordinator maintains some job hunt and internship work site data in his office, which you can use, as part of your search. Thus it is recommended that you, the student, prepare a resume, cover letter, examples of work product, etc., and start early and work methodically in order to secure a good field experience site for yourself.

8. **Can I earn all of the college credits in one site?** Yes, but it is recommended that you consider earning part of your credits in one professional setting, and the balance of your credits in another professional setting. This allows you to broaden your range of experience, your contacts, and gives you more insight into what kind of professional setting you enjoy and are most comfortable in.

9. **How am I to dress? Am I expected to behave like a professional? Am I expected to treat LA 245 and/or LA 285 like a real job?** Yes. If it is not already obvious, you should understand that these field experiences are critical to your future success. Many past graduates successfully launched their careers by making the most of their field experience time in an office. They did so by dressing appropriately, behaving in a dependable manner, which means showing up ready to work at the time you are scheduled to work. It also means showing characteristics of team work, initiative, discipline, professional emotional restraint, attention to detail, follow-through, etc.

10. **How is my work schedule arranged?** This is done in consultation with the employer/ volunteer work site. At the time you interview with a prospective work site you should candidly discuss the office’s expectations and your availability in terms of days and hours of availability, as well as any other factors which bear on the decision of whether the professional office should bring you on as either an employee or a volunteer intern.
11. What happens if I work at the job site between quarters? Can I accrue hours and apply those to earned college credits in the next quarter? Yes. You are encouraged not to adopt a “minimalist” attitude. In other words you are encouraged to see this field experience as a critical component to your future success, and to make every reasonable effort to maximize the opportunity with an enthusiastic and willingness to learn attitude. If you work between quarters, keep track of your hours, and then in consultation with the class instructor/program coordinator, convert those hours into college credits, using the above formula, and register for those credits in the next available college quarter.

12. Is it better to spread the 8 credits of LA 245 and/or the 3 credits of LA 285 out over several quarters or take them all in one quarter? Of course the final decisions about your education rests with you as an adult. In making such decisions you will use criteria such as your budget and income, your energy level, relative commitment to personal excellence, time and task management skills, means of transportation, commitments to other classes, family members, another employer, yourself, etc. Thus the schedule for one student will not be the same as for another student. You are strongly encouraged not to make comparisons with other students—each student’s situation is unique to him or her—and thus comparisons are usually futile and enervating. There will be student situations which dictate that all the work experience credits are earned in one quarter and all in one professional location. But in general it is best to spread the credits out over several quarters and several work sites, if possible. In general, after graduation, a student’s resume will look stronger if he/she has worked over many months, even if for only a few hours per week, and at several different work sites. Such a resume communicates to the typical employer a certain depth of experience and broader exposure to the profession, which are generally viewed positively by most professionals. Most work sites will be disinclined to assign meaningful work to a person who is only going to be at the office for 10-11 weeks—that is simply too short a period of time to become truly familiar with office routine, clients, etc.

Good Luck!