

Ryan Amburgey
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Summer Internship with the Honorable Judge Van Tatenhove

This summer I spent the months of June and July interning in the chambers of United States District Judge Gregory Van Tatenhove of the Eastern District of Kentucky. The Judge's chambers were located in Frankfort, Kentucky and London, Kentucky, although the majority of my clerkship was spent in Frankfort, the state capital. For the duration of my internship I worked with two 1L law students, under the supervision of the Judge's three law clerks. The majority of my clerkship was spent: reviewing and summarizing federal cases, observing trials, and completing clerical tasks assigned to me by the clerks. Although I was limited in what I could be assigned, as I am not a law student, I do not believe that this detracted from my experience in chambers in any way.

Throughout the summer I was given a multitude of assignments, ranging in difficulty, to assist the law clerks. The first major assignment was to update the law library's copy of the United States Code. The United States Code is a vast series of books that covers every subject matter of federal law and is revised yearly by the United States House of Representatives. It is important to keep an updated edition of the code in chambers, as this is what the law clerks use while working on their assigned cases. The law of the United States is ever changing, as new laws are always passed and judges at the district, appellate and Supreme Court levels set new precedents. Uniformity in all federal courts is crucial in order to ensure that all Americans are treated the same no matter which courthouse they are in.

The second major assignment I completed was reviewing, in detail, all the cases that were presented to judge in trial in the past year, and then summarize them. The purpose of this assignment was to provide Judge Van Tatenhove with comprehensive case summaries for the book he one day aspires to write. This assignment was also an effective way to familiarize myself with all of the aspects of a federal case, as I was able to review every order, motion and transcript of the trial. As an economics major and business minor, the trial I found most interesting while reviewing was a pro se case involving an oil scheme in which several men devised and executed an elaborate scheme to attract investors to invest millions of dollars in oil companies that did not exist.

The third major assignment I was given during my clerkship was most closely related to one of the daily responsibilities of a law clerk, which was reviewing a writ habeas corpus. In this writ of habeas, an individual was petitioning the court to re-review his case, as he believed that he had received ineffective counsel at both the federal and appellate court levels, and therefore entitled a new trial. This assignment was the most challenging for me, as my opinion could possibly have a real influence on whether or not the imprisoned individual could receive another trial.

My final two assignments were the most interesting to me. The first of these two assignments were to review appeals to the judge on whether or not the law was violated while they were applying for disability benefits from the Social Security Administration. These cases were extremely detailed and required analysis of the arguments presented by both the applicant,

who was represented by private counsel, and the Social Security Administration, who was represented by one of the prosecutors within in the U.S. Attorney's Office. I believe that I found these cases most interesting as I was able to learn a tremendous amount of information about the process people go through while applying for government benefits, as well as the misconceptions associated with the simplicity of receiving said benefits. The second of these two assignments was creating an extensive excel sheet of all the drug offenders convicted by judge within the federal prison system. The reason for this assignment was because recently, congress passed a point reduction for drug offenders, which resulted in a calculated decrease in prison time for these offenders. This assignment was of particular interest to me as an economics major, as it provided me with an opportunity to complete an assignment similar to one that I will likely be asked to perform while working in the financial sector post-graduation.

Although it may seem like my internship experience was spent starting and completing assignment after assignment, this could not be further from the truth. While this internship is reading and writing intensive, it was also full of opportunities to learn about all aspects of the federal court system. At the beginning of this internship, Judge Van Tatenhove and the law clerks told us that at any time we would like to sit in on a trial in any state or federal courthouse, we were more than welcome to do so. In my short two month clerkship I was able to complete all of my assignments and also attend an extremely interesting federal trial in Lexington, Kentucky, a murder trial in the Fayette

County Circuit Courthouse, several sentencing hearings and oral arguments in London, Kentucky, as well as a naturalization ceremony performed by one of the district's senior judges and the Kentucky Secretary of State in Frankfort, Kentucky, in which dozens of immigrants were granted citizenship. In addition to these trials we were also able to attend the judicial fellows program, which gave us the opportunity to meet the U.S. Attorney and learn about the federal prosecution process, go to the U.S. Probation Office and learn about sentencing and probation, as well as visiting the U.S. Clerk's office and learn about their responsibilities. Additionally, although I was unable to attend, after the internship ended in July, the interns were offered the opportunity to sit in on oral arguments presented before the circuit appellate judges in Cincinnati, Ohio. These panels of judges review the most valid appeals, and preside over all of the U.S. District Courthouses in the states of Kentucky, Ohio, Tennessee and Michigan.

Even as an economics major this internship was one of the most rewarding experiences thus far in my life. I learned not only a tremendous amount about the legal system, but I was also able to improve on my writing and analytical skills, as well as how to perform in an office setting; all of which are universally important no matter what career you pursue.