

# Northwestern

---

## PRITZKER SCHOOL OF LAW

### Senior Research Rules

The Owen L. Coon/James A. Rahl Senior Research Program allows third-year law students to conduct in-depth, supervised legal research leading to a paper of publishable quality and length. Students work one-on-one with a supervising faculty member on developing the research topic, researching the topic, and writing the paper.

To participate in the program, students must be eligible as noted in these rules, draft a proposal, and find a faculty member to supervise the project.

#### 1. Eligibility

- a. A student must have completed four semesters of full-time work toward a Northwestern JD before participating in Senior Research for credit. In exceptional cases, the Director may authorize a student to enroll in Senior Research after completing only three semesters of full-time work toward a Northwestern JD.
- b. Students on academic probation may be authorized to do Senior Research at the discretion of the Director of Senior Research, but in no event will an application be accepted from a student on academic probation after the commencement of the fifth semester.
- c. In exceptional cases, and only with the prior approval of the Director, Senior Research may consist of an expansion of work previously completed, even if academic credit was received for that work. Without the Director's special approval, Senior Research may be pursued as part of work that will also lead to a thesis counting towards another degree. A Senior Research project must be a discrete research project and in no circumstance may be a part of a larger project for which other credit towards a Northwestern JD is being simultaneously obtained.

#### 2. Credit Hours

- a. The number of credits a student may receive for a project is dependent on the nature of the work and scope of the research/writing involved in the project. Thus, students should describe the nature of the project in detail when submitting a proposal. The Rules and Regulations limit the number of Senior Research credits permitted in a single term and in a student's law school career (see Rule 3).
- b. Senior Research projects undertaken for at least four (4) credits in a single semester will satisfy the Research Writing graduation requirement.

- c. One semester (or term) projects must be taken for exactly four (4) credit hours, subject to approval by the Director of additional hours up to a maximum of eight (8).
- d. Projects combining more than a single semester should normally be for four (4) hours in each semester (or term). The supervising faculty member may approve a lesser number of hours in either semester (or term), but such projects may not be approved for less than two (2) credit hours in either semester (or term) or for less than six (6) credit hours overall. The Director may approve a greater number of hours, up to a maximum total of 12 hours in the student's law school career, inclusive of credits earned through Independent Study, except as specified in part (e) of this rule.
- e. A student may receive a total of 12 hours of Senior Research credit in a single semester only if both the supervising faculty member and the student are exclusively devoting a full-time semester to the project.

### 3. Limitations on Multiple Semester or Separate Senior Research Projects

- a. Senior Research may be conducted in the fall or spring semesters only. The maximum number of semesters in which a student can earn credit for Senior Research is two (2).
- b. No student may enroll for more than one Senior Research project to be conducted in the same term or semester.
- c. A student who has pursued a Senior Research project for credit in a given semester may not pursue a second, separate Senior Research project in a subsequent term or semester unless he/she obtains the following prior to fourteen (14) days after the first day of classes of the semester (or term) in which he/she seeks permission to enroll for a second project:
  - 1. Certification by the supervising faculty member of the first project that the first project has been fully completed, that a grade has been given for the first project, and that the supervising faculty member of the first project recommends the student as especially deserving for additional Senior Research experience; and
  - 2. Approval by the Director, who shall first satisfy that the permission sought will not deprive another student, who has not theretofore done Senior Research, of an opportunity to pursue such work.
  - 3. Separate projects completed in separate semesters must be completed with a minimum of four (4) credits allocated to each project.

### 4. Supervising Faculty Members

- a. Senior Research is intended to foster a close working relationship between the student and one or more member of the Law School faculty. Every Senior Research project is supervised by at least one primary faculty member throughout the semester. The final paper is read by the primary faculty supervisor and a second faculty member (the "second reader").
- b. The student is responsible for finding a supervising faculty member. We recommend students pursue faculty members with whom they already have a working relationship and/or who have

expertise or interest in the proposed area of research. Students who need assistance choosing a supervising faculty member may make an appointment with the Associate Dean of Curriculum and Director of Senior Research, [Zach Clopton](#).

- c. Adjunct faculty members are eligible to supervise Senior Research projects as long as the second reader is a member of the residential clinical or research faculty.
- d. As the educational and research benefits of the program depend heavily upon the student and professor sharing a mutual interest in a specific area of research, the supervising faculty member concerned necessarily has final discretion as to acceptance of a particular applicant, the research topic, and the procedures and methods to be followed, subject to these rules and to the rules of the Law School. Where possible, priority will be given to students who have not otherwise had an opportunity in Law School to do substantial supervised upper-class written work.
- e. A supervising faculty member may supervise more than two Projects in a semester or term **ONLY WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE DIRECTOR OR THE DEAN.**
- f. The Director shall compile annually and distribute to the faculty, no later than the first week of the academic year, a report on the participants (students and supervising faculty members) and research topics for the preceding academic year.

## 5. Proposal Submission Process, Deadline, and Review Process

- a. All Senior Research projects must be approved by the Director of Senior Research. The form for Senior Research registration is available online on the [Registration](#) webpage. The student shall submit a completed form which will automatically route to the supervising faculty member and the Director for approval. The form shall be submitted as soon as possible, and in no event later than 5:00 PM on the first day of class.
- b. Projects designed to include work for credit in more than one semester or term must be clearly registered as such and approved by the Director in accordance with Rule (5)(a) above. Extension of a project originally intended for one semester or term into an additional semester or term is not favored and can be done only with the approval of the Director upon a showing that substantial and unexpected work is necessary for completion of the project.

## 6. Enrollment/Withdrawal

- a. After receiving approval from the supervising faculty member and the Director, the Office of the Law Registrar will enroll you in the Senior Research Program. Enrollment for Senior Research takes places on Friday after Round 2 bidding ends, and then periodically until the end of the second week of the term. Students will be charged 25 bidding points per credit hour of Senior Research conducted in the Fall and/or Spring semester.
- b. In order to withdraw from Senior Research, a student must submit a withdrawal form to the Registrar no later than the Friday of the fourth week of the semester or term in which the credit was to be earned. The withdrawal form must be signed by the supervising faculty member and the Director. Any requests for withdrawal after this date must be approved by the Dean or

Dean's designate and, if approved, will be recorded by a "W" grade on the student's academic records and transcript.

## 7. Conduct of the Work

The work must be conducted in accordance with the following requirements:

- a. Direct supervision of each participating student by one or more members of the Law School faculty (see rules in Part 4).
- b. The student must attend frequent, individual meetings of a substantial nature with the supervising faculty member to discuss the work. These meetings must include a regular, weekly one-on-one meeting between the student and the supervising professor. The weekly meeting is to be held in accordance with a pre-arranged schedule. These meetings may be conducted remotely (e.g., via teleconference or videoconference) if the supervising faculty member agrees in advance to this arrangement. A minimum of twelve (12) such weekly meetings should be held in each semester a Senior Research project is in process. For projects that involve work when classes are not in session, there must be at least one meeting each week during that period.
- c. Completion of one of the following by the student:
  1. A paper of at least law review comment or article length (a minimum of 7,000 words) which has gone through a minimum of three drafts (including the final submission), two of which were critically reviewed in detail by the supervising faculty member, and revised by the student after such review;
  2. A program of supervised field study of substantial scope and difficulty, with a detailed written report of findings and conclusions, reviewed critically by the supervising faculty member and revised at least once by the student after such a review; or
  3. A program of approved interdisciplinary study in one or more other departments of the University, conducted in compliance with these rules, and a written report of this study as under (c)(2) of this rule.
- d. Review and approval of the final draft of the required paper or report by the supervising faculty member and a second faculty reader. An oral examination may also be required. If the supervising faculty member is a member of the adjunct faculty, the second faculty reader must be a member of the faculty.

## 8. Due Date

Senior Research project papers or reports are due on the date established by the supervising faculty member, but not later than three days before the grade due date of the semester in which the credit is earned. For good cause, a student may request to submit the paper at a later date. Such a request must be in writing, addressed to the supervising faculty member, and must set forth the student's reasons for the request. The supervising faculty member may:

- a. Deny the request.

- b. Authorize a delay in the submission of the paper or report until any date prior to three days before the grade due date of the semester in which the credit is earned.
- c. Recommend, with the concurrence of the Director of Senior Research, that the Dean authorize a delay in the submission of the paper or report, to three days before the grade due date of the semester in which the credit is earned.

## 9. Intensive Research Semester Option

Students doing Senior Research may apply to spend an entire Intensive semester doing academic research under the supervision of a faculty member if both the supervising faculty member and the student are exclusively devoting a full-time semester to the project. Students may receive a maximum of 12 credits for the project and must follow the guidelines set forth in this document. Students may not enroll in more than one Intensive semester during their law school career, whether it is Practicum, Clinic, or Research. Students who participate in Intensive semester may not enroll in any other coursework during that semester. Students interested in applying for this intensive semester experience should contact [Zach Clopton](#).

## 10. Limitations on Outside Work

Experience has shown that successful participation in the Senior Research program requires continuous and substantial expenditure of time. For the protection of program and student alike, therefore, the faculty recommends that participants devote their full time and effort to Law School work while enrolled in the program, undertaking no outside employment or other substantial outside time commitment. In meritorious cases, however, the supervising faculty member may authorize up to five (5) hours per week, of outside work, provided that more than ten (10) hours of outside work may be permitted only in extraordinary circumstances, taking into account the nature of the job, the student's total work load, and all other circumstances relevant to whether the student's ability to do the Senior Research project will be impaired.

## 11. Seminars

Because of the difficulty of accommodating the writing of substantial papers for seminars while engaged in the Senior Research program, participants are advised to avoid taking such seminars in the same semester. If it appears that a seminar must be taken in the same semester as a Senior Research project, the student should consult in advance of the beginning of the semester both with the supervising faculty member and with the seminar instructor concerned.

## 12. Grading

- a. All Senior Research projects receiving a final grade of A+ will be awarded "Senior Research honors," which will be reflected on the student's transcript.

## Contacts

- [Zach Clopton](#), Associate Dean of Curriculum and Director of Senior Research
- [Office of the Law Registrar](#)