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Final Impact Report
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Summer of Justice and Law

After a very hectic and nerve racking application process in the spring, I was offered and accepted my position as a law clerk within the Felony Trial Division of the Cook County State Attorney’s Office in early May. Before entering the position I couldn’t help but feel out of sorts, overwhelmed, and somewhat unqualified to take on such an excruciating position. As I would later learn the position itself is typically filled by law school students or at the very least upperclassmen pursuing prelaw studies. After only one year of undergraduate studies and being one of the younger recipients of the Badger Reach Fellowship Award it was rather easy to be slightly anxious about this new opportunity. All the same, I looked forward to the opportunity and the challenge before me as one where I could truly learn and make a difference.

Starting my position on May 30th, I was immediately thrown into the fast paced courtroom atmosphere and the sometimes chaotic office life. After making the two and a half hour commute to the Circuit Court of Cook County, I would typically start my day in the office as myself and my two assistant state attorneys prepared for the cases set to be called for the day. Upon gather all of our materials for the day we would then go to the courtroom at around 9:30. Once in the courtroom, I would set up the computer records system, record the present police officers waiting to testify, continue to review case by case materials, and assist my attorneys with
anything they need to prepare for the day. At about 10:00 court would begin session as the
honorable Judge Lacy would take the bench. Dealing with cases from possession of controlled
substances (illegal drugs) to first degree murder, my assistant state attorneys and I would strictly
deal with felony offender charges. Given the severity of the cases we were prosecuting, it was
incredibly interesting to watch my attorneys litigate, make agreements, talk to witnesses, and the
relationships they had with the judge, court officials, and the defense attorneys. Depending on
the day we would be in court for as little as an hour and a half to as long as five hours. After
court my attorneys and I would return to the office where I would review any new cases, create
discovery packets for the defense, review files, complete minor investigative work, watch body
cam or dashboard footage, make copies, and ultimately complete any task that was requested by
my assistant state attorneys.

One of the greatest aspects of this position was the promise each day offered. Each day
was different than the one before and offered a different scope into the daily lives of Americans
in urban environments. No one case is the exact same and each day presented the opportunity to
facilitate law, justice, security, and order to a city that has long been wrecked by violence, drugs,
gang activities, and murder. I never exactly had one specific overall task, but instead everyday
was a task in itself to better my city and the communities facing so much hardship.

Personally, I had an incredible experience being able to delve into complex and current
issues that are gripping not only the Chicago area, but urban America. Coming from a
Chicagoland suburb I never faced many of the issues that I witnessed everyday while being a law
clerk. To say the least the town I grew up in is a “bubble wrapped” town with low violence and a
wealthy population that isn’t challenged by widespread unemployment, violence, gangs,
shootings, and diminishing opportunities. This internship allowed me to make myself uncomfortable and challenged me to fully understand and grasp the present state of our urban jungles. This interconnectedness I was able to establish with those facing unfortunate conditions and the community allowed me to recognize the severity of our present situation. The culture shock I experienced was just one of the many factors that contributed to my amazing law clerkship.

The shock I experienced further translated into the law practice itself. After establishing myself I came to recognize some of the minor malpractices in the Chicago Police Department. Basic traffic stops or police stops in numerous situations led to unlawful searching and seizing of an individual. From finding unlawful weapons to possession of controlled substances, these practices were blatantly performed in an attempt to target individuals in these deprived areas. As much as the media may discuss police malpractice and racial bias in law enforcement, I do believe there is an underlying racial factor in some police actions. It was hard for me to ignore this fact as almost everyone facing prosecution would be of a minority group. This fact has long puzzled me as I grappled with the state of urban America and the manifestation of horrid conditions in these poorly supported areas that face major crime activity.

In the same instance, I was able to grapple with the dedication and hard work that goes into every case and everyday as men and women uphold and protect the well-being of the citizens of Illinois. While I did take note of some malpractice, I was more than impressed with the daily efforts of the assistant state attorneys, police officers, court officials, and all law enforcement as they attempt to safeguard the community. I do not believe I have been around as selfless of people as they pursue a thankless profession for the well-being of every citizen.
My advice to anyone who would seek to take this position in the future would be to always approach every day as a new opportunity to do good. The work is sometimes difficult to handle and the process for each case is often months and/or years in the making. Through a rugged determination and an open mind to grasp the entirety of the justice system any person who is committed will thrive. It is often fast paced, but that taught me to learn quickly and to further develop a focus for every word. Absorb everything about the judicial process on a daily basis. Some days may feel long, but remember that with each day you go to work to protect and defend the well-being of all citizens. There is a bit of learning curve, especially with the legal language, but with a determined attitude it is rather easy to pick up and there are resources and people to help every step of the way.

Lastly, my own take aways from this experience was that of a life change. This job changed so much of how I look at life and reassured my dedication and commitment to public service. As a freshman in college I initially felt overwhelmed with the position, but I quickly came to love that same feeling. I was the youngest law clerk in the entire office and because of that inexperience and youth I pushed myself that much hard to be the best. Youth and inexperience wouldn’t contain my efforts as I quickly thrived in this fast paced environment. I feel that my own short term and long term goals for my own pursuits in public service and law can be whichever path I choose to take as now every opportunity seems within my grasp. This experience humbled me like no other and changed scope of the world. I try to make myself uncomfortable everyday in order to understand what I may not fully grasp. This internship allowed to do just that. I feel as though I have grown an exponential amount from this opportunity and that I was able to make a difference with my time spent and my daily efforts to
improve my city. None of this would be possible without Badger Reach, the University of Wisconsin, and my fantastic coworkers in Felony Trial Division. For that I am forever thankful to have received this opportunity to not only make a difference for others, but to have learned and to have been enlightened through my work.