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Making good work possible

Summer public-interest internships build on fellowship support

Twenty-five UB Law School students spent their summer researching, writing, litigating and learning as public interest fellows – their internships in public service fields supported by the Buffalo Public Interest Law Program (BPILP) and other UB Law-based fellowship programs.

The internships – in private law offices, advocacy organizations, public prosecutors’ and defenders’ offices at all levels of government, and non-governmental organizations – are typically unpaid, and the fellowships support students’ living expenses and free them from the need to shoulder more debt during their law school years.

Nearly 40 students applied for fellowships, a process judged by BPILP board members, the dean’s office and the development office. In addition to funding provided by BPILP, whose 16th annual auction raised nearly \$40,000 for the effort, donors included Dean Makau W. Mutua, the UB Law Alumni Association, the Student Bar Association, the Buffalo Human Rights Center and individual faculty, staff, alumni and students.

Among the donors were attorney Steven M. Cohen ’87 and his wife, Pamela D. Cohen ’84, whose gift funded the new University at Buffalo Law School Civil Rights Fellowship that enabled a student to work on pro bono civil rights cases with Steven Cohen and the civil rights litigation team at the HoganWillig law firm in

Amherst. The first recipient of that fellowship was **Erica C. Smith ’12**.

“I wasn’t quite sure what I was going to do this summer,” Smith said. “But as an African-American woman, civil rights has always been something near and dear to my heart. It’s been so rewarding to provide a voice to those who may not have one. This internship has definitely lit a fire under me to continue this work.”

In the 12-week internship, Smith



Erica C. Smith ’12



Kinsey Davidson ’13



Bradley Loliger ’13

said she did a lot of research and drafted legal documents and memos on cases involving Constitutional issues, free-speech violations and questions of due process. She also has responded to and corresponded with prisoners who have alleged civil rights violations. Her research and writing coursework at UB Law, she says, has been essential. “The skills that I learned in my first year and continuing into my second year have been immeasurable,” she says. “That’s pretty much the substance of what I do.”

Adds Smith, who has 5- and 3-year-old daughters: “People shy away from public service for various reasons, including finances. To be able to

have this opportunity and still be able to maintain my household, to engage in rewarding work and still be able to pay the bills, has been wonderful.”

Her classmate **Laura Groschadl ’12** spent the summer in Washington, D.C., working for the National Center for Transgender Equality, an advocacy group.

“I applied for the Buffalo Human Rights Center Summer Human Rights Fellowship specifically to work at a U.S. LGBT civil rights organization,” Groschadl says. “Although much progress has been made recently, I feel strongly that the United States is far behind where it should be in granting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people full civil equality. I believe that this will be one of the most important civil rights struggles of our generation, and it’s a very exciting time for young lawyers who want to get involved in making change.”

Her background has concentrated on domestic violence prevention, Groschadl says, so “I had to educate myself quite a bit about issues affecting transgender people. My internship at NCTE has provided me a great deal of education on working with federal agencies to change regulations, policies and practices. I had to get up to speed on the sometimes elusive workings of administrative law. I’ve also learned skills about collaborating with allied organizations and the strategies of effective non-profit organizations in changing federal policy.

“Although I haven’t yet taken administrative law, and my substantive legal knowledge was of limited usefulness, my UB Law training has helped me in one major area: research and writing. I appreciate more than ever before the value of good research



Laura Groschadl '12 spent the summer in Washington, D.C.

skills, and I hope to take an advanced research course during my third year of law school.”

The summer’s work, she says, has involved drafting legal and policy memoranda to advocate with federal agencies to improve access to health care and eliminate health care disparities for transgender people under the Affordable Care Act, and working on issues affecting transgender seniors, such as resident rights in long-term care facilities.

“As much as I love D.C., it is certainly a more expensive city than Buffalo,” Groschadl says. “Without the support of the fellowship, I simply would not have been able to come to D.C. this summer. I am very grateful to the Buffalo Human Rights Center and its donors for this opportunity.”

Bradley Loliger '13, who is studying for the joint J.D./MSW degree, combined those interests in his summer internship with Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled or Disadvan-

taged of Western New York.

“Every day is something different, depending on what we have to focus on,” he reports.

“We do a lot of Article 81 guardianship cases, when an individual is allegedly incapacitated. The work runs the gamut from researching cases to drafting letters, communicating with attorneys, helping to figure out how to write a motion to dismiss a case, home visits to meet clients, looking at contracts. I get a taste of all different things. I’m not stuck in an office running Westlaw all day.”

It was tough getting up to speed, Loliger says.

“Going to law school and lectures is way different than the practice of law and how it works,” he says. “But the opportunities that Legal Services for the Elderly have given me are really great. One of the things that has impressed me is that there are five or six attorneys total here, and six or seven paralegals, and they do such a vast amount of work.”

Loliger, who currently serves as outreach coordinator for BPILP, is only too happy to make the case for increased support of public-interest fellowships. “There’s a huge, huge need for public-interest work,” he says. “Donations that people make to these fellowships go directly to the students in fellowships and helps them. In past summers I worked on the grounds crew at UB to survive and pay the bills. It’s because of the fellowship that I’m able to do this internship.”

“One of the best experiences I could ever hope for” is how **Kinsey**

Davidson '13 describes her summer internship with the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of New York. “I’m able to do something that feels like it has a lot of prestige and gives me a lot of opportunities, but it’s also so good for the public.”

Assigned to work with two attorneys in the federal prosecutor’s office’s criminal division, Davidson has worked on cases involving white-collar crime, environmental crime, tax fraud, mail fraud and environmental crimes.

“Legal practice is such a broad area,” Davidson says. “In law school or the first couple of internships, you learn those details. I’ve been surprised at how quickly and effortlessly all of the interns in my office get up to speed. Particularly at UB, we have the LAWR course that has been so useful. In my first week I was assigned two internal memos, and I knew how to write those in my sleep. When you have those raw materials for research and writing, you can do anything with it.”

Her BPILP fellowship, she says, is an essential part of the experience. “Being a student with a limited budget, it really wouldn’t be possible for me to do this work without the fellowship,” she says. “I have the luxury of not having a part-time job on the side, and being able to devote myself 100 percent to learning the practice of law. I think that will make me a better lawyer and a better public servant.”