

Summer Internship Report 2017

Elon Epps, C'20

Hometown: Washington, D.C.



United States Attorney's Office of the District of Columbia Washington, D.C.

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

The United States Attorney's Office of the District of Columbia is the government organization that prosecutes crime in the local and federal courts system of D.C. On their website it states that "the Office is committed to being responsive and accountable to the citizens of the District of Columbia". I was specifically an intern for the Sex Offense and Domestic Violence (SODV) section. My responsibilities as an intern were to complete the tasks I received from AUSAs. That could include anything from legal research, watching body worn cameras, reading medical records, organizing files, drafting motions/or legal documents. We were encouraged to go watch Superior Court as much as possible.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

My first assignment came from one of the Directors of SODV. I was supposed to read over a case file and provide a summary discussing whether there was a basis for issuing an arrest warrant. I sat at my desk and read every single page, took notes, and made sure to truly understand the case before I started writing. I then completed my summary and sent it to the Director. That experience was so amazing for me; never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would be able to do something like that. I learned that a summary of a case is not meant to be 3 pages; but a page. The skill of learning how to condense a document like that is something I used this summer and will continue to use for my school work. I tend to be a long winded person, who thinks every detail is important, but I was able to learn what can be left out. I also completed two legal research written assignments as well; finding the case law definition of "force" and the other being cases concerning the authentication and admissibility of text messages. To complete the first task required me finding a series of prior court cases where the term "force" had been at issue or raised so that the AUSA could decide which way to charge the crime and what case evidence was needed to back it up. The second

research project required that I locate court cases that provided the standard by which the court requires the authentication and ultimate admission of a text message into evidence. The AUSA needed this research on hand for the trial in case the judge required a legal basis to allow admission. Both assignments taught me how to conduct legal research and allowed me to become familiar with the online legal research tool Westlaw (a database that has years of case law and cases). After learning Westlaw shortcuts and how to specialize searches, I was able to obtain information much quicker. I also had a few assignments that involved watching body worn camera footage and transcribing what happened. These assignments increased my critical listening skills and forced me to learn how to listen and type simultaneously. I would go back and make sure I did not miss anything; the write-ups were really important to cases because they help support the facts and ultimately could be direct proof of guilt. My most tedious assignment I was given was cataloging a victim's medical records for my mentor. I had to read at least a thousand pages of medical records; which included pages of illegible handwriting, looking up different medicines and conditions, and more. This project taught me a lot of basic skills; including how to use an automatic copier, use an old fashioned hole-puncher, and organize papers. On the larger scale I learned what is needed when it comes to determining the mental competency of a victim and how truly monotonous some of the tasks that AUSAs have to do.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

A problem I helped solve this summer was assisting an AUSA with trial prep. The trial was the next day, yet there were all these binders that still needed to be made with material about the case. From learning flexibility and time management at Sewanee I was able to complete the binders in enough time for the AUSA to have them for trial.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

My teamwork skills were strengthened because I am an undergrad student. As an undergrad I did not know how to do legal research or what a lot of legal terms meant. Being in a room with 15 other interns, 10 of which were law students, I had to learn to lean on other people. Being in a team of other interns over the course of the summer we all worked together to accomplish our assignments. For me that was being able to ask some of the law students how to use Westlaw which is an online legal database. Not only did I need to know what it was but how to use it efficiently. It took three different occasions with two different law students and one senior in college for me to truly grasp how to use Westlaw. Without learning how to lean on people for support I wouldn't have been able to complete some of my assignments.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

This internship affected my career plans because I now know I don't want to be a lawyer. Yes, I know that working in this office doesn't represent the entire legal field or what every lawyer does, but for me it helped me see what I want for my future. That is a more hands on version of public service.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

Well, I encountered many people this summer with different backgrounds than my own victims, defendants, AUSA, but the people I spent the most time with were the other interns. While I am from DC, not all the other interns were and in fact most weren't. We all come from different walks of life and had various opinions on politics and cases. Over time I learned who I agreed with and who I didn't, but that didn't stop me from conversing with everyone. Everyone's perspective is so important

for us to grow as human beings. I learned that while I may not agree with everyone, everyone has their own reasons and backstory as to why they believe what they believe.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

Learn how to use the DC metro system. I am from DC so I had no issues but some of my fellow interns were not so lucky.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

To my donor thank you so much for supporting me this summer while I interned. Because of you I was able to have an amazing experience learning about the law and how SODV works. Without your support that would not have been possible.