

Expedition Fund Award Report 2013/2014

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I am Gaspare Chirillo and I am second year law student at Queen Mary University of London. I was awarded of the Expedition Fund bursary during my first year in order to fund an internship that I have undertaken this past summer. Thus, through the ProBono Society of QMUL, I was chosen to spend three weeks in Cape Town, South Africa, to be an intern in a legal clinic providing legal advices to people who cannot afford to pay. This clinic is called Project Abroad Human Rights Office (PAHRO) and is led by different lawyers who dedicate their time to ProBono activities. This office specializes particularly on certain areas of law, such as human rights, immigration and criminal law.

Moreover, in this legal advices centre, many students are allowed to work here in order to gain important working experience: in fact, since ,as it often happens with this legal clinic, the funds are limited so this office relies significantly on the work of the interns by giving a lot of responsibilities. Consequently, interns are enabled to perform many tasks from making legal researches to drafting report, from interviewing clients to participate in social activities. This was a huge surprise for myself since, before leaving for South Africa, I was expecting to perform very small tasks, such as making coffee or photocopying files, as a consequence of the fact that I was just a first year law student. Instead, the most important benefit that I received from this internship was that I was allowed to use my skills and my energies to perform many tasks which allowed me to grow significantly as a student and as a person.

In fact, this internship allowed me to develop certain skills which are essential and important for a future in the legal world but, also, it enabled me to improve skills which are also necessary for my legal studies at Queen Mary University. In fact, thanks to the three weeks spent in Cape Town, I improved my researching skills since in the office, I was often asked to conduct legal researched in order to find information to draft reports and application for asylum seekers in particular. This skill is definitely crucial for my legal studies since I feel that now I can perform legal researches, necessary for tutorials and lectures, in a shorter amount of time and in a more efficient way. In addition, through the time spent at PAHRO, I developed great listening skills since, in order to do a good job in this office, I had to pay a great amount of attention to what my supervisors were telling me. This skill, in my opinion, is vital to do well in every environment, from university to a working place.

Furthermore, this experience has allowed me spend a lot of time in working within a group. In fact, in addition to legal task, such as drafting reports or conducting legal researches, I had the great opportunity to participate in social group projects. Since Cape Town is characterized by the significant presence of many slums, in which the criminality rate is significantly high and the living conditions are very desperate, PAHRO organizes every week projects aimed at improving the condition of the people living in these areas of the city. Particularly, during my three weeks at PAHRO, I participated in a project aimed at rehabilitating minors who were already in jail. In fact,

twice a week, I visited juvenile prisons in which I was part of group presentation with other interns. The goal of these presentation was to make these young teenager understand that there are other possibility for them after their prison time. In fact, we organized different presentations on gang life, drugs and working options. In addition, to the great opportunity to spend my time to do something which could change the life of these teenagers, this projects allowed me to spend a great deal of time in working within a group. This experience has been significantly important since it made me understand the importance of relying on other people's help when you have a common goal and, also, what are those necessary skills and behaviours which made easier to work efficiently within a group and achieving the established goal.

Furthermore, this placement has enabled me also to shadow the lawyers during the time in which they were interviewing and providing clients with legal advices. This was a great opportunity since I learnt a lot by observing them and, also, I had a practical touch of what it means to be a lawyer. Also, I had the chance of following a criminal case from the interviews in the prison all of way to the trial before the judge. These were all experiences which I have never thought I could do after my first year and that allowed me to receive huge benefit for my personal and legal development.

Although during this internship I worked within certain areas of law, such as human rights and criminal law, which do not interest me for my future legal career, this experience had been significantly important for myself since it was my first legal working experience. Thus, when I left for South Africa, my goal was to have a great legal experience which could make me understand whether or not I want to become a lawyer and whether or not the life as a lawyer could suit me. Without any doubts, this internship had enabled me to understand that becoming a lawyer was not just a dream that I had since I was a child, but it is actually what I want to be for the rest of my life.

Moreover, in addition to all of the important legal experiences that I had during my time at PAHRO, during these three weeks, I had the amazing opportunity to further my knowledge about South Africa and its cultural. The cultural exchange was one of the best benefit that I drew from this experience, which made me grow significantly as a person. Visiting the slums and the prisons made me understand how different the life could be in other countries in the world but, also, how rewarding is when thanks to the help and time that you give, something could change for the best.

If this experience has been so successful, I have to thank the university for awarding me with the Expedition Fund Bursary. This fund was significantly important because it allowed me to finance the cost of my trip in particular. Thanks to the amount of money which I have received through the bursary, I was allowed to dedicate all of my time to studying and preparing for my exams, without worrying about finding a part-time job which could allow me to find the rest of the money that I needed in order to fund my trip in South Africa. For this reason, the Expedition Fund Award has been so important for the great outcome of this experience.