An Internship at the Center for Immigration Studies

This past summer I had the honor of having an internship at the Center for Immigration Studies, located in Washington, D.C. The Center for Immigration Studies, or CIS for short, is a non-partisan non-profit research organization that analyzes the effects immigration has had on our country. CIS aims to educate the American public, lawmakers, and the media about the social, economic, environmental, fiscal, and security consequences of both legal and illegal immigration into the United States. I had many responsibilities as an intern for CIS, one of them included researching various topics relating to immigration and preparing short, concise briefings for fellow staff members. I focused much of my research on studying the economic and fiscal impact of immigration, which paired well with my Economics minor.

I spent the summer further developing many skills that will be instrumental in my future. One skill I developed was my time management. I was often assigned multiple tasks and I had to create a priority system in order to meet the different deadlines. An example was I was doing a short research report about illegal immigrants potentially obtaining driver’s licenses but I was also trying to juggle our other tasks, which included following all press mentions of CIS. So during the course of a few days I would have to both check online and prominent news sites and complete the driver’s license project.

One of my favorite projects was less of a project and more of an opportunity to further my education. We had the pleasure of attending immigration court, which is based in Arlington, VA. I was able to attend with one of CIS’s senior fellow, David North, who has been working in the immigration field for many decades. His knowledge and experience was invaluable, and
he was also incredibly helpful when it came to answering any questions I had. During this day at Immigration Court I was able to see first hand how broken our current immigration system is, since hearings were being scheduled for late December 2017 – nearly two years in the future. After court I attended lunch with David where I was able to ask him a plethora of questions I had, and he was more than happy to answer all my questions.

One of my favorite days in the office was when I was able to shadow the Executive Director for CIS, Mark Krikorian, for an afternoon while he went to conduct an interview. I was able to ride in the car with him to the studio and he explained to me how he had started working in immigration policy. Turns out he was born in Armenia and emigrated to the United States as a young child, so immigration policy has always had a huge impact on his life. Then once we got to the studio it was interesting to watch the interview and all the prep work that goes into an interview, even a recorded one.

Another great task we had assigned for this internship was to explore the city. Every Friday we were tasked with going out into DC and learning something interesting about the city. While our destinations weren’t always immigration related it was a great opportunity to explore many famous landmarks in Washington. We went to the Supreme Court building, the Capital, and many of the Smithsonian museums. It was also a great opportunity to bond with the other two interns where we could all discuss what we had learned from the week.

An important lesson I learned from this summer was how fast a situation can change, and how quickly an office needs to react to a changing world. The best example was the child migrant crisis of the summer, while some staff members had predicted a crisis was going to
happen no one was expecting it this past summer. The office environment quickly changed from a relaxed summer environment, into an office in full swing. Fellow staff members were conducting many interviews, and suddenly I was engaging in research projects on current events. I did not expect this summer to be an eventful one in the immigration world, but quickly I learned how fast a work environment could change in reaction to a changing world.

This summer only reinforced my desire to live and work in Washington DC. It was fantastic to work for a group who cared so passionately about their causes. Everyone in the office dedicated long hours to their work, and most refused to go home until they had finished their work. It reinforced my enjoyment at a fast-paced work environment, since I feel that my best work comes when I have to operate under a strict deadline. I thoroughly enjoy working in an environment that is constantly changing, and requires your full attention. At no point this summer did I feel that nothing was happening in the world of immigration, there was always some news or some work being done relating to immigration.