

Charlotte La Nasa

Charleston County Master in Equity Office
August 1st 2015

I began this summer with a single, fundamental question in mind: “Do I want to go to Law School?” This question took me to the Charleston County Master in Equity office, to search for my answer under the guidance of Judge Mikell Scarborough.

A Master in Equity Judge deals with property disputes. As a specialized civil court, all cases heard before the Master in Equity require a referral from the Circuit Court. Should a plaintiff pray the court to enforce a mortgage note with foreclosure, partition a piece of land amongst heirs, move a boundary line by adverse possession, convey a title by acquiescence, or seek numerous other possible pleadings, the parties will eventually end up in the endlessly busy office of Master in Equity. The office of Master in Equity is in the circuit court building, a part of Downtown Charleston’s “four corners of law”. On the downtown intersection of Broad Street and King Street, one can find four buildings dedicated to city law, state law, federal law, and God’s law. Some of these buildings date back to the 1600’s, so as a history major I was drawn to Charleston because of its judicial center’s historic location, and powerful cultural identity. I soon found that the concentration of varied levels of law allowed me to view other cases outside of Master in Equity in Federal Court, Probate Court, and Circuit Court levels.

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When I explain my position to legal professionals, many are both surprised and impressed because judicial internships are coveted positions reserved for current law students. To work for a judge requires a thorough understanding of civil procedure and jurisdiction, as well as a firm grasp of lofty, redundant legal vernacular (this is no small feat). I worked hard to soak up information and ask as many questions as possible. Everyday, Judge Scarborough's law clerk, Ryan Conner, gave me a different case or statute to read. To prepare me for what would be in store during law school, Ryan would ask me questions about what I read using the Socratic method in order to gain practice in identifying the issue, rule, and application of the rule, involved in a case.

Being able to spot the main question at hand, select the rule, and apply the law to the situation takes practice, but with the patience and excellent teaching of the clerks in the office, I learned to write legal memoranda. I used databases such as Fastcase and the Charleston County Clerk of Court website to do research on cases. I would then select the issue, explain how the court should rule, and back up my reasoning with case law. Over the course of the summer I wrote three legal memoranda. While buried in piles of other memos, summons, and affidavits, I found that synthesizing information was what I wanted to do with my professional life. I believe that the legal field is the best place to do this.

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I learned that when doing research and understanding legal documents, one need not “reinvent the wheel” as I was often advised. Property disputes are complicated by nature, but it was challenging to avoid making them more of a headache in order to solve them. My task in writing memos was to simplify the issue as much as possible. Writing legal memos involves combing through dozens of pages of exhibits, orders, and pleadings and it is easy to overlook important elements. One case I studied and researched was five years old and had nine causes of action, which means that the plaintiff was attempting to seek damages from the defendant for nine different issues (or at least whichever of the nine issues the judge would grant). This meant that deciphering which orders had been granted, and which had not was difficult to keep track of. Dealing with such a drawn out and complicated case was a strong lesson in how important it is to slow down and pay attention in research. The chance to act as a detective and carefully read comparable memos, and examine what past judges had ruled on similar matters was a challenge I found fascinating and exciting.

One of the hardest and most daunting parts of my internship was memorizing the Rules of Civil Procedure in order to determine whether or not the Court had jurisdiction. The Rules of Civil Procedure are packed with tiny details. Judge Scarborough’s Legal Clerk, Ryan Conner, prompted me to memorize them and

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quizzed me with questions like “how many days after the filing date does the plaintiff’s attorney have to serve the other party?” Quizzing sessions such as these are very similar to what I would encounter in law school, and helped me to realize how essential it is to be thorough in the legal field. A competent lawyer must be prepared to catch or offer every detail, but also be able to separate what is important from what is not.

This summer began with a single question; do I want to go to Law School? With the guidance of Judge Scarborough and the excellent teaching of his staff, that question has been answered with a resounding *yes*. Unfortunately, the follow up is a long list of questions as to when, how, and where I will attend law school. That being said, the long lasting relationships I’ve made with legal professionals and the lessons I’ve learned in Charleston have been invaluable. I have no doubt that all I gained from my work this summer will guide me to the right choice for LSAT practice, law school applications, and other challenges ahead.