

Lydia Casavant

Summer Legal Fellows

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August 1, 2017

This summer I had to opportunity to work with the Government Law Center at Albany Law School through the Siena Summer Legal Fellows Program. At the GLC I was able to work with multiple staff members to help clients involved in the Rural Law Initiative. The two major tasks I was given this summer were to create memos that explained the different types of employees a non-profit organization can have, and the different business forms an organization can take on. These memos, along with my other research, allowed me to further develop my analytical thinking and research skills.

The first task I was given this summer was to create a list of all the issues a new business owner may face. This task led me to do further research on different legal liabilities, tax credits, and types of business organizations. The documents I created led my supervisor, Kendra Sena, to giving me my first assignment for a Rural Law Initiative (RLI) Client. This assignment involved a non-profit organization and an issue they had with how to compensate employees. At this point in time the GLC had not offered us any WestLaw or LexisNexis training, so I had to do all of my research through Google. Despite this handicap, I was able to find a lot of state regulations and statutes on government websites that dictated the different types of employees a non-profit organization can have. Some of the employee types I researched were interns, volunteers, part-time employees, and trainees. As this was my first memo for the RLI it took me a few tries

to understand what I should and should not include in a legal memo, but overall the final product helped the client understand what options they had.

The next assignment I was given originally spawned from the work Andy Ayers gave me when there were no “real” assignments that needed to be done. During the first few weeks at the GLC I wrote a brief document on the advantages of different business forms: corporations, LLCs, limited partnerships, general partnerships, LLPs, and sole proprietorships. After Kendra learned that I had already done research on this topic, she gave me my second RLI assignment. This new assignment was for a small farm that was trying to decide if they should change business forms, and if so, which would be best. By this time, I had received some brief training in WestLaw, so I was able to look up statutes and regulations in a more direct way than before. After discussing the client’s situation with Kendra and a new staff attorney, Taier Perlman, we were able to decide that my research should focus on LLC, general partnership, limited partnership, and sole proprietorships. At the end of the summer, this memo was the piece that Kendra and I chose to use to develop into a writing sample.

During my time at the GLC I was able to take a Constitutional Law class which was very interesting. We discussed multiple cases that I was already familiar with, and the professor was friendly and excited to have undergrad fellows sit in. The other class we took part in was a training session on WestLaw. This training did not happen until the beginning of July, about a month into our time at Albany Law School, which was disappointing because it would have been very helpful in the research I had done up to that point. The librarian we worked with was very well versed in the different techniques that would be most useful to us, and his information session was extremely useful in the research I conducted for the remainder of the summer.

Although we were not trained in LexisNexis it was helpful to understand the different types of legal resources.

I enjoyed my time at the GLC, but I do not believe that the experience I had was the one that was presented to me. While I did work with a few staff members, it was rare if I worked with them more than once every two weeks. The interactions I had with them were quite limited, and if I submitted an assignment it would be several days if I received feedback, and sometimes I received none at all. Most of the documents I completed by the end of the summer were just busy work they had given me when there was nothing to do which was quite frustrating because there were other fellows who were given numerous assignments and tasks. Everyone at the GLC was very friendly and seemed excited that we were there, but I think they were not prepared to provide work or attention to the Siena Fellows in the way I was expecting.

The Siena Summer Legal Fellows is a program I am glad I participated in because it was a goal of mine ever since I learned about the program at an Open House in November of 2013. The connections I made through the GLC are invaluable to me, and Andy has offered to have us come back for more classes and events in the future. Despite some of the negative aspects of my experience overall, I think the skills and training I gained is a great addition to my professional and academic repertoire.