

Kaitlyn Smith

Summer Legal Fellows 2017

Reflection

For eight weeks this summer I had the opportunity to work in American University's Washington College of Law Clinic. At the clinic I worked under various professors, student attorneys, and my supervisor Kathleen Gordon. Throughout the duration of the program, I had the opportunity to pursue multiple projects that have helped secure my desire to be a future attorney.

My first project at the clinic was research for Professor Minwalla concerning the Yazidi community. Professor Minwalla has been working on a project concerning the ethics of journalists covering the Yazidi community following the attacks on Sinjar. While participating on this research project, I transcribed interviews of various individuals living within the Yazidi community, such as survivors, humanitarian workers, and community members. Transcribing these interviews proved to be an interesting task as I learned first-hand knowledge of the experiences and injustices faced by those living within the Yazidi refugee camps. Professor Minwalla also asked me to code various articles and interviews for her project. Professor Minwalla has been evaluating various media articles from different sources such as the New York Times and the Washington Post. She has created a coding system which sorts each article into a database and evaluates whether or not the article violates ethics. My job was to read through these various articles, code them, and place them into the database. My final task for Professor Minwalla was the analysis of transcripts from various interviews concerning the Yazidi community. As I evaluated the articles, I was tasked to search for common themes that could be

used to group and analyze the articles in a future paper or book. Overall, my work assisting Professor Minwalla on the Yazidi project was eye opening and interesting. The project exposed me to the injustices that have occurred against the Yazidi community, and how the media can contribute to these injustices through unethical journalism.

The second project I undertook while working at the clinic concerned an unemployment wages case. I was able to work alongside faculty member Richard Ugelow and a student attorney on an actual case. While working on the case I learned how to write memos as well as draft an actual letter that will be submitted on behalf of the client. For me, the case provided hands-on experience and demonstrated the typical process that attorneys go through when handling a case.

While at the clinic I also had the opportunity to attend court twice and file two separate claims. The first court experience occurred in the District of Columbia's Family Court. I was able to witness live cases and watch two of WCL's student attorneys argue a case before a judge. The second court experience was in the District of Columbia's Small Claims Court. Here I had the opportunity to witness various cases being argued before a judge and learned how to file claims for court. Overall, the process of attending court and filing claims gave me the ability to experience and participate in the process of handling a case.

The final project I undertook while working at the clinic was completing administrative tasks such as alumni lists, case sorting, case filing, and the transcription of material for research assistants. The clinic has an extensive alumni list that consistently needs to be updated. My task was to update these alumni lists, including contacting alumni via LinkedIn, ensuring the accuracy of the clinic's information. Occasionally I would be tasked with sorting case files, shredding old case information, and filing cases for future reference. This is important because the clinic must preserve and correctly store old case information in order to prevent future

liabilities. Finally, the clinic employs multiple faculty members who handle cases and conduct research. Professors asked me to prepare their research or case materials by making copies, converting documents into PDF's, and preparing files for research assistants. Overall, this administrative work provided insight on tasks completed by attorneys besides attending court. Attorneys must complete various administrative tasks throughout the duration of their cases and I feel that my experience at the clinic prepared me to balance various administrative tasks alongside other projects.

Overall, my experience with the Summer Legal Fellows Program at American University's Washington College of Law was immensely positive. The program gave me the opportunity to work within a clinical setting, aiding student attorneys and faculty as they represented actual clients. I was able to hone my research skills while conducting research on the Yazidi project and learned how to create memos and draft legal letters. The experience of attending court and witnessing the process attorneys go through while handling cases has prepared and solidified my desire to attend law school. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Cutler for giving me the opportunity to participate in the Summer Legal Fellows Program at American University's Washington College of Law. It was a great opportunity and insightful experience.