Boston College Law School

Boston College Law School Public Interest Newsletter

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The 86 students who participated in the Boston College Law School pro bono spring break trips traveled across the nation and internationally to cities such as:

- Miami, FL; Los Angeles, CA; Washington, DC; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; New Orleans, LA; New York, NY; Window Rock, AZ; and Harlingen, TX.

The students worked at many different non-profits and government agencies, including:

- The Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti; Kids In Need of Defense; the Public Defender Service; the Health Law Institute; the Navajo Nation Department of Justice; the Fair Housing Project; and the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network.

The students logged an impressive number of pro bono service hours, collectively totaling more than:

2,668 hours!

SPECIAL FEATURE:
PRO BONO SPRING BREAK

Starting early in the fall semester of each year, BC Law students begin to organize several pro bono Spring Break service trip programs. Students participating in these service trips gain hands-on legal experience with a non-profit organization or government agency and also earn pro bono hours. In this issue of the Public Interest Newsletter, we want you to hear from the students about their experiences during Spring Break of 2014.

A special thank you to all the BC Law students who contributed to making this issue possible!

NAVADO NATION
SPRING BREAK TRIP

Where: Window Rock, AZ, Navajo Nation reservation

By: John Kalogriopoulos, 1L

Over spring break, I traveled with nine other first year students to perform pro bono legal work for the Navajo Nation in Window Rock, Arizona. The trip was the perfect way to begin applying the skills that we had all been learning since late August of last year. While we all worked for the Navajo government, we were placed with a number of different agencies. One student worked in the Supreme Court, two worked in the District Court, and seven of us were assigned to units in the Department of Justice. A single week of volunteering is not enough time to make any sort of significant contribution, but the work that we accomplished in our various assignments will hopefully serve as the basis for later work done by full time employees or future volunteers.

Not only did we get a chance to gain real legal work experience, but the immersion into Navajo society for a week was a once in a lifetime experience. None of us knew anything about Navajo culture prior to our trip, but we were given ample opportunities to learn about the nation’s history and traditions. We were given a tour of the capitol grounds, heard a presentation from the Attorney General about Navajo law and history, and sat in on a Supreme Court hearing. Most important were the conversations that we had with everyone we met. From the front desk employees in the government units to our supervising attorneys, the overarching lesson was that while the Nation is an overwhelmingly impoverished place, the Navajo are a proud people that seek to do whatever they can in order for their lands and people to become more prosperous. I am glad that through collaborations such as this spring break partnership, BC Law students can help contribute to this goal.

Participants of the 2014 Navajo Nation Spring Break Trip from left to right: Rita Couto (LL.M. student), Peter Skeffington (1L), Billy Clark (1L), Julia Koch (1L), Lauran Schaal (1L), Caroline Thibeault (1L), Victoria Chu (1L), John Kalogriopoulos (1L), Alena Chaps (1L), and Stephen Sobey (1L). (Photo submitted by John Kalogriopoulos.)
NEW ORLEANS

SPRING BREAK TRIP

Where: New Orleans, LA

By: Kyle Litfin, 1L

This year’s Gulf Coast Recovery Trip split into three groups, providing legal aid for The Innocence Project, The Fair Housing Clinic, and the Honorable Judge Eldon E. Fallon. I was part of the group that worked under Judge Fallon and the experience was one-of-a-kind. The effects of Katrina, Isaac, and the BP Oil Spill are numerous, complex, and far-reaching. In addition to assisting Judge Fallon in drafting memoranda, I was fortunate enough to participate in meetings discussing a wide array of legal issues. These meetings touched on everything from defective drywall in post-Katrina home construction, to the dilapidated FEMA trailers that many families have called their home for far too long.

Although I valued my experience working for Judge Fallon, I think the best part of the trip was the communal experience. Each night the group would get together to share stories from the day. A particularly memorable story came from The Innocence Project. As we sat down for dinner, Britney explained how a man had been sent to jail for 20 years for being an accomplice to the shooting of his best friend. The bail restrictions placed upon him were so severe he could not get a job, and because of his incarceration, he had only seen his son once in his entire life. These stories and experiences were a reminder of why we all went to law school in the first place. This trip was a chance to take a step away from the casebooks and see the law in practice. It reminded us that, at the end of the day, the practice of law has a real effect on the lives of people. The Gulf Coast Recovery Trip has been the highlight of my Law School experience, and will be something I cherish for years to come.

DC SPRING BREAK TRIP

Where: Washington, DC

By: Devon Applegate, 1L

During spring break I had the opportunity to work at the Public Defender Service (PDS) in Washington, DC. I could not have been happier with my placement at PDS and am grateful for my time there. PDS provides and promotes quality legal representation to indigent adults and children facing a loss of liberty in the District of Columbia. They work to protect society’s interest in the fair administration of justice. PDS is regarded as one of the best public defender offices in the country and the benchmark by which other public defender systems often measure themselves. During my week at PDS, I primarily worked for one attorney writing memoranda, conducting legal research, reviewing case files and discovery, attending hearings, and attending client meetings and interviews. I also had the opportunity to attend other court proceedings, including trials, arraignments, and sentencings that featured PDS attorneys. Considering that I was only at PDS for one week, four days since we had one inopportune snow day, I feel extremely lucky to have been exposed to so many things. Our group was welcomed with open arms and learned much about PDS as an office, how they operate, and what distinguishes them from other public defender offices around the country. We were invited to attend multiple lectures conducted throughout the week at PDS. I particularly enjoyed the session on how to write a successful motion. I left DC with a more refined understanding of what it means to be a public defender. The overall experience was great because I felt that I got the best of both worlds. Not only was I able to complete meaningful research and writing, but I was also able to attend a number of court proceedings and client meetings with PDS attorneys.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: KATE DEVLIN JOYCE, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC INTEREST AND PRO BONO PROGRAMS, AT KATHLEEN.DEVLIN@BC.EDU OR (617) 552-4345

FOR INTERNSHIP, JOB, AND PRO BONO POSTINGS, VISIT: HTTPS://LAW-BC-CSM.SYMPLECTIC.COM/STUDENTS
**Immigration Spring Break Trip**

Where: Students participating in the Immigration Spring Break Trip travel across the US to work in several different cities at non-profit organizations that do immigration law work. The piece below is from a BCLS student at a placement in Berkeley, CA, and the picture is from a BCLS student at a placement in Los Angeles, CA.

By: Aileen Kim, 1L

The Immigration Spring Break trip team to the SF Bay Area had the pleasure of living in beautiful Berkeley and working with East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (EBSC), a non-profit organization that primarily works with affirmative asylum seekers in the Bay Area helping them apply for and gain asylum status. EBSC walks their clients through the process of researching and filing out all the forms and documents necessary to apply for asylum, preparing clients for their interviews, and speaks on behalf of clients in Immigration Court, should cases go to court. Our team of three was assigned a variety of tasks ranging from filing to researching aspects of immigration law. We also worked on client intakes, interviewed clients, and drafted declarations of clients. We were fascinated, and sometimes horrified, by the stories we heard from our clients and the files we read through. We learned the elements of asylum and gained a better sense of what makes a solid asylum claim through our work with the EBSC attorneys. We developed research and legal arguments and thought through how we could best help serve the interest of our clients. We also learned a lot more about oppression and persecution in other countries against groups of people. The experience was very eye-opening and at the end of the week, we felt a sense of fulfillment to have helped our clients be on their way towards living a persecution-free life in the United States.

**Haiti Spring Break Trip**

The Haiti Spring Break Trip was supported by the Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy at Boston College.

Where: Port-au-Prince, Haiti

By: Chris Pinto, 1L

The purpose of the BC Law spring break service trip to Haiti is to assist the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) with their current endeavors. IJDH is a non-profit organization that works with the people of Haiti in their non-violent struggle for the consolidation of constitutional democracy, justice and human rights. IJDH’s work encompasses a range of critical issues including the right to adequate housing, women’s rights, immigration advocacy and prisoner’s rights. BCLS students spent the first portion of the spring break trip at Camp Grace, an Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camp, outside of Port-au-Prince. Camp Grace consists of the victims of the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti. Residents of Camp Grace have been subject to incidents of violence, arson, forced evictions and terrorism. BCLS students documented these instances and interviewed residents in order to write a formal report to the international community on behalf of Le Bureau Des Avocats Internationaux (BAI). This report will expose that Camp Grace residents do not receive adequate rights to housing and initiate the steps to ameliorate their predicament.

While the first part of the trip gave students more intimate experiences with human rights work, students next looked at major human rights violations across Haiti. In collaboration with students from the University of the Aristide Foundation, BCLS students analyzed critical problems that plague the country. These problems include prisoners’ rights, gender-based violence, human trafficking and slavery and voting rights, among others. Each student will explore a specific issue and use testimony from UNIFA students to uncover these problems that are consistently obscured from the international community. Students will then work together to submit a single report to the United Nations declaring the current status of these issues in Haiti.