

Time Expectations for Fieldwork Classes

The law school expects that a student will normally spend 1-3 hours outside of class preparing for every one hour in class, and I personally expect my students to work in the “high half” of this range, that is, 2-3 hours outside of class preparing for every one hour in class. This means that a three-credit course carries the expectation of 9-12 hours per week of student time (3 hours inside of class and 6-9 hours outside of class). In my three-credit courses where fieldwork plays an important role, I usually translate this formula into something like the following as a normal weekly expectation, though of course there will always be some play in the joints:

In Class:	2 hours per week in class
Outside of Class:	7 - 10 hours per week outside of class
	– 1 hour per week meeting with team and/or professor
	– 1 - 3 hours per week reading/writing for class
	– 3 - 8 hours per week on field work
Total in and out:	9 - 12 hours per week

In this course I will ask you to keep track of your time. Believe me, I know time sheets can be a real pain. On the other hand, many lawyers have to keep track of their time in practice, as I am sure you know – often to the tenth of an hour. The requirement may have to do with charging billable hours to paying clients, or it may have to do with administering a grant from a public interest funder, or it may simply be that the firm or organization the lawyer works for is trying to figure out how lawyers are spending their most precious resource. In any case, time-keeping requirements are widespread. So consider it good practice.

Besides, there is another reason that I think it will be in your own self-interest for all of you to keep good records of your time and how you spend it. This other good reason has to do with my own expectations about time.

The truth is, that although intellectually I understand and endorse the above time expectations, I actually have quite a hard time accepting them! For instance, I hate thinking that 3-8 hours might be all you can put into field work in a week, or that because of your fieldwork obligations you don't have time to read many wonderful pages of stuff that I would like to assign. To make matters worse, I also tend to inflate what it is possible for a human being to achieve in 3-8 hours. Not to mention that I would rather not face the fact that sometimes other courses or outside obligations will have to take priority in any case.

Why do I have such a hard time with all this? Two main reasons, I think. First, the fieldwork we undertake in this course is significant. If the projects were trivial, or if we only did work with community partners that didn't really need us all that much, it might be different. But projects that focus on important issues, with partner groups that are both deserving and under-resourced, are often the kinds of projects that could use not only the full 3-8 hours per week that I outline above, but a lot more. Under these circumstances, my desires as a teacher can begin to expand unrealistically without my realizing it. A second reason why I have a hard time accepting the above limits is that I am an inveterate optimist about what it takes to get things done, so on the front end of a project I often think that it will be easier and quicker (for me and for everyone else) to do things than actually turns out to be the case.

I am telling you all this because I hope it will help you understand that my motivation in setting out clear time expectations and requiring that you track your time is to help impose a two-way discipline -- a discipline that operates on you, but on me as well. I want to be sure you put in the time that is expected, and I want to be sure that my own assessments of your effort and achievement are made within the ground rules set here, and not on the basis of an unconsciously expanded standard. Attached to this handout are weekly time sheets for the semester.

Ways a student might spend time outside of class in a fieldwork course

(1) **Preparing for class** by doing readings and other assignments related to class

(2) **Doing the fieldwork.** Listed below are examples of fieldwork activities. Note that these are not intended to suggest a linear sequence. A good project will usually involve some of these activities circling back on each other in repeat spirals and feedback loops.

a. Listening and learning

- find out about your community group/site – its history, structure, issues, etc.
- hang around informally with your community group to build understanding
 - attend committee or membership meetings
 - volunteer in some helpful way not directly related to your project
 - talk with staff or members
- listen to a person from the community tell about his or her life, issues, experiences, etc.

b. Researching law or facts

- find what questions your community partner has related to your project
- articulate questions of your own about the issues and realities you are finding
- carry out research to get answers to priority questions
 - do standard legal research related to the questions
 - locate social science and other empirical research related to the questions
 - conduct your own original research (interviews, counting, observing, mapping, etc.)
- include your community partner in the research if possible and desirable

c. Educating and communicating

- Communicate your research results to the group and its members in creative, appropriate ways
 - give an in-person report to a staff member or to a meeting of the group
 - prepare a written report for the group (or maybe visual, theatrical, musical, etc.?)
- Put on a public educational event or activity (this means plan, practice, conduct, and document)
- Prepare by finding out about educational methods appropriate for your target audience
- Evaluate your report or event (include input from others)

d. Taking action

- Work with others to identify group or individual action steps based on what has been learned
- Help to carry out appropriate action

e. Planning all the things you do on the project (see above and below)

f. Reflecting on all the things you do or learn, and how they relate to each other

- Ask yourself hard questions about the project, the world, your role, etc.
- Observe, compare, contrast, predict, analyze, synthesize, choose, propose, sum up
- Consider how course readings or class discussions relate to what you are finding
- Organize a reflection or assessment session with others involved in your project

g. Documenting all the things you and others do on the project

- Take still photos or record audio/video of activities (getting consent)
- Draw pictures, charts, diagrams, maps
- Get written or other recorded reactions from participants
- Keep copies of written materials (correspondence, lesson plans, fliers, memos, etc.)
- Write regularly in your project journal, and do it while things are still fresh

Name: _____ For week of Mon. _____ to Sun. _____

Time Record for Fieldwork Course

Short, sweet and approximate are the operative words here. Turn this time sheet in by Monday of each week. Include time in class, class preparation, and field work. For more on what counts as "fieldwork," see the back of the handout on Time Expectations.

Day	Activity	Time Spent
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

(The expectation is that in a normal week you will spend 9-12 hours on this course. Include time spent in class, preparing for class, travel to and from your project site, time spent filling out this form, etc. Please do your own calculation of the total hours.)

TOTAL: _____