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Summer Legal Fellowship- Self Reflection

The project I was assigned for my fellowship was researching the depths and evolution of consumer protection over the last 100 years. When I first began, I was intimidated because I did not quite know where to begin. The masses of consumer protection are far complex and cover a diverse field I had never covered before, and that was my first struggle. The first couple weeks I had to immerse myself into the field of consumer protection and try to become comfortable with it. Research was the main aspect of this project and those skills grew fundamentally throughout my eight weeks at Western New England. I had done research in college before, but never to the degree of which I was expected during this fellowship. I had to come to clear understanding of consumer protection, and I had to do it quickly. Laying a foundation for consumer protection was a crucial step in my research endeavors. I needed to come to an understanding of what exactly consumer protection was in America and how it had evolved over the years. Being expected to create project on an area I had never been familiar with was intimidated when first started. However, as I began to research and discover things about consumer protection, I was able to put my own twist on the project itself and look at it from a different point of view.

I was extremely lucky to have an advisor who was welcoming to my ideas and information I was learning about. Every single week we would have a meeting and discuss the findings of that week and in relation to consumer protection today. Being able to openly communicate with someone about what I was researching made things thrive. With research topic for a paper in school essentially you have your perspective and that is what you drive off of and you research can only show your side. What I found at these weekly meetings was how important it is in the research field to communicate and talk about your findings, because that

itself can drive you into directions that were never even thought of before. That is one thing that I took away from this experience that in the field of research communicating with peers of what has been found is rewarding and beneficial to the research at hand. The communication also made me realize I understood what I was researching. Being able to talk about the things that I was reading made me know that I was retaining that information and interpreting it. So often in previous research I would find myself reading passages and not really aware of what it meant. Throughout this process and being able to communicate effectively I found myself truly understanding things in the legal field I was not able to before. I still have a long way to go and skills to enhance in that perspective, however throughout this experience I found those skills improving in myself.

Researching an unfamiliar field was not the only new thing I experienced this summer. I also had the opportunity to immerse myself into Westlaw and explore the extent of the legal database. This was something I was very fortunate to do as an undergraduate. Being able to learn my way around the database was interesting, but I found it fascinating how much information it held. The cases within the database were my favorite part, being able to read about how these laws and statutes that were put in place first hand affected people. The cases show there is enforcement for the laws that are put in place in this country and those who do wrong are held accountable. The legal documents within Westlaw enhanced my reading skills immensely. Being able to understand what the documents suggested was a skill I developed throughout the fellowship. Never before had I read documents to the degree and rigor of those, I came across this summer and it was rewarding to finally be able to understand and interpret them. Although I still came across documents that were confusing and I did not fully comprehend, there were few

I could not develop some type of main idea. The other catalogs I was able to access throughout my time helped me develop the historical timeline of consumer protection. Having access to these resources and being able to read the laws throughout the years it was clear with the amended and new laws how consumer protection was changing. My analyzing skills became far more developed by reading laws from years to years and visualizing how they were changing over time. It was expected that as time went on and society evolved consumer protection was going to change, but with the legislation you can see it firsthand.

Another skill that I enhanced during this fellowship was self-discipline and work ethic. There really was not timeline or deadline that was set in place for me besides the PowerPoint I created that was due at the end of my time. This meant that it was on my terms what I researched and when I did it. The weekly meetings with my advisor obviously served as motivation to be sure the research was taking place. But it was on me to make sure my research and time was being used in an effective matter, something that I have struggled with in the past. With regard to some things in my life especially school I find myself procrastinating. With this fellowship I could have fallen into my normal routine and done just that. However, I decided to start holding myself accountable for the time and commitment that I was putting into this fellowship and actually make it worth my time. That self-discipline is something I hope to take from this experience and transfer it into my daily life and continue to hold myself accountable.

One of my greatest takeaways this experience was questioning. Regarding research that is really the main goal to answer questions and developing new ones, and that is how research comes to be. I found that the more knowledge I gained about consumer protection itself the more questions I had. With that it made me want to understand more and analyze the way our

legislation in this country is set up. I found the research to be extremely eye-opening because consumer protection affects every single one of us whether we see it or not. The more I found out I wondered if the consumer protection in this country really is doing all that it can, especially in today's society where with the technology we have leaving us so vulnerable. This questioning makes me think more cautiously about the knowledge I am consuming. Also, questioning is beneficial as a whole because it leads to understanding. Anytime I came across information that I was completely unfamiliar with and could not understand I asked my advisor and had it explained. Not being afraid to ask helped me so much because then I was able to dig deep and find out even more information regarding consumer protection.

This entire fellowship was extremely rewarding, and I learned so much about myself and my skills. I still have more to learn and room to grow within all of these skills, but I feel as this experience lead me in the right direction. I know the skills and knowledge I enhanced this summer will help distinguish my future, especially since deciding after this I believe law school will be right for me.