

## **EQV Internship**

**Tabitha Gillombardo '16**  
**Hometown: Cleveland Heights, Ohio**

### **What is your major?**

I am a government and international politics double major, and I am also getting my certificate in Middle Eastern studies. Since high school, I have been shocked by and drawn to U.S. involvement in the Middle East. From studying Guantanamo Bay in class to working with a federal public defender that represented 12 Gitmo prisoners, I knew innocent until proven guilty was no longer a promised right for all, but rather had transformed into a circumstantial privilege dependent on personal interest. My areas of study at Wes stem from my passion for human rights and my interest in how behavior and morals change in times of crisis. My thesis should prove quite interesting as I analyze which frames were most salient in both George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden's speeches from 2001-2007.

### **What was your job title and what type of work did you do through your summer experience?**

This summer, I interned at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) in Brooklyn, New York, where I worked in the family defense practice. I worked with social workers, attorneys, and parent advocates. I reached out to PTAs, public housing tenements, and organizations that offer services for domestic violence survivors in order to schedule "Know Your Rights" trainings. I accompanied clients to mental health evaluations and social services; visiting clients in their homes to fill out naturalization applications; ran a resume workshop with clients; created a job application how-to kit; and saw two trials, countless in-takes, and procedural hearings. Before this summer experience, I had never been inside an active courtroom!

### **How will your work this summer relate to your major or area of study at Wesleyan?**

Although the clients I served this summer are not living in the Middle East, a fundamental link between my areas of study and my summer work is protecting basic human rights outlined under the law, like a fair trial and innocent until proven guilty. People's lives are not black and white. A person's life choices cannot be viewed as solely good or solely bad. My summer experience exposed me to people with complex life stories and my job, just like their attorneys' jobs, was to protect their fundamental human rights. My studies and my summer internship showed me a plethora of different lifestyles and life circumstances. I cannot pretend to posit what life choices I would make in hypothetical situations, so there is no justice in prematurely admonishing someone's decision because it is not something that you in your position would ever consider. Put more simply, the link between my studies and my internship was that both challenged my perception of the world and my perception of right-wrong, but both come back to the fact that we cannot compromise our duty of viewing all of our neighbors as equally valuable human beings.

### **How will your work this summer relate to your post-Wesleyan career?**

I know that I want to pursue law and go to law school. I also know that I want to take time off in between Wes and higher education. I think that it is important to be something other than an enrolled student before going to law school. BDS's director, Lauren Shapiro, has told me that they have a paralegal position opening up at the end of the 2015-2016 school year and that I would be an amazing fit. Besides opening possible job doors, this experience has provided an incredible network of professionals from lawyers, to social workers, to social services providers. This summer I worked even more directly with clients than I did last summer and these experiences are unparalleled. I learn more and more about how I specifically want to help people. I know that I want to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. My internship at BDS also exposed me to a new type of law: family defense. I think that trying many different fields of law is important before beginning legal studies, so that I can scholastically attack those courses that match up with my career interests.

### **What did this summer experience mean to you?**

The EQV Internship allowed me to pay for all of my New York City housing expenses and my subway card. This grant could not have come at a more blessed time. My father passed away in April just a few weeks after I found out that I won the grant. My mom was rightfully distracted by the outpouring of documents that come after a passing. I cannot convey the joy and pride that I felt knowing that my summer plans would not be a burden on my mom. I was able to sign a lease and be done with it. I was able to focus on my mom's needs, my family's

needs, and my personal needs. I left Wes a week after my dad's passing to go home early. I could not be on campus during the frenzied Spring Fling and finals period. Shortly after I got home, I learned that I have two autoimmune diseases, including a rare liver disease. This grant helped alleviate the pressures I was feeling and enabled me to focus on grieving my dad and recuperating from surgery. Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart. I would not have been able to live in New York City for this internship, especially if my family needed to contribute \$4,000 after my father's passing. I valued every moment of this experience because I recognize that it may not have been within my reach without your support. Thank you!

## ***Thank you!***

**Dear Donors,**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pursue an internship at Brooklyn Defender Services. It magnified my passion for social justice. As a result of your generosity, I feel intellectually validated and supportively challenged to continue to push myself and my peers to shape the world that we know can exist.

Your generous award helped me secure housing, transportation, and several weeks of food independent from my family's resources. My father passed away on April 22, 2015. He was so proud of this award for intellectual curiosity. My fondest memories with him are learning roman numerals, practicing mental math, discussing literature and art, and observing and questioning the world in which we live. My dad showed me that being passionate is wonderful. I learned from him that learning is exciting. These early lessons have stuck with me as I defend my academic pursuits and challenge peoples' expectations of woman. I know that my voice is valuable and worth sharing. Your award gave me another platform on which I can do just that.

My EQV summer internship got me into the courtroom for the first time! I saw two trials, countless in-takes, and have watched several procedural hearings. Had it not been for your summer internship opportunity, I would have been yearning to be a lawyer without ever setting foot inside a courtroom. I have networked with many attorneys, learned which aspects of Family Defense most excite me, and become an additional support system and resource for these parents. No one should ever feel alone. Thank you for believing in me!

Sincerely,  
Tabitha Gillombardo