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Amanda Barba '15



Richard Rogers '17



Samantha Yager '16



Andrew DeMasters '16



Kelly Barrett '15

A summer in the public interest

Carrying on a proud SUNY Buffalo tradition of working in the public interest, nearly two dozen students invested their summer in government and nonprofit work. Many did so with the support of the Buffalo Public Interest Law Program, which awards grants to support students who work unpaid internships.

Their jobs and the experiences they had range widely, but they report one common thread: They remain committed to using the law as an instrument of seeking justice and improving lives.

Among those whose work was supported by BPILP:

At the New Jersey attorney general's office, **Amanda Barba '15** helped represent the Division of Child Protection and Permanency.

Much of her summer, she says, was spent drafting a 65-page responding brief for an appeal of a case in which a mother's parental rights were terminated. "I had to review the entire case record, all the trial transcripts and all this documentation that the division has gathered since before the parents even had the child," she says.

"And it puts things into perspective. This is a real case; I'm not in school here. I wanted to do a good job with this because this child has a good life with his foster parents now."

Richard Rogers '17, a joint J.D./MUP student, worked in Buffalo with the mayor's Office of Strategic

Planning and reports, "It's a nice mix between law and business." That includes sitting in on meetings about the Green Code, the city's overarching economic development plan.

He also worked with the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, evaluating developers' proposals for developing unused property owned by the city, and also helping prepare property transfers under Buffalo's homestead program, in which individuals can buy houses or vacant lots for virtually nothing if they agree to build or rehabilitate the housing stock.

"City-owned lots are a strain for the city to maintain," Rogers says. "Now residents are taking control of these lots and stabilizing the neighborhoods."

An undergraduate interest in prisons and inmate recidivism led **Samantha Yager '16** to her summer position with Prisoners' Legal Services of New York, in Buffalo. The tiny nonprofit advocates for and provides civil legal services to indigent inmates in New York State correctional facilities.

"I felt this was a way to get a real-life experience of how the system works," Yager says. That included visits to inmates in two local prisons to discuss how best to help them.

The job, she says, entailed "a lot of legal research, trying to figure out how the courts address certain issues," as well as writing numerous letters to the state Department of Corrections on behalf of inmates seeking treatment for medical or mental health conditions.

"People are victims of circumstance

sometimes, and mental illness seems to be an increasing problem in prisons," Yager says. "Their stories are heart-breaking."

Andrew DeMasters '16 was in Washington, D.C., with the Office of General Counsel of the federal Department of Homeland Security. There he worked on pre-trial litigation in labor and employment law, cases involving Homeland Security workers who claim employment issues such as age or sex discrimination or a hostile work environment.

"It's fascinating," DeMasters says. "I've done a lot of different things: discovery, responding to a discovery report, motions for summary judgment, requests for admission and document requests."

As well, he says, he got to experience

"what it's like to have the United States government as your client. That's a huge responsibility, but at the end of the day, what you did meant something."

Kelly Barrett '15 spent her 2L summer in the government affairs office of the Trevor Project, a national organization that provides crisis inter-

vention and suicide prevention to LGBT young people.

Partly, she says, the work involved advocacy – reading the Federal Register to look for government actions that would affect gay and lesbian youths, and submitting comments on the Trevor Project's behalf. There was also a major research project looking at how the religious exemption in Title IX has been applied in light of the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision.

"I have learned more this summer than I have ever learned in any position in the past," Barrett says. "I spent probably half the week out of the office, meeting with other organizations, going to Congress, attending White House briefings, networking with tons of people and learning a lot about advocacy and policy work. This has been the most incredible experience of my professional life."



The Buffalo Public Interest Law Program (BPILP) held a bagel breakfast in the lobby of O'Brian Hall to welcome new students.