DATE AGENCY DESCRIPTION UPDATED: 8/16/14

NAME OF AGENCY: Montana Innocence Project

ADDRESS: UMT Law School - Room 158

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CONTACT PERSON: Keegan Flaherty, Director of Operations  PHONE: 243-6698

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AGENCY WEBSITE: www.mtinnocenceproject.org

STUDENT PREFERENCE: BSW or MSW student

A. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AGENCY SETTING

Founded in June 2008 by a committed group of public officials, attorneys, journalists and professors, the Montana Innocence Project (MTIP) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to exonerating the innocent and preventing wrongful convictions. We provide charitable legal and investigative assistance to Montana prisoners who pass our rigorous screening. While physical evidence such as DNA is used to advance many claims, MTIP also accepts cases where DNA evidence is not available. In addition to MTIP’s casework, we also advocate for public policy reforms that will prevent wrongful convictions and work to educate Montanans across the state.

Our small staff and dedicated volunteers screen, investigate and litigate innocence claims through the Innocence Clinic we operate in affiliation with the University of Montana School of Law and School of Journalism. Through this interdisciplinary clinic, law, journalism, paralegal and criminology students assist our casework while gaining hands-on training, a wide range of skills, and a strong understanding of our justice system.

B. DESCRIPTION OF CLIENT GROUP

The Montana Innocence Project works with Montana inmates who are innocent of the crimes for which they have been convicted. Clients have been convicted of a felony crime in a Montana state or federal court, completed trial, sentencing, and direct appeals, and are not currently being represented by an attorney or have access to a public defender.
C. LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Students have the opportunity to assist the Montana Innocence Project in four areas:

1) Researching and implementing an Exoneree Exit Plan;
2) Work with our Legal Director to screen and build cases;
3) Develop a grant research procedure and assist with grant writing; and
4) Assist with statewide policy initiatives.

D. EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

The student will be expected to approach their work with a willingness to learn work with other interns and staff to further Montana Innocence Project's mission. They are able to work well independently, take initiative, and manage time efficiently. Students must be able to uphold the program’s strict confidentiality policy and follow Montana Innocence Project policies and procedures. Finally, they must have a passion for social justice and be able to express that passion to others.