



The Haywood Burns Legal Internship at CSS Words of Appreciation

Erin Opperman (University of Michigan Law School), Burns Intern 2008

This past summer meant a great deal to me both personally and for the development of my legal education. I started as the intern who had no idea where to begin to research on Westlaw, and ended up at the end of the summer feeling relatively confident in my research skills. This was mainly because I was given actual, substantive projects to work on, in which a real amount of responsibility was given to me. During the summer I spoke to many of my law school colleagues about what their work entailed, and whether they worked at non-profits or private sector employers, the answer was often “a whole lot of nothing”. Though some may not have been looking for real work during the summer, I was not one of those people. I was able to work with three amazing attorneys, from whom I could learn just by observing. ... I was never embarrassed to admit I did not know something, or did not know how to do something, and if I could describe the internship with one characteristic it would be that CSS was more interested in how they could help me grow than vice versa.

I could not have asked for a better summer or a better employer for my first summer internship. I was happy to be in an environment that was both nurturing and demanding of my work as a law student, and more so lucky to be somewhere where I knew my colleagues genuinely cared about my development.

Swan Lee (University of California – Hastings School of Law), Burns Intern 2008

CSS has made great progress with its prisoner reentry initiative and I think it should continue to focus on this issue. While most people are aware of felon disenfranchisement, the educational and employment discrimination of individuals with criminal records does not receive as much attention. CSS has really tackled this issue well and is taking prisoner reentry in the right direction. I had a wonderful summer at CSS and learned an incredible amount. Thank you for this great opportunity to engage in stimulating work and to meet all of you.

Erika Navarro (Rutgers University Law School – Newark), Burns Intern 2007

My summer at CSS proved to be quite a learning experience. I learned to be more resourceful and was afforded the opportunity to practice my advocacy skills in an extremely supportive environment. My experience was as great as it was in large part because I was able to do both policy/research work and direct services work. While I understand that CSS is not a legal aide

type of organization, the individual cases allowed me to fully understand just why an organization like CSS is imperative to the strengthening of underserved communities.

Edalia George (Dickinson School of Law), Burns Intern 2007

One of the things I loved most about working for CSS is that it is all inclusive; in one location the organization retains advocates, policy analysts, public relations specialists, attorneys, and etc. Due to the distinct structure of the organization, CSS possesses the unique ability to address every aspect of systemic problems plaguing New Yorkers. Through its analysis of policies, advocacy for change, and when necessary litigating to improve unjust conditions, CSS has proved its longevity as a leading nonprofit organization. I believe that a great deal of CSS's success is correlated to the organization's ability to reinvent itself. For example I think that CSS's decision to centralize its efforts on the working poor is an extremely tactful approach for the continued growth of the organization. However, I feel that the CSS's ability to balance direct services with larger public policy goals (i.e. campaign for universal healthcare) will be essential to the organization's advancement.

Paul Keefe (City University of New York Law School), Burns Intern 2006

I got a lot out of the NAACP Brown Bags, the meals with practitioners and the [CSS] testimony before the New York City Council on the Voting Rights Act reauthorization and the oral argument for your desk appearance ticket case. These latter two events highlighted the importance of extra-legal advocacy, shaping policy and challenging rules in ways not taught in law school. An experience no less impressive for each time it happens is losing despite the law. The legal system, for all of its rules, is still a human system subject to, at best, caprice. Despite manifest injustice, the best you can do is build a case, present it to a judge, and hope for the best. There is no wise and shining tribunal before which you can lay the problems of the world for swift and fair repair. Notwithstanding all that, the most important thing I learned is that sometimes you just have to, in Craig's words, "sue the bastards."

Ariella Onyema (New York University Law School), Burns Intern 2006

I like that CSS works on both policy matters as well as direct services for lower income communities. This is something many non-profit organizations find very difficult to do.

Tamika Johnson (Rutgers University Law School – Newark), Burns Intern 2005

Overall I had an incredibly rewarding summer. I received as much supervision as I wanted and could have possibly received. The attorneys at CSS struck a good balance between supervision and independence. The attorneys also struck a good balance in the variety of assignments that I received. They were attentive to the needs of a law student wanting as much experience as possible. They were also extremely considerate, knowing that this was my first summer in law school. ... I was given feedback in every area that I worked in. The memos, letters and other correspondence that I worked on were all critiqued prior to submission. Whenever I was given

an assignment, I felt comfortable enough to ask attorneys about how to write or the correct format for writing a document. My experience has been both positive and rewarding in that I was able to see my work to fruition in a felony disenfranchisement case. The exposure to different kinds of public interest work in both the private and public sectors was invaluable.

Jennifer Cook (City University of New York Law School), Burns Intern 2005

I found the 2005 Haywood Burns fellowship program at CSS to provide an enriching learning experience. ... I enjoyed working in the close-knit atmosphere at CSS. The genuine care and respect the legal team show for each other is truly special and I felt lucky to become part of it, even for a short time. ... Also, interacting with various public interest lawyers through the mentor lunch series was something I looked forward to and learned from. Each of these mentors seemed genuinely interested not only to share their own career paths but also to find out what our interests were and to offer advice. ... I also enjoyed being involved in the community events that CSS hosted ... volunteering for these events made me feel like I was not only a legal intern, but I was involved in the larger mission of CSS to battle poverty issues on many levels.

Christopher Coulston (New York University Law School), Burns Intern 2004

The summer was everything I wanted. From the start, I was busy with interesting research questions and constant feedback. My researching and writing skills and my conception of developing a legal claim that furthers a social aim advanced dramatically last summer. I believe the program was designed to maximize this development.

On felon disenfranchisement generally, one of the best days at CSS was the strategy session held in Juan's office with the NAACP attorneys. We all appreciated being included – and actually listened to when we spoke. The coordination of such an important and far-reaching case exemplified the kind of work that I personally dream of. That day was a microcosm of the whole summer. From day 1, I felt like an essential part of CSS's work. In many ways, this is the most effective aspect of the program.

Michael Wright (Rutgers University Law School – Newark), Burns Intern 2004

I could not have had a better placement this summer. The Burns Intern program was selfless. At all points, it was dedicated to giving and nurturing advocacy skills and social awareness. Working at CSS resolved my ambivalence about direct services work, educated me on politics, provided the means to query practitioners and focus career goals, exposed me to a variety of civil rights initiatives through brown bag lunches, and instilled in me the importance of being mindful of national, state, and local politics affecting the causes you are working for.

I came in knowing CSS stood out from the single line models of many nonprofits and advocated holistically through its totem of direct services work, policy analysts, lobbyists, media analysts,

and finally impact litigation attorneys. I hope to work again for an organization structured like the Community Service Society.

Marisa Bono (University of Michigan Law School), Burns Intern 2003

These [Burns Intern Mentor] luncheons were invaluable in terms of networks and contact building, and especially for career guidance. The career diversity was a plus, as it gave me a sense of what type of opportunities are available in the public interest field that are more difficult to ascertain in law school, where career services are more often centered on firm and government jobs. As a Latina, I especially appreciated the insights of the women we met with, concerning what it is like to be a woman of color in the field.

Taja-Nia Henderson (New York University Law School), Burns Intern 2003

The most important aspect of this fellowship, and the one of which I was least aware, is the ongoing substantive feedback that the legal fellows receive on their written work. I am slowly (but surely) realizing that lawyers are best known for what they write, and this fellowship provides an excellent opportunity for developing and honing writing skills. To that end, I was well-prepared for interviewers who requested a writing sample. I know that several of my classmates used the briefs we drafted in the spring semester Lawyering program as their writing sample. The writing sample that I prepared at CSS is not only better than the one I wrote for Lawyering, but also, it is infinitely more interesting and original. This is the sort of sample that gets people noticed, and also provided great conversation starters during the interview season. ... I cannot express enough how much I have appreciated this summer. .. I felt supported at all times, and I appreciated how valued the staff made me feel. I never felt that my opinion was discounted, or brushed aside, and as a result, I came out of the internship more confident in my abilities as a future lawyer.

Sarah Eisenberg (City University of New York Law School), Burns Intern 2002

Everyday a surmounting amount of people in New York City and throughout the country remain poor – unable to receive adequate housing, healthcare and equal educational opportunities. Throughout this internship, we met with several lawyers and advocates for the poor who speak politically and legally for those individuals who do not receive adequate representation in society. We learned about felon disfranchisement, the effects of new drug-zone laws in urban communities in New Jersey, the effects of lead poisoning on young children, the failure of hospitals to provide non-English speakers with translators, the issues surrounding immigration law and elder law, tenant-landlord issues, the failure of the educational system in New York City to properly assess bilingual students, and the importance of economic community development. By working on a variety of cases ... I was able to sharpen my writing and research skills.

Chloe Georas (New York University Law School), Burns Intern 2002

My first year of law school was disillusionment. Rather than an in depth discussion on issues of social justice, I was bombarded with rules taken out of their social and historical context, and, more often than not, without any discussion of their problematic political implications. I wondered whether I had made the right decision to study law. It was thanks to my internship at CSS that my faith in my decision to study law was restored. I want to thank CSS for making me feel completely motivated by my work, even on very technical topics (e.g., upset price), because I knew that the politics underlying my work were on the right track.

Sarah Alvarez (Columbia Law School), Burns Intern 2001

The term “public interest law” previously struck me as a convenient umbrella used to bind dissimilar professions together only for the sake of ease of understanding. ... After my experience as the Haywood Burns Legal Intern, the umbrella term of public interest law seems necessary. ... I have now truly experienced that everyone in the field shares the commitment to change society for the better. ... My experience as the Haywood Burns legal intern has provided me with immeasurable benefits. It has reaffirmed my commitment to public interest law, sharpened my analytical, writing, and research skills, and inspired me through the example of the remarkable people I met in the New York area public interest community. This internship is indeed a fitting tribute to its namesake, as it will produce not only stronger legal minds but also stronger commitments to community and to service.

Andrea Rodriguez (City University of New York School of Law), Burns Intern 2000

The Haywood Burns Fellowship at CSS has been a unique learning experience. I believe that it is an ideal program for a first-year student because it fosters interaction with those in the field, exposes the student to different areas of public interest work, and it reinforces legal writing skills. I believe that it is one of the few internships that offers such an abundance of experiences and I appreciate and praise its innovated structure for encouraging and developing public interest lawyering.