

Criminal Justice Internship:
Official Court Reporters Office

Recently, I completed an internship with the Official Court Reporters Office at the Santa Rosa County Courthouse. My job as an intern involved many different tasks. I was introduced to the CourtSmart system, which is a computer system that digitally records court proceedings onto video. The CourtSmart system is used to tag the names of all the people involved in a court proceeding such as: defendants, judges, state attorneys, defense attorneys, witnesses, and probation officers. The case number is tagged, as well as the main actions of the proceeding. An example of a main action that needs to be tagged in a criminal trial is a cross-examination or a direct-examination occurs. It is important to tag correctly while using CourtSmart. When a transcript is ordered, it is easier for my supervisor to find the correct case when the name and case number are correct. Once the name and case number are located, the case is either copied onto a CD or transcribed onto paper. Sometimes the person ordering the transcript requests a CD copy and a paper transcript. Besides tagging the proceedings, another task that I was required to do was monitor the proceedings. It was important to make sure all of the equipment, such as the microphones and video cameras, was functioning properly. Microphone and video checks were performed in the morning before court proceedings started. Also, when monitoring the proceedings, it is important to make sure that anyone that is speaking is talking into a microphone. Some attorneys will walk around when trying a case, and if the attorney is speaking loud and clear, their voice is clearly audible.

If the microphone is not picking up their voice, a call needs to be made into the courtroom to inform the clerk that the attorney needs to speak louder. Judges would forget to turn their sidebar microphones back on after turning them off. Other instances involving microphones included defendants and witnesses not speaking into the microphone. If any of these instances occurred, it was important to call into the courtroom as soon as possible, so that the record correctly reflected what was said in the courtroom.

While interning with the Official Court Reporters Office, I gained valuable knowledge from the first hand experience. I was able to apply some of the necessary skills that I learned in the classroom, such as using correct grammar when using CourtSmart and proofreading transcripts. As mentioned before, it was very important to make sure that anything that is being tagged in CourtSmart is correctly spelled. If a person calls and orders a transcript on John Doe, case number 00-0001-CT, then it becomes much harder to find a case if there is misspelling in the information. The person ordering the transcript would most likely know the date of the case and the judge, but that doesn't always narrow the search down completely. The person who is searching for the case would have to watch that proceeding all over again, which can be extremely time-consuming. I was also able to apply and develop my social skills. While interning at a courthouse, I interacted with many judges, judge's assistants, attorneys, and clerks. I learned to interact with others in a professional manner. I also acquired many other skills throughout the internship. One skill I acquired is the ability to type faster. I have not taken keyboarding classes, and did not realize the benefits of being able to type quickly. I started off at a slow pace, but after a few weeks of tagging misdemeanor arraignments

(the defendant's names and case numbers are often called quickly), I was typing much faster. The most important skill that I acquired is the skill of understanding the criminal justice system. It is a complex system involving many different people and processes. After experiencing more court proceedings, I developed a greater understanding of the criminal justice system that can be applied to many professions in the field.

My personal goals in the internship were to gain a firsthand knowledge of the criminal justice system and to build rapport in a professional environment. I was able to achieve both of my goals. I felt that I had adequate knowledge of the criminal justice system from my studies, but the first-hand experience of court proceedings helped me learn much more than I expected. I found that the knowledge I gained from reading textbooks is important, but work experience taught me how to apply knowledge from the classroom. I also never expected building such a great rapport with my supervisor. Although, I did not receive a job from the experience, my supervisor and I still keep in touch and she plans on keeping me informed on any job offers that may arise. My supervisor praised me on my ability to be a quick learner and on being a great help to the office. Many cases that were handled during the proceedings that I monitored and tagged on CourtSmart were being transcribed and my supervisor was able to find my tags quickly. The only problem that arose while I was performing my tasks was that the CourtSmart system froze and I did not know how to start it back up. I immediately notified my supervisor and she was able to get the system back on track. There is a backup system to CourtSmart that records audio, so thankfully none of the record was lost.

The benefits of the internship were: good rapport with coworkers, a great understanding of the criminal justice system, and professional work experience. As mentioned earlier, I was able to build good rapport with others, which could result in future job opportunities. The connection I made with my coworkers from the internship could result in a job offer in the future. A great understanding of the criminal justice system is essential for anyone entering the field. When I begin to interview for jobs, my understanding of the criminal justice system will be a valuable asset. I gained some professional work experience from completing this internship, and this experience shows other employers that I am capable of applying myself in a professional environment. When employers view resumes they look for previous experience. This internship will show possible future employers that I am able to perform in a work environment, just as well as I perform in the classroom.

My internship experience at the Official Court Reporters Office was excellent. I was able to monitor and tag misdemeanor/traffic arraignments, violation of parole hearings, dependency trials, delinquency trials, criminal trials, shelter hearings, domestic violence injunctions, and delinquency hearings. Viewing these court proceedings on a regular basis allowed me to understand what happens in each of these proceedings. I also was able to completely watch the murder trial of State of Florida v. Brandon Ward. On serious criminal matters, there is almost always a court reporter present, so I was unable to monitor and tag the trial. The trial was recorded by CourtSmart, and I was able to watch between other proceedings. It was extremely interesting and I am glad that I was able to experience a criminal trial first-hand. My supervisor was also very adamant on making sure I had plenty of interesting things to do. This internship is very helpful in

showing students what part different criminal justice occupations play in the court system. Students can view state attorneys, public defenders, private attorneys, probation officers, social workers, law enforcement, and judges. Students will acquire knowledge of court proceedings, social skills, and typing skills. Students will interact with other court reporters, court administration personnel, attorneys, judges, judge's assistants, clerks, defendants, petitioners, and respondents. The internship also had an impact on job habit improvement. My supervisor was with me almost at all times. If I was performing a task incorrectly, she was very helpful in showing me the correct way to do it. Performing a job correctly and learning as you go leads to good habits and work ethic.

The University of West Florida Criminal Justice Program prepared me by teaching me about the judicial system, so I was aware of most of the actions occurring in the courtroom. The UWF Criminal Justice Program is conducted very professionally, so I am used to showing up on time, being respectful, and dressing in an appropriate manner. I was also given the email address to my supervisor before I started, so I was able to ask her any questions concerning the internship. The UWF Criminal Justice System can better prepare students for an internship by offering more class examples of how to apply classroom knowledge to the real world. I would strongly advise future interns to go about the work as if it is your real job. A bad attitude or inappropriate behavior can prevent an applicant from securing a good job in the future.