

Alumni-Funded Fellowships

For the past several years, Notre Dame Law School alumni have been opening their hearts and their wallets to eager law students dedicated to working in the public interest. Last summer was no exception. Eight law students were able to participate in public-interest internships because of the generous donations of Notre Dame Law Association members and Notre Dame alumni clubs throughout the country. Whether they dedicate their professional life to the public-interest field or continue to provide *pro bono* assistance through their employer after graduation, the impact these experiences have on the law students is nothing less than life changing. It is an experience made possible through your generous gifts of time, talent, and financial resources. With your support, we will continue in our mission to educate “**a different kind of lawyer.**”

Rachel L. Mordecai-Izikson

Legal Aid Society of Colorado
Denver, Colorado

I chose ND because the literature said the Law School is “educating a different kind of lawyer.” I quickly came to find out that this is not just a slogan the school places in pamphlets. This dedication became evident to me in my first year, when my job search for that summer went into full swing. I wanted to go back home to Denver, but I needed to find a place where I could give back to the community as well.

That opportunity came in the form of an internship at Colorado Legal Services (CLS) made possible through the Notre Dame Club of Denver and the Alumni-Funded Fellowship program. CLS is a statewide organization that provides seniors and low-income people in Colorado with meaningful access to high-quality legal services.

While working at CLS, the attorneys taught me many things. One of the most valuable was to remember that attorneys, and the legal profession as a whole, are here to help people, all of whom are equal and deserving. I was able to see those words put into action. Many of the CLS clients were in desperate need of medical care and medication, but they were not receiving the necessary benefits under the state’s Medicaid system. I was able to intervene between the state Medicaid system and our clients with a favorable result.

Notre Dame has shown me that its principles and actions are one and the same. The Alumni-Funded Fellowship allowed me to gain valuable legal experience and helped to show Denver that Notre Dame stands behind its mission of service to the community.

Ryan Blaney

Legal Aid Society of New York
New York, New York

Thanks to the sponsorship and generosity of **Jim Carr ’87 J.D.**, a partner at Kelley Drye & Warren L.L.P., and the New York City Notre Dame Alumni Association, I had the opportunity to represent the Notre Dame Law School as an alumni-funded public-interest fellow with the Legal Aid Society of New York. This internship, located at the Juvenile Rights Division in Manhattan, was extremely rewarding and eye-opening. I worked on cases involving adoptions, abuse and neglect, and delinquency. I interviewed legal aid clients and attended court hearings, trials, and the Harlem Community Justice Center. Attorneys supervised me as I wrote office memorandums and bills of demand, researched relevant cases and statutes, and contacted caseworkers, attorneys, schools, and parents.

The alumni grant allowed me to participate in this rewarding experience and pay for my transportation and housing while I was staying in Jersey City. In addition to Jim Carr, I would also like to thank **Leslie Farris ’01 J.D.**, an attorney at the Legal Aid Society, who organized my internship experience. I am also grateful for the generosity of the New York City Notre Dame Alumni Association, particularly **Matthew Donohue ’95 J.D.**, who invited me to numerous Yankee games, and **Patricia Moran ’93 B.A.**, **Laura LaVelle ’92 B.A.**, and **Larissa Herczeg ’96 B.A.**, who welcomed me to New York City and introduced me to many Notre Dame alumni living there.

Catherine Lockard

Hamilton County Public Defender
Cincinnati, Ohio

This summer, I worked as a law clerk for the Hamilton County Public Defender’s Office in Cincinnati, Ohio. As an intern, my Notre Dame alumni sponsor, **Paul Mattingly ’75**, made sure that I was given substantive legal work, and not clerical tasks. Whether I was conducting initial interviews, researching legal issues, writing motions, or preparing questions for trial, the fast pace of municipal court was never boring. The attorneys always kept me involved in the cases on which I was working, making sure that I was present in court when a motion I had written was being argued and inviting me into the judge’s chambers to discuss the motion.

While the public prosecutors all have their own offices and individual computers, the public defenders have cubicles and share outdated computers. To say the least, the technical resources at the public defender’s office were lacking. Oftentimes, demands and motions were not filed because it was too time consuming for an attorney with hundreds of cases to create a motion for each client. Because I have a strong computer/database background, I helped develop a motion template database that inputs client and attorney information into the motions automatically. As a result of my efforts, the attorneys can now easily access hundreds of motions/entries, greatly simplifying their job and helping them to more effectively represent their clients. Recently, one of the public defenders contacted me to tell that motions are still being filed for many cases—a fact that makes me proud.

Most of the clients with whom I interacted had so little both financially and socially. Our clients ranged greatly, from those who were very sympathetic to those who were belligerent. Some clients came to court drunk and dirty. Other clients came to court clean and cooperative. Regardless of outward looks or overall demeanor, the attorneys at the public defender’s office understood that each client deserved good legal representation. I was impressed with one attorney who, having been a public defender for more than 20 years, still treated each client with tremendous respect and professionalism. In law school, the focus is on learning to think like a lawyer and not necessarily on how to interact with a client. The attorneys at the public defender’s office taught me how to interact with the clients: when to be firm, when to be compassionate, and when to just listen. My summer internship will have a lasting impact on my life, both as a person and as a lawyer.

Rebecca McCurdy

Legal Aid and Defender Association
Detroit, Michigan

During the summer of 2002, because of the generosity of the Notre Dame alumni in Detroit, I was able to take advantage of the opportunity to work at the Legal Aid and Defender Association (LADA). LADA provides legal services for low- and moderate-income individuals in Wayne County, Michigan. As a law clerk I worked with the civil division of LADA. During the course of the summer I assisted with all aspects of cases dealing with Social Security, Housing, and wills. I was able to help prepare for a trial and serve as co-counsel at various hearings. Throughout the summer I was encouraged to take an active role in anything that interested me.

Unlike many work experiences where the clerk is relegated to research assistant, LADA allows law clerks to play an integral role in the management of cases. I participated in cases from the time clients were initially brought in for interviews, through the filing of various court documents, to preparation for trial.

In addition to my work experience, the Notre Dame Club of Detroit included me in the club’s various functions throughout the summer. I attended a meeting of the Alumni Club, a golf outing where Tyrone Willingham spoke, and was invited to the end-of-the-summer sendoff for Notre Dame students. These activities gave me the opportunity to meet and thank the alumni whose generosity funded my internship and to network with members of the Detroit legal community.

The Alumni-Funded Fellowship is an invaluable opportunity for individuals who wish to pursue public-interest work. As funding is so limited for many public-interest jobs, Notre Dame is fortunate to have such supportive alumni.