

My Summer 2009 clerkship assignment with the Federal Defender's Office (FDO) was an unforgettable experience. From the first day, I knew the summer with the FDO would be memorable. On Monday mornings, the entire office – lawyers, paralegals, and even support staff – gather in a conference room to discuss their assignments for the week. This allows everyone to see the importance of their role in the grand scheme of how the office works. The interns jumped right into the process. By the second week, we too were being asked what we would be working on and how our work would affect the entire office. Being made to feel like part of the team made us all work harder and want to do our best to ensure the success of the projects we were assigned.

The entire FDO was helpful, encouraging, and easy to relate to. The atmosphere they created was critical to making the experience so enjoyable. Whenever interns had questions, the attorneys would take time to explain things and be sure that we understood. When attorneys had strategy meetings, interns were encouraged to attend. Not only did we attend, but the attorneys actually asked for, and listened to, our insight and observations, and went so far as to incorporate them into the strategies if they could. Above all else, the entire staff was really personable. It was not uncommon for attorneys and staff to stop and chat with interns about any number of subjects; politics, sports, current events, and any other topic that may arise.

Assignments in which I participated over the summer included:

Wrote interoffice memoranda

Prepared memos for attorneys that were included in motions in limine, sentencing memoranda and recommendations for judges, appeals, and general defense strategy.

Interviewed clients

In conjunction with attorneys and/or investigators, conducted client interviews concerning background, living experiences and other pertinent information to gain facts to be used in argument and mitigation purposes.

Investigating and Interviewing witnesses

Identified, investigated, and interviewed witnesses to determine which individuals' testimony would be an asset to cases, if there were any circumstances that would detract from their effectiveness as a witness, and determined what information, if any, they could contribute.

Witness trial preparation

Briefed witnesses on their area of testimony, demeanor and etiquette in the court room.

Trial preparation

Assisted attorneys in developing theory and theme for case-in-chief, determining witness order and line of questioning, and made suggestions for opening and closing remarks.

Having never done a legal clerkship before, I didn't have a clear point of reference, but the clerkship with the FDO met and exceeded my expectations. I knew I would be given assignments, but I never imagined that I would work so independently, or that the work would be challenging and critical to the outcome of our cases. I anticipated the people I met would be cordial, but never knew the people at the FDO would be so enjoyable, insightful and helpful. Most importantly, while I was certain that the FDO clerkship would be a worthwhile experience, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it would be such a life-changing experience and make me completely reconsider an area of law to which I had never given much attention. In every area, this clerkship was above and beyond anything that I had anticipated.