

William Stoker, Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations: Washington, D.C.
September 1, 2014

From June 2nd through August 1st, I participated in an internship with the Episcopal Church Office of Government relations. As a legislative intern, I was given a variety of responsibilities. These included daily office tasks—such as attending staff meetings, compiling and distributing a daily email of relevant news headlines, posting on the office’s social media profiles, and occasionally creating analytical briefings on issues, events, or legislation for supervisors’ use—as well as more dynamic assignments such as taking notes on congressional hearings and attending weekly issue-based coalition meetings with or occasionally in the place of the office’s analysts. Finally, I was responsible for researching, writing, and uploading two posts for the office’s blog on topics of my choosing. These blog posts are exemplary of an area in which I strengthened a skill which I consider to be among my strongest: writing.

Before this internship, my understanding of “blogging” was as an online version of personal journal keeping. A productive exercise, to be sure, but somewhat removed from serious discourse. My opinion on Twitter, and especially the type of correspondence I associated with it, was...less than charitable. Throughout my experience with the Episcopal Church OGR, however, I developed a healthy respect for the viability of these online phenomena as outlets for worthwhile communication.

Blog posting, I came to realize, could be quite similar to the short writing exercises I was familiar with in school; the exercise requires significant research and analytical thought and demands close attention to grammar and style, and even has

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its own unique challenges, such as internet-appropriate formatting. Replacing the MLA format to which I was accustomed was a more reader-friendly method that emphasizes consumability. Citations were replaced by hyperlinks. Success was assessed in terms of circulation. It was here that Twitter came into play: I had to learn how to promote my work in an attention-grabbing and succinct way. Writing on Twitter requires fluency in a unique dialect of the English language. I give my sincere gratitude to Lacy Broemel, my office manager and internship coordinator, for her patience and persistence in teaching me. While it is still not my favorite iteration of social media, I can now confidently say that I am twitter literate, have a profile, and have found it especially helpful as a breaking news source.

Perhaps the most satisfying facet of these endeavors was the sense I had of potentially making a positive difference through my work at The Episcopal Church OGR. The chief example of this is, unsurprisingly, my blog posts. I wrote two documents for our blog, the first pertaining to the crisis of unaccompanied immigrant minors at the southwestern border, and the second discussing government funded animal testing as a morally unconscionable and fiscally irresponsible waste. I was happy and proud to see both of these documents circulate well in relevant spheres of interest, and I like to think that I may have contributed to positive momentum for both issues. This sense of positive contribution is true not only of my blog posts, but also of all aspects of my work this summer. Whenever I compiled a briefing on a piece of legislation, I knew that work was helping someone do a job that benefitted others. Reflecting on what I learned this

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summer, I realize that my learning happened in a number of phases. As I have already detailed, my office experience honed my writing skills and informed me of the diverse manifestations of writing in the digital arena. Additionally, much of our work was geared toward facilitating our immersion into the political currents of the city; examples of this included our daily compiling and emailing of top news headlines to our local and remote office staff.

In a broader sense, however, my greatest learning experience occurred outside of my office. I have never lived in a city larger than Chattanooga, and even then I was on a residential campus outside of the city. Living in Washington, D.C. for two months was a valuable experience in and of itself, as I learned—in a crash course at times—about self-sufficiency, budgeting, and the responsibility of independence.

While I am still quite undecided about my career goals, this experience has informed my thought-process in terms of profession as well as location. I am most thankful for the exposure I gained in the professional sphere, and I now know that the non-profit advocacy arena is one which I will continue to pursue.

Lastly, I want to give my thanks to the Tonya Fellowship and the Sewanee Office of Career and Leadership Development—I couldn't have had this experience without your help.