

In the weeks leading up to my first day as a paralegal intern at Burns & Levinson, I realized how little I knew about private client law. I had a sense that I would enjoy working with individual clients, and I knew the subsections of the department (Domestic Relations, Fiduciary Litigation, and Trusts & Estates), but each time a family member or friend asked follow-up questions about my summer plans, I had to admit that I had no idea what the daily tasks of a private client paralegal looked like. Yet this lack of knowledge is precisely why I was so excited about the internship. As a humanities student, I know that my degree is widely applicable, but I sometimes struggle to develop concrete pictures of what life would look like in different jobs. Interning as a paralegal in a mid-size law firm put me in the right place to ask questions not only about being a paralegal but about multiple different legal paths. In doing so, I learned about the significance of the humanities in preparing students for careers that require understanding and expressing complex information in multiple formats.

To answer my family members' question: my day-to-day work varied greatly, from administrative work such as redacting and compiling binders, to more traditional paralegal work such as drafting court documents and completing financial statements. Part of the reason that I had so many different kinds of assignments was because I worked with three different private client groups. Rather than formally rotating between the groups, I received work from all three groups throughout the summer. I loved this structure because I was able to learn what kinds of assignments paralegals have in different departments. Additionally, since I got to work with all three groups all summer, I was increasingly comfortable with the work that I was given. Rather than moving onto a new role just as I was getting my bearings, I continued to improve throughout the summer.

My work varied not only because it was from different groups, but because I received assignments from all different levels of employees, including the private client group's co-chairs, partner and associate attorneys, other paralegals, and legal administrative assistants. I was pleasantly surprised by the collaborative nature of Burns & Levinson. From the outside, different job titles and ranks might appear to form a rigid hierarchy, but I did not find this to be the case. Instead, associate attorneys, partners, paralegals, and legal administrative assistants worked together on cases, with work often blending across their official job descriptions. This atmosphere was not only pleasant and productive, it also allowed me to learn a lot about different legal career paths. I felt very comfortable asking questions to all members of the office, and I loved hearing about different experiences.

In addition to learning by asking questions, there was an official education component to the internship: a weekly seminar on communication, taught by vocal coach Gina Razón. Gina spoke about how effective communication requires the speaker to know how to say their message in a way that leads to the action they are looking for. That is, it is not enough to know what you want your audience to do, you must know how to say it in a way that will result in this action. This distinction is one that my humanities education has well prepared me for. My college classes have placed great emphasis on knowing one's audience and purpose before undertaking a research project. Law is very similar. I was greatly impressed by the ability of attorneys and paralegals to express information in multiple ways, from the jargon-heavy language of official court documents to explaining options to clients in colloquial terms. I realized that I could gauge how well I understood an assignment by whether I was able to explain a case in my own words

rather than continuously repeating the diction given to me on a memo or case document. Many of my assignments involved summarizing information, whether it was through case research or a legal memo. In these instances, I similarly used my humanities background to determine and express the most relevant information.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Burns & Levinson shifted to a hybrid model. I was very eager to be able to work in-person because I wanted to have the opportunity to participate in casual conversations in order to best learn about working in law. I originally coordinated with human resources that I would work in-person three days a week and remotely twice a week, but I ended up having a lot of flexibility around coming in, even on my remote days. There is a lot to be said for remote work, but I found my in-person days to be more rewarding because I was able to so easily tap into the collaborative nature of Burns & Levinson. There were times when I found myself approaching an assignment from an entirely new angle after a spur of the moment conversation at the photocopier machine or reassessing my gap year plans after a lunch conversation with a workplace mentor. The hybrid model seemed to work well, creating flexibility for those who were unable to make it into the office but allowing those who wanted to come in the chance to benefit from in-person experiences.

My summer at Burns & Levinson taught me a lot not only about legal professions, but about the importance of the humanities in making connections and communicating effectively. Working across multiple groups and with many kinds of people allowed me to complete many intellectually stimulating projects and to learn from the experiences of others. Of course, working on so many diverse projects has a downside: it is still difficult to succinctly tell my family members exactly what it was I did this summer.