

Timothy Zehr

My summer legal fellow experience with the Government Law Center at Albany Law School was one that gave me a new perspective on my research strategies, writing abilities, and law school in general. I am immensely grateful for both Siena College and the GLC for providing me with an opportunity for expanding my knowledge of topics within my undergraduate studies as well as giving me a foundation for my future law school career.

I began the summer with no more instruction than to find a topic that piqued my interest and to research that subject with the intention of producing a short-form memo or explainer. The topic of “cimmigration”, the growing overlap between immigration and criminal law, caught my attention and I began to look into the subject. I approached this with the same mindset that I have had for every research assignment I have completed since high school, only looking at broader topics without diving into the nuanced research that accumulated into the general points I was focusing on. Attempting to take a big picture approach quickly led to the realization that there is a stark difference between submitting a research paper for a grade and having your research and ideas challenged directly. Looking into the subject of cimmigration as a whole proved to be ineffective as seemingly every point I looked to make had already been deeply explored by people with much more experience, time, and resources than me.

This dilemma led me to dig deeper into the subject than I previously would have and come across the topic of “retaliatory” raids conducted by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, commonly known as ICE. My initial research brought me to an example in New Haven, CT which saw an ICE raid through known immigrant areas less than 36 hours following

a policy that granted municipal identification to undocumented immigrants who otherwise would not be able to have proper identification. This operation took place in 2007, but the similarity between ICE's actions in New Haven and ICE's public raids in the Trump administration lead me to find numerous examples of ICE being used as a political tool against pro-immigrant policymaking while claiming that its actions were strictly in defense of homeland security. Researching this topic further led to examples of ICE not only retaliating against pro-immigrant policies but also using the threat of raids as a bargaining asset to discourage small communities from adopting such policies in the first place, as was the case in Travis County, TX.

In addition to using federal authority to punish and/or influence policymaking at the community level, I was also able to find evidence of ICE intervention at the national level as well as on an individual level. While the Trump administration's nationwide raid on sanctuary cities in March 2020 was not covert, it served as an undeniable example of ICE's willingness to punish areas that do not align with the immigration rhetoric of the current White House. I was able to uncover multiple examples of immigrants following the tremendously complicated process of becoming an American citizen only to be deported after becoming outspoken community leaders on the topic of immigration.

By the time I had concluded my research on the topic of retaliatory raids and had my memo edited and submitted, I had realized how drastically different the entire process had been from what I had been accustomed to. The process of going through multiple drafts, scrapping entire topics, and evolving the focus of my work as I came across new pieces of information was something that I had not done with regularity in my prior writing career. The biggest influence I had pushing me towards changing my approach towards research was the GLC staff. One of the

biggest challenges I face as an undergraduate is that my primary means of accountability is the grade I receive on an assignment. During my time as a legal fellow, that was replaced by being held accountable for both my writing as well as being able to discuss ideas and research with a group of professionals. I found that one of the driving forces in looking deeper into topics was simply the question “What if I get asked about this?”.

In summary, I feel that my summer legal fellowship with Albany Law showed me an example of the steps that I will have to take going from undergraduate to law school as well as being able to research a complex topic and understand the different aspects of it beyond general points. The increased standard for my work is something that I am excited to apply to my last semester at Siena and build upon moving forward.