Adventurous Internships: for Some Students, the Summer Commute Included A Long Plane Trip

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For some students, the summer commute included a long plane trip

Three SUNY Buffalo Law students made good use of their passports this summer, as they flew off to work at legal internships in Europe and Central and South America.

The internships, arranged through the International Law Section of the New York State Bar Association, were coordinated by Hodgson Russ attorneys Lauren D. Rachlin and Benjamin R. Dwyer ’96. This is the second year for the program, which places students worldwide where the Bar Association has local chapters; last year’s interns worked in Guatemala, Prague and Vienna.

“I wanted to go outside New York State and get a non-traditional experience,” says Jessica Carbone ’15, who spent three weeks at a law firm in Bergamo, Italy, just northeast of Milan. She also is of Italian heritage and heard Italian spoken at home — but, she says, the rapid-fire Italian was a challenge.

The firm, Studio Legale Amorese, is small — only four people, two of them who spoke good English. The principal attorney, Marco Amorese, is a generalist, practicing litigation, corporate law and criminal defense.

“His clients who want to do business with New York law,” Carbone says. “For example, one client had started a business that would sell in the United States, and he was trying to decide if he should choose U.S. or Italian law, wanted to know the benefits and risks of each one.” The parties to contracts, she explains, have to agree on which body of law applies to the deal.

In Bergamo, Carbone says, “the bar exam you have to take there is the most difficult in Italy, and the lawyers there are the best in Italy.”

“It’s fairly new for women to be lawyers there,” she says, “I learned I would not want to be a lawyer anywhere but the U.S.” But she also appreciated learning about the customs that attach to jurisprudence in Italy: the extravagant robes that attorneys wear to court, the cage-like structure in which defendants are held in the courtroom, trials that can go on for more than a decade.

In the four weeks Matt Turetsky ’14 spent at an internship in Guatemala City, Guatemala, at a law firm called Pacheco Coto, he found himself immersed in the culture and the language. He had had only a semester of Spanish in college, but “by the end I could piece together a conversation.”

At the firm, he worked on contracts and other legal documents, addressing trademark and franchising issues. He also wrote an article that compared franchising laws in Guatemala and the United States. “Guatemala has every franchise you can imagine,” Turetsky says.

In rotating through the firm’s different practice groups, Turetsky found that corporate contracts typically are based on New York law. “New York is the hub for international business,” he says. “A lot of things were in English.”

He also sat in on a meeting of the Latin American Council, a new group backed by the NYSSBA that brought together attorneys from North and South America to address corruption in government. That meeting was in Antigua.

Lizeth Castillo ’14 made the leap to the Central American nation of Panama, where she did corporate work with a small but influential Panama City firm, Quijano & Associates.

During her five-week internship, Castillo says, she worked in sections of the firm dealing with incorporating companies, registering ships and immigration issues. She found the experience paperwork-intensive dealing with the Panama’s maritime authority, but the corporate work was “very interesting.”

“The firm is micromanaging everything about these client corporations,” she says. For instance, the law firm might put its own attorneys on a company’s board of directors, to expedite the paperwork.

Most valuable to her, she says, was “being submerged in corporate law that I hadn’t had any experience in before. I really enjoyed it.”

As for the language, Castillo is of Mexican heritage and Spanish is her first language. “In Panama their Spanish is very fast, almost all slang all the time. It was interesting to get there and feel I couldn’t actually speak the language.”

Professor Errol E. Meidinger was the Law School’s faculty liaison for the internships, and Lisa M. Patterson, associate dean for career services, coordinated the student application process.