Focus Area Information for Students

Upon the recommendation of the Curriculum Committee, in Spring 2015, the Faculty approved a pilot measure that would allow students, at their option, to organize courses taken after the first year in one or more approved curricular focus areas.

This notification is intended to provide information about how students may organize their course of study according to approved focus areas, as explained below. If you have questions, we ask that you contact your faculty advisor, who will also be provided with information about the implementation of the focus areas.

The rationale for identifying focus areas includes: (1) supporting the student advisement process by identifying courses that bear a relationship to one another and which students may wish to study in depth; (2) serving as a vehicle for the law school’s curricular planning; and (3) demonstrating to potential employers that a graduate has organized his or her studies around a particular area of legal practice and taken advantage of CUNY’s particular strength in that area.

The focus areas were developed according to the following criteria:

(1) Focus areas were chosen in topics in which there is significant employment opportunity, student interest, and faculty depth and experience.

(2) So that students completing a focus area have exposure both to doctrinal and experiential learning in the subject area, each focus area includes the following categories of courses:

- at least two options for a “Second/Third-Year Practicum,” which includes Lawyering Seminar III offerings, and also approved internships, approved student fellowships with a CUNY law center; and/or participation in the moot court competition and redrafting of the brief on an approved subject.\(^1\)
- at least two clinic options;
- at least five upper-level doctrinal course offerings.\(^2\)

(3) The number of required upper-level electives varies according to the focus area. However, to complete a given focus area, in addition to taking one Second/Third-Year Practicum and one clinic, students (with one exception\(^3\)) are required to take at least three of the upper-level electives offered for the focus area. Please note, however, that the law school may not be able to offer all of the listed electives in a focus area in any given year and the listing of an elective in a focus area does not imply that the course will be offered every year.

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\(^1\) If a student seeks to use an approved internship or moot court competition to satisfy the Second/Third-Year Practicum for a focus area, the student is still required to complete a Lawyering Seminar III. The requirements for

\(^2\) Some of these courses may involve existing requirements for all students but are included to show how completing a particular required course contributes to a student’s depth in a focus area.

\(^3\) The Criminal Law and Justice focus area requires that students enroll in both Criminal Procedure I and II, and that they take an additional two elective courses.
(4) To maximize flexibility, an internship for credit in a focus area, if approved by a faculty member as relevant, may count either as one of the upper-level elective options or as a Second/Third-Year Practicum, but the same internship may not count twice. To qualify as a Second/Third-Year Practicum, the internship must be for at least three credits and the work must be comparable to a Lawyering Seminar III course. To qualify as an upper-level elective, the internship must be for at least two credits.

The Faculty approved the following focus areas:

- Community Development, Housing, and Economic Justice
- Criminal Law and Justice
- Family and Children’s Rights
- Gender and Sexuality
- Health, Disability, and Elder Law
- Immigration / International Human Rights
- Social Justice, Equality, and Civil Rights
- Solo and Small Firm Practice / Community-Based Legal Services
- Urban Environmental Justice
- Workers Rights, Employment, and Labor Law

Courses designated under each focus area appear in the list attached to this notification. Please note that there is some overlap among the courses so that a number of courses qualify under more than one focus area. **It is anticipated that the list of courses offered within a focus area will change over time as course offerings in the curriculum change.** Accordingly, the Curriculum Committee in consultation with the Office of Academic Affairs will undertake an annual review of courses and update the list as needed.

Students can also craft their own focus areas based on the criteria set out above. In addition, students can request exceptions or variations based on their individual needs. Both crafting of individual focus areas and requests for exceptions should be approved first by a faculty advisor, and ultimately by the Academic Dean. Faculty advisors will work closely with the student; the Academic Dean will generally defer to the faculty advisor’s approval for exceptions, while making sure fairly consistent standards are being applied.

During the pilot period, a student’s successful completion of a focus area (passing grades in all the requisite courses) will be documented using a form signed by the student’s faculty advisor and countersigned by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs or Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs.