



Feature

## Internship Season Fast Approaching

By Charisse Dengler

For many people, summer is the season for slipping into sandals and dusting off skim boards. For law students, it's the season of the summer internship, a necessity in a world where experience is everything.



Whether it's paid or unpaid, a summer internship is the perfect opportunity to turn textbook training into real-world understanding; and for many law students, it's the foot in the door that can lead to full-time employment in the future.

The amount of money the internship pays, though it may be important to the student, doesn't matter in the long run. It's the experience that future employers will be looking at. Therefore, students should look for internships that provide experience in the basics: analyzing, researching, and writing.

When it comes to deciding on an internship, the options are extensive. Some law students choose an internship at a firm where they would like to work upon graduation. Others use the summer internship as a time to explore their options and grow in their appreciation for areas of law in which they don't plan to practice.

There are even internship opportunities abroad for those students eager to do some globe-trotting. Lehman, Lee & Xu is a firm with a summer-internship program that offers students the opportunity to work at a firm in China. Interns accepted into the program get the chance to work closely with associates in different areas of law, while forming beneficial business contacts through a wide variety of social engagements.

Whatever you decide regarding practice area and location, you should be sure to approach your internship with an attitude of dedication.

"Do your work seriously," echoes a fourth-year litigation associate currently practicing in North Carolina. "When meeting with an attorney, always, always, always have a notepad and pen and take notes. Even if you never use those notes, take them anyway."

Having gone to work full-time at the firm where he interned after his 2L year, his advice to interns is to view the summer as an evaluation period.

"Keep in mind that everything you do this summer is being watched and analyzed," he said. "Every memo you write, every issue you research, every party you attend, every meeting you attend—your professionalism, your behavior—all of that is being measured."

"Don't be paranoid—you should be yourself and have a good time, but also don't treat it as 'just another new experience.' It's a job interview—an extended 8-to-12-week job interview. There is a prize at the end, and it is entirely possible for you not to get that prize," he said.

Depending on the firm, internship experiences can differ greatly. For example, a student interning at a large firm in a big city may be invited to dine at fancy restaurants and browse through illustrious art museums. An intern for the District Attorney's office, on the other hand, may spend the summer conducting research on criminal cases and touring the city jail.

Another example of what to expect in the civil liberties and public interest areas can be found in the American Civil Liberties Union. Interns for the ACLU can expect to write briefs, assist with trials, and provide assistance to lawyers who seek support from the organization. They will also work side by side with the ACLU staff attorneys on federal court cases.

While an ACLU internship or other internships in public interest law may not pay extremely well, many do offer some sort of weekly income. In addition, firms and organizations sometimes offer interns non-monetary perks such as free housing or group outings.

Another important perk of a summer internship is its tremendous networking possibilities. Building relationships



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with lawyers at the firm where you are interning can be very beneficial down the road. When it comes to the protocol for business lunches and after-hours social events, however, it's important to remember to let the situation dictate your behavior.

Even though some attorneys at the firm may be comfortable going out with you after work and talking or joking around, others may want to keep the relationship more professional. Don't be overly familiar or inappropriate with those who wish to keep their distance; and if someone chooses to befriend you on a more personal level, remember to be respectful of him/her and the firm in your conversations.

When it comes to the chain of command in an internship, some firms prefer students to work with numerous lawyers, while others favor assigning each intern to one specific lawyer. This type of setup is thought to allow for better feedback. However, even firms with the best intentions can be short on feedback. If this is the case, don't be afraid to ask for it directly.

It is best to go into an internship with the knowledge that it is a learning experience; and it helps to view other interns as a support staff, not your competition. Also, don't be afraid of your supervisor. Feel free to ask for clarification on assignments you don't fully understand; and when you encounter a problem or have a question, bring it to his/her attention right away.

Also, don't commit to more than you can handle. This way, you are able to make sure all assignments are turned in on time and completed to the best of your abilities.

So, with summer fast approaching, go ahead and buy some fun shades to wear in the car; slather on plenty of protection against those harsh fluorescent lights; and don't let the lack of seaside sunning get you down. Instead, focus on the fact that in three months, when your friends are left with fading tans, you'll be miles closer to landing the job of your dreams.

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