



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: Although I have been working with my legal aid clinic, Lincoln Square Legal Services Inc. with Fordham University School of Law, since January 2024, these last few weeks have been the busiest and possibly the most enriching. When I took this clinic as a course for credit during the Spring 2024 semester, there was lots of structure in place that guided my learning about housing rights litigation, and I was able to share my casework-load with a student who was my 'case-partner', and a class of 10 other students.

Now that it is just myself and a couple other students, I feel greater pressure to learn legal topics and make sure that they 'stick' in a timely manner, so that my clients can feel supported and secure when I speak to them, and when I help draft materials on their behalf, since I don't have as large of a team before to help with these tasks. But I've found this dynamic to be more engaging and exciting, too. The past few weeks have included legal research, client intake interviews, preparing arguments for court appearances, and attending court dates where I must show up prepared to provide information and support to my supervising attorney. It has been amazing to see my efforts go towards making sure people can stay in their homes, and to try to help rectify issues of housing discrimination. This week has specifically taught me about procedural concepts, such as motions to renew and motions to reargue, as well as honed my fluency in understanding civil procedure more broadly. I am really enjoying being able to apply my own desire for justice to set standards and procedures of law, to make sure that those I serve can benefit from our justice system and housing infrastructure in the way that we all deserve.

Update 2: The past couple of weeks with my legal aid clinic have actually been a bit slower - which, I'm realizing how much our work can ebb and flow. It feels nice to have caught some sort of rhythm, knowing that I won't have to be 'on' every day, and that in the midst of longer and harder days, there will also be times where the workload is much lighter. This makes me feel



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

more comfortable with having chosen to be an attorney, knowing that I will be able to manage my larger workload, so long as I continue my practice of being prepared, and developing meal and rest plans into my routine.

Now, we are preparing motion practice for a housing court case in a few weeks and doing preliminary research to get our drafting process started, for a motion to dismiss and a motion for summary judgment. After we complete our research, we (the student attorneys and research assistants) will draft portions of our motions. I find that although it can be daunting to consider that whether we do a good job or not affects whether someone can maintain their housing, it is okay to relax knowing that my supervising attorney's will make sure that our work is effective, and that I have time to hone my skills and practice at these things before I have my own license to practice. On that note, I'm very glad that I can take on both a position that is somewhat lower stakes, where I share the responsibility to my clients with other employees who are more experienced than myself, and that I can have this time to gain my own experience.

Update 3: As the summer semester approaches a close, my clinic has begun wrapping up some of our work, in preparation for the fall semester's students to begin working. Working with my clinic has included some (positive) challenges and has not been easy every step of the way. In this sense, I look forward to being able to focus on my classes when the fall semester begins, but I also know I am going to miss working with my clients. It has been nice to build trust and relationships with them, and to know that they feel comfortable working with me. I am hopeful that they will be able to build similar, if not even better, relationships with the new students that we onboard to assist in their casework.

I am also really excited to also see how working with the clinic will change how I approach learning and classwork, even though I'm not taking very many practice-based law courses this semester. I will be fulfilling my 'legal writing requirement' (LWR) set by this school this semester, and I hope that all of the note taking, research, document review, and drafting I've done over the summer will be reflected in the quality of my LWR paper. The paper will be written for my "Slavery and the Constitution" course, which I think will be a great exercise of me having to take a resonant topic that is difficult to remove my subjectivity from, but argue whatever my thesis will be with strong, logical, objectivity. I also think that the more personal lessons I've learned from my clients will help me to find new perspectives to frame my other courses, especially through lenses of ability, accessibility, and accountability.

Update 4: This past week has afforded me new opportunities to learn about how to communicate as a (student) attorney, with the best interests of my client held to the forefront.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

For instance: One of my clients has been locked out of his apartment for 3 weeks, since he lost his key. Instead of management providing a new lock or key to my client, he has had to sometimes leave his door unlocked, or pay \$5 to have his door unlocked if he wants to lock it behind him and leave his home. Knowing the other harassment that my client has endured, and how unsafe I have felt in my own home when it comes to privacy and safety concerns, I really wanted to just call his apartment's management team, and demand that they fix this issue, and more personally, express my anger towards them. But, I was instead directed by my supervising attorney to send a letter to management and the opposing counsel who works for the apartment building.

Another example: We are doing motion practice for a nuisance holdover case, and one of the nuisances alleged against my client has been completely falsified - based on video evidence that my client provided to me. I know that if we could present this video to the court, we would more easily be able to dismiss the case. But, based on procedural standards and the plan set by my supervising attorney, we won't be using that video.

Each of these examples have shown me how important it is to be able to wisely wield the law, and to have a full skillset, so that you can use strategy to assist your clients, as opposed to 'brute force', for lack of a better phrase. Sometimes this feels frustrating, especially when I consider all of what my clients are suffering through, and that I want to be able to provide relief more immediately. But I know that this casework is an opportunity to continue honing my skills so that I can communicate and make procedural strategies that serve the same purpose as say, making an angry phone call to building management. (Note: I have a terrible poker face and am terrible at hiding my tone when aggravated. I want to work on this too.)

Update 5: Overall, my experience with working as a student attorney this summer has been engaging, formative, and self-affirming. Working with my team and my clients has allowed me the opportunity to work on my discernment and my understanding of legal concepts, and to continue building a broad perspective of the world and humanity. I have learned small things, such as how to sympathetically work with a client who is experiencing a traumatic living situation, without being pitying or condescending, as well as learned much larger things, such as how to structure a motion to dismiss.

My work this summer has included many tasks, including drafting filings, meeting with clients in person, explaining legal strategies and concepts to clients, corresponding with opposing counsel, and conducting interviews. The practice I've done with drafting documents to file with the court has likely been the most important and practical skill for me to start to develop to be a well-equipped future lawyer within the next couple of years. But I also know that the professionalism and people skills that I have begun to form while calling, interviewing,



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

debriefing, and meeting with clients in person have been crucial to building my confidence to be able to do so in the future. I have most enjoyed seeing my clients feel comfortable to ask me for help, and to share their personal successes with me, as it means that I have likely made them feel that I am reliable and deserving of their trust - if not that they feel as though I am facilitating their expressed best interests.

Into my future work, I hope to take some of the confidence and assertiveness that I've gained during this experience. I am a person who believes deeply in compassion and understanding, but I've had to structure those values with my own self-resolution and steadfastness, to ensure that my clients understand and will cooperate with the work I am trying to accomplish with them. I tend to be a more sensitive person, so it has been empowering to see that I can maintain my 'softness', and still pursue a career as objectivity based as the law. I look forward to bringing my personal character traits into my work in a way that maintains the integrity of a legal career, which will likely center around amplifying the needs and rights of my clients who all deserve safety, an opportunity to thrive, and to determine their own realities.