

Summer Internship Report 2017

Julie Lorenzo, C'18

Hometown: Oxford, Mississippi



**United States District Court:
Honorable David C. Norton
Charleston, SC**

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

As an intern in Judge Norton's chambers, I worked mostly in the library with Judge Norton's interns and Judge Gergel's interns. We were all assigned tasks by the judges' clerks. Each federal judge has two clerks, and they are usually pretty young and are hired for 2-year periods. The judges allocate their cases to their respective clerks, and those clerks conduct research, using databases like WestLaw and Nexxus, on cases that are pertinent to the ones at hand. The clerks pass on some of that research to the interns. I worked on about four projects throughout the summer, searching WestLaw by using keywords and summarizing relevant cases in order to write memos to the clerks about my findings and the information that changed (or didn't change) the clerks' recommendations for Judge Norton. For example, if I were working on a case regarding the South Carolina Unfair Trade Practices Act (SCUTPA) in conjunction with a Rule 68 request for attorney's fees and a settlement or offer of judgment, I would enter those terms into the search engine and sift through the database until I found cases relevant enough to the current case and write summaries and memos for each. Luckily, the interns are all able to attend multiple court proceedings daily to break up the research end of the workload. When Judge Norton presided, he allowed his interns (two others and me) to sit in the seats where a jury would normally sit and observe. Judge Norton's other interns and I also attended two different jury trials over which Judge Gergel presided. Both were criminal cases, but one regarded gang violence and the other was white-collar. The balance between research on various types of cases and observation of real proceedings as they advanced through the court system made the internship dynamic and ensured that no day was boring.

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?

The most I could really impart my own effort and skill regarded the research end of the internship. When my clerk assigned me a task, I had to spend substantial time intensively researching and picking out cases that were relevant on all fronts - if a case ended in a summary judgment instead of an offer of judgment or settlement, for example, the relevance of that case to the current one I received from my clerk was rendered moot. Sometimes this was frustrating, because it's really difficult to find cases that match the exact relevant details of another, but it became easier each day. When I submitted my work to my clerk, it was really rewarding if she found my memos and recommendations helpful. That research contributed to a real case currently in the court system, and it was special to know that my individual conclusions made a difference in someone's life and the application of our law to his or her case. I also inevitably gained writing skills in an area to which I haven't been exposed in the past, and gained the confidence to craft documents in the legal field - a context that differs significantly from the realms of writing in my English and philosophy classes at Sewanee.

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?

The problems I faced usually had to do with difficulty coming to conclusions when researching. For example, I may find a case that seems relevant to the one I'm researching that would result in my recommendation going one way, but then I may find another case with a completely contradictory precedent. In situations like these, I had to employ critical thinking skills and analyze the conflicting cases to their cores until I found the essences of the two and the truly relevant parallel decision. A logic class I took at Sewanee most substantially contributed to my ability to evaluate information like this at face value and break down the contents to fully understand their meaning. Philosophy classes in general promote thought in such a way and enable me to use reasoning skills when analyzing passages. And more obviously, my English courses have all enhanced my reading comprehension and interpretation skills.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

For the most part, the interns are expected to work individually in the judge's' chambers. We're each assigned separate cases to research and analyze. However, we often asked each other for extra opinions regarding research tips, rules and statutes, and the nature of the final work we would submit to the clerks. The other interns were all already in law school, which was intimidating, but they ultimately helped me to assimilate into the environment of the internship smoothly and confidently. I often asked for their advice and they were happy to help.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

When I began this internship, I was unsure of whether or not I wanted to attend law school after Sewanee. Now, I am positive that I do. The proceedings of the court and the information involved in cases, as well as the dynamic and unpredictable day-to-day environment, convinced me that the legal system plays a determinant role in the worlds of those involved in it; I want to immerse myself in that system so I may make a difference in others' lives.

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?

I encountered the most diverse groups of people when I attended court sessions. In criminal cases especially, it was really illuminating to see the types of people the legal system affects. The accused often come from underprivileged backgrounds and have extensive criminal records. It's always sad to hear their cases, but the most striking moments are when the defendants represent themselves on the

stand or at the bench. Toward the end of a sentencing for example, the judge gives the defendant a chance to offer any information which may affect the circumstances the judge considers when determining the amount of time the defendant will spend in prison or on probation. The defendants often talk about their families and their early lives and the conditions that have contributed to their poor decisions. In my observations, they were always regretful and respectful to the judge, and the judge was always kind and compassionate in return. First-hand exposure to the ways the court system affects people convinced me that a role in the legal profession can provide a medium to help determine crucial outcomes for the lives of others.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Thank you so much for an incredible summer. This job has played a crucial role in determining my career and future plans. I couldn't have asked for a better internship.