

Summer Fellowship Experience  
Equal Justice America

Dear Dan Ruben,

This summer I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to work at American Gateways (formerly the Political Asylum Project of Austin) in Austin, Texas. American Gateways is a central Texas non-profit organization that provides free and low-cost legal services to immigrants and their families.

As an intern at American Gateways, my responsibilities included the development of client affidavits, trial court preparation, Spanish to English translations, and legal research and writing related to immigration deportation hearings. I was also responsible for assisting with legal presentations put on at various detention centers and developing a three-day pro bono training program regarding asylum and U-Visa cases.

The most rewarding part of my internship at American Gateways was the amount of face-to-face time I got to spend with various Spanish-speaking clients. Coming into the internship I was under the impression that most of our time would be spent sitting behind a desk, researching case law and writing legal memos. However, as one of the only non-profit organizations that provide legal services to immigrants in the central Texas area, American Gateways faces a seemingly never-ending supply of potential clients. As a result, the internship called for strong commitment to individual clients and their cases.

One of the many highlights from my internship included a U-Visa case I was assigned at the beginning of my internship. The U-Visa was part of a law passed by Congress in 2000 with the purpose of giving victims of certain violent crimes temporary legal status and work eligibility in the United States for up to four years. My client, a young

immigrant from Mexico, was the victim of a violent sex crime committed against her by two individuals. Working closely with my client, I was able to develop her affidavit and prepare the necessary paperwork in preparation for submission to the United States Department of Homeland Security.

The process not only allowed me to gain insight into the intricacies and complications of immigration law, but also allowed me to gain an appreciation and understanding of the hardship that many immigrants face as part of their difficult journey into the United States. In the end, it was an extremely rewarding experience to help a victim of crime who did not have the financial resources to contract with a private attorney.

I am grateful to the wonderful attorneys at American Gateway who took time to guide me through each project I was assigned. I am also grateful to Equal Justice America for providing me with the financial support I requested for my internship. Overall, it was a great learning experience.

Yours Truly,  
Jorge Vela  
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Class of 2011