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Final Report: Internship at Hull and Hull LLP

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SASAH Experiential Learning

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Final Report

Under the unique circumstances of this summer, my internship has been quite different from what I imagined it would be. It was certainly a distinct contrast to my previous experience working at Hull & Hull. Consequently, this internship taught me very different lessons in work ethic and independence. In previous summers I have had hands-on tasks and positions requiring interpersonal interaction. I have represented the firm in information booths at conferences, reorganized files in the safe, and supervised the front desk, fielding calls from clients, deliveries, and setting up board rooms for meetings. Needless to say, this summer has limited the tasks that I can safely work on. Working remotely has taken its toll on almost everyone, it simply isn't the same. I struggled a lot with this at the beginning, whether it was the initial miscommunications where instructions were lost in translation, or the scattered support network, it was a big adjustment for me. So much so that for the first week of my internship I called my friend and coworker almost every day for technological assistance, much to her amusement.

As is almost always the case between technology and I, almost everything went wrong. I was booted off of the remote server more times than I can count, the first time it happened I lost a lot of work but from then on, I was always prepared for the server to let me down. I ran out of disc space and lost more work (this could not have been avoided no matter how savvy I thought I was), and I constantly found myself at odds with Microsoft Word formatting while making my charts, one little change could alter the entire document.

In spite of all of this I did manage to become accustomed to remote work. The most challenging aspect of it all was, surprisingly, me. In past summers I have always worked in a synergy environment at Hull & Hull. My first summer there I worked in the Student Synergy, which was basically a boardroom with one big long table that all the summer students shared and worked at. The intention was for the students to have an easy time communicating with one another in order to delegate tasks and to create a strong working relationship so that teamwork became second nature. It worked out quite well and I became accustomed to it. I remember in that first year of work I was surprised by the amount of real responsibility the students were given. I had anticipated a summer of scanning documents, binding records and pleadings, and fetching coffee. When they gave us correspondence to draft and documents to file at court, I was intimidated but excited at the opportunity. The tasks were quite daunting at the time given the fact that most of us had no experience drafting letters in that capacity or had ever filed something at court. The first two summers that I worked at Hull & Hull prepared me well for the sort of responsibility I was given this past summer.

In my second year at Hull & Hull, we were moved to the main synergy room where most of the lawyers worked. I added a picture of the main synergy room to my presentation so that people were able to get a feel of what the space would have been like to work in and were able to imagine how busy it would have been with all of those chairs filled. It was a very different type of environment, more intense and determined, which in turn made the summer students that much more focused. Working remotely this summer has been a test of my motivation and drive. I had to essentially be my own boss on a daily basis, making sure I met my own goals and stayed on task. One would think that this would be easier to do without coworkers to distract me, but it wasn't. A grocery delivery would come and I'd spend an hour in the middle of the day

disinfecting it all and putting it away, or my dog would decide it was time to play catch and drop her ball on my keyboard and when I didn't throw it, decide to rest her head on my keyboard instead. Distractions were never in short supply. I had to be diligent and account for the time lost in other ways. Sometimes this meant working later, waking up earlier, or working on the weekends.

The work I was given was also very unique to the current circumstances. Since so much of my education has been digitized it has been easy to forget that a lot of workspaces have not completely taken those steps. It was surprising to me how much of the legal profession has not been modernized in this way. Hull & Hull is a firm that does do its best to be paperless and environmentally conscious, but there are limits to this practice. Much of formal court procedure currently requires physical documentation. This is changing though; the pandemic has been a wake-up call, promoting the convenience and prudence of digitized procedure. I am very interested to see where these changes will take us and what this will look like for the legal profession, as it is indeed a work in progress. The charts I was experimenting with were in pursuit of the best electronic presentation of documents for the court and for mediation purposes. This meant that much of the chart formatting was trial and error. I had phone meetings and check-ins with Natalia and Julia (my supervisors) after each prototype to discuss alterations, and in the end none of them panned out. During my last week Natalia realized that grouping objection notices and correspondence by subject matter, rather than by date, was incompatible with the materials. She had and decided that we should stick with the charts organized by date.

Although I knew my work on the charts was experimental, I initially did take this dead end a little personally. Logically, I knew that these formatting changes may not work, but I kept wondering if I had done something wrong or misunderstood the direction Natalia wanted to take.

The longer I looked at the charts, however, I started to realize what Natalia meant. No matter how we structured it, it would never be as concise and clear as when it was grouped by date. It was difficult to accept the idea that a great deal of what I was working on could not pan out, I had grown attached to the project while I was working on it. The most important take away from this is that sometimes you have to explore other options to recognize that you already had the right one, and you can't take it personally when an idea doesn't work out as well as you had hoped. This is probably the most significant thing I learned from my work on this internship. As someone who often has perfectionistic tendencies, I find it very difficult to accept when things don't go as planned, and so this was definitely a good experience for me to have had.

In the areas of estates law and elder law there is a lot of contention amongst family members and, in most cases, someone has taken advantage of the older adult in pursuit of money and property. This is an area of a very personal nature for clientele. They are usually fighting their siblings or stepparents, ensuing strong feelings of betrayal and loneliness. I found that because I was working remotely and simply reading about people's lives instead of seeing them, I had a degree of removal from the full impact of the emotional aspect of this work. It was not until I sat in on the cross examination that I truly had a visceral reaction to the nature of the clientele in this practice area. It was difficult to imagine how the lawyers were able to keep their composure, the accusations of abuse, fraud, and manipulation were heart wrenching.

I have a deep respect for those who work in this practice area, they see the worst of people firsthand and still continue to help people. After observing the intensely personal nature of these files, I do not think I could handle the emotional toll it would take on me to work in this area. There is a difference between fighting injustices committed by strangers, or by society, versus fighting against injustices committed by close family members and friends. I would

therefore prefer to work in civil and human rights law. I know that these cases can and will be personal and deeply emotional as well, but I somehow prefer this to constantly being faced with the betrayal of those who were meant to be trusted. I want to make a difference in the world and help people, and I believe that civil and human rights law might be the appropriate platform for me to do this.

Something that really solidified this potential career path for me is the current state of long-term care facilities and protections for older adults in Canada, which has come to the surface during the pandemic. I have heard many estate practitioners discuss elder abuse and the systemic mistreatment of older adults, but I had never imagined that these issues were going unnoticed and untreated by government officials despite the information they had. The news coverage of recent reports from long-term care facilities has made this injustice a bit of a hot topic. I dare say people still don't care as much as they should, nonetheless I can hardly pretend that people have not begun to take notice. This has created an opportunity for activism in favor of the elderly population, and for those in the area of elder law to provide possible solutions to this pressing issue. This is an area I would like to work in because I see the opportunity for change, and I would like to help move towards it. Our world has a lot of room for progress and I would really like to help it become a safe and welcoming place for everyone to live in, not just for a select few. I am under no illusions about how difficult it is to work within the governmental system to achieve change, but I think with enough support it is entirely possible.

I can also honestly add that this interest in civil and human rights law has also been influenced by the current civil rights movement. Whether it be furthering the rights of older adults and vulnerable persons, or fighting against discrimination and abuses of power, I feel strongly about these issues and protecting people's rights. This was a rather timely realization for

me, as the SASAH course this semester taught by David Simmonds focused on teaching us tools to achieve progress and change within existing social structures through storytelling. This helped me to build further on what I learned about the legal profession over the summer, and to cultivate my skills as an advocate.

This internship has prepared me for the future in a lot of ways. I have learned a lot of things about the law, about this practice area, and about myself in terms of my work ethic and career interests. Simply being around the legal terminology and documentation will certainly prove useful at law school. Knowing the language will help me understand case law and lecture materials, hopefully giving me a strong platform to build upon. Before this internship I didn't know much about passing of accounts or mediation processes, and I had certainly never sat in on a cross examination. These experiences are invaluable to my learning process. I won't say I could conduct a cross examination tomorrow, but I have a much better understanding of the formalities that are required to maintain professional decorum and the ways in which you can ask the proper questions to form a narrative. The cross examiner has to almost plan for exact answers before they even ask the questions, which requires a lot of intuition and preparation. This has given me a glimpse of how much planning goes in to almost every aspect of the legal profession. When crafting my presentation, it occurred to me, in part due to this year's SASAH course, that many aspects of the legal profession are akin to storytelling. In a way, all advocacy is. In order to craft a compelling and persuasive argument, in order to make your point clear, you have to tell a story.

I also learned how complex a passing of accounts, or really any case with multiple concerned parties, can be. The passing of accounts which I was working on consisted of an audit of the estate and all transactions that have been made in and out of it. This specific passing of

accounts was so complex because there were two objecting parties rather than one, and each had multiple objections. The first objector was a fellow family member and beneficiary, but the second was the trust company involved with the estate accounts. This was surprising to me because I had never thought of objections being made by anyone other than a beneficiary, but in hindsight it makes sense that any party with financial interest in the proceedings would have a say in a passing of accounts including the estate trustee during litigation. An estate trustee during litigation (a party charged with the responsibility of preserving the estate during the litigation) is also obliged to pass its accounts if requested. Since there were so many objections for the file I was working on, it was quite difficult to organize succinctly.

My internship has also given me the opportunity to practice strengthening professional relationships and interactions. I have come to realize how important the social aspect of work is. Without seeing everyone every day, making small talk at your desk and saying “good morning” or “have a great night” it’s hard to feel connected to the work you’re doing, and it makes everything seem less worthwhile. Professionals always push networking and I have always understood how that can create mutually beneficial working relationships where you can refer work to one another, but I don’t think I ever gave enough credit to the social aspect of work as a motivator. Working around other people makes you push yourself harder and hold yourself to higher standards. You want to do a good job not just for your sake but because you don’t want to let others down and because you want them to respect and trust you. Without that aspect, it is hard to remind yourself why you should work hard and do well. Workplace socialization is more important than I realized, I suppose it is one of those things that is taken for granted until it has been taken away. I will say that our weekly trivia nights were a great way to connect with colleagues. They were almost better than other law-related networking events I have attended

because the trivia topics got people talking about their interests and hobbies outside of the workplace, allowing me to get to know my colleagues in a less professional capacity. It was also good to see everyone's faces once a week as a reminder that there were real people behind the screens I was constantly communicating with. I wound up running a similar trivia night event for my mom's law firm once a week for the entire summer, and people seemed to really enjoy it.

Throughout my three summers working at Hull & Hull I have made friendships as well as professional relationships. Working on the same task, sitting beside each other at a desk, or even being sent on the same errand, I was able to establish strong friendships that, although we weren't physically together, continued to grow during my remote work. I felt very lucky to have those friends while working remotely. I had an established support network in the event that I needed help, and I had people who were working on similar tasks that I could bounce ideas off of. They helped make my kitchen table feel more like the Hull & Hull office space.

I find that I do much better with the in-person conversations, or even FaceTime/Zoom, than I do over the phone or over email. This meant that the format of this internship was a chance for me to exercise those conversational skills that I usually do my best to avoid. Phone conversations, especially with people I am not as familiar with, are difficult because without seeing someone you can miss a lot of cues. Being interrupted or talked over is something I have always disliked, and I know how disrespected it can make someone feel, so I try very hard to make sure I never do this to people. Over the phone, however, I find myself being sometimes overcautious of this to the point that I end up not asking the questions I wanted to or forgetting about certain comments I had. This is something that I had a lot of practice with over the course of my internship as Natalia, Julia, and I had many calls wherein I had to navigate the proper

etiquette. I did get noticeably more comfortable with these phone calls as time went on and eventually became confident enough to voice all of my questions and comments.

Email is another story. I imagine that I will always experience a bit of trepidation when it comes to writing emails. I proofread every email, no matter how small, before I send it and I will usually have someone else read it. I agonize over punctuation, wondering how many exclamation points is too many, or if too few of them will make me appear negative or bored. I find that through technological communications it can be easy for your message to be misunderstood or taken out of context. The LinkedIn Learning course on email etiquette did help me a lot when it comes to confidence, and, as with anything, practice makes progress, so I would like to think I am well on my way to comfortably sending emails. This internship, especially since it was remote, gave me ample opportunity to practice this skill, for which I am much appreciative. Throughout first semester I have seen a marked improvement in my email and phone skills, I spend less time agonizing over the small things and the conversations tend to flow more naturally.

The SASAH online course prepared me well for my internship this past summer. The advice from videos about networking, correspondence, and etiquette were useful in developing a greater confidence in my electronic interactions with coworkers. The networking lessons especially taught me a lot of important things about communication. Being an introvert for the most part, I appreciated the tips that were tailored to people like me who might find some social situations to be stressful. Even the forum discussions were excellent practice for communicating ideas and suggestions in a succinct and cordial manner. I also think that the online course was great preparation for working remotely. Although these circumstances could not have reasonably been foreseen, the type of self-monitoring and independence that was required for keeping up

with the online course helped to prepare me for this internship. I really appreciated this preparation because I do not think I would have handled myself as well as I did without the foundation that the SASAH online course provided for me. I felt more confident and competent than I have in the past, and therefore did my job that much better.

The internship and the SASAH online course both prepared me well for this academic year. With all of my courses online, the transition doesn't feel so drastic now that I have had the experience of working remotely for the summer. The time management skills we learned in the SASAH online course have taught me to create a daily schedule, make time for breaks and meals, and organize my responsibilities all together in order to make sure nothing is forgotten. The experience of remote work this past summer has prepared me for schedule disruptions, technological malfunctions, and the challenges of online communications. These practical experiences have made online learning a little less overwhelming this semester.

The internship experience will also be helpful in the completion of my Independent Research Project this year. I have chosen to research the legalization procedure and how pardons are distributed, using the legalization of marijuana as a reference point. My internship has allowed me to become more familiar with legal processes and jargon that may help me in conducting my research and writing my report. I am also hopeful that the professional connections I made during my internship will be useful for this project. I will be contacting lawyers to request interviews in order to get the opinion of those working in the legal profession on the process of legalization: do they think it has been implemented properly, are there better ways to issue pardons, what does it say about the validity of existing law, and how does it reflect the evolution and adaptability of the law? I will most likely be contacting some of my colleagues

from Hull & Hull for interviews, which I probably would not have been comfortable doing had I not developed a working relationship with them.

Something I had not anticipated was how useful the reflections and reports in this course would be for my university applications. I realized while writing my law school application essays, having already done a comprehensive and formal account of my experiences allowed me to be more concise. I was able to provide an account of the skills I gained and improved upon in my time at Hull & Hull and articulate the value of those skills and experiences in relation to my future academic and career opportunities. The internship experience overall was a valuable addition to my applications. I was able to say, having experienced working in a law firm, that I was confident in my plan to pursue a career in law. Similarly, I imagine the assignments I have completed for the experiential learning course will also be useful in completing job applications and interviews in the future.

When preparing my presentation, I found it challenging to decide which information was most important to conveying the context of my internship and the most valuable for others who may want to follow a similar path. I found myself struggling with how to use terminology, I didn't want to use jargon that people may not be familiar with and I didn't want to risk spending too much time explaining some points while neglecting others. Sierra, Francesca, and I decided to practice our presentations together on Zoom so that we would be familiar with the technology and, since we were in consecutive order, practice the transition between each presentation. During our practice, we were able to use each other as focus groups. For instance, after my presentation I asked if there was any legal wording that was difficult to understand, and they noted a few areas that they felt required further explanation. This practice session was certainly helpful for my confidence. I tend to get a shaky voice and fumble my words sometimes when

I'm nervous for a presentation, so having run through the whole thing with my peers made the actual presentation a little less daunting.

Since I had a degree of removal from the emotional and personal aspects of estates law throughout the majority of my internship this past summer, I had time to only briefly touch on it during my presentation. So, I was glad that Professor Mahon asked about this because it allowed me to expand on what is an intrinsic part of the profession. Almost every profession involves working with people, but in estates law, as with many other practice areas, you are involved in the most personal facets of people's lives. When dealing with such personal subject matter, more often than not you deal with crying, yelling, and frustrated clients who need emotional support as well as legal assistance. The tasks of a lawyer are multifaceted, and they hold a lot of responsibility as the client's future is in their hands.

I really enjoyed presenting on my internship and hearing about what others in my cohort did. It was so interesting to see how different each of our experiences were, and how they each prepared us for our future academic and career opportunities in distinct ways. Although we all pursued unique internships, we all seemed to earn and develop a similar set of essential skills. Most of the presentations touched on interpersonal, communication, time management, critical thinking, teamwork, and networking skills, acting as the common thread between otherwise dissimilar positions. I was also happy to have received a message from a student who had watched the presentations and was interested to know more about my internship and how to search for summer student positions at law firms. It reminded me that while the presentation was a learning experience for me, it was also a helpful tool for others who plan on doing their own internships.

I have come out of this internship with a more concrete understanding of the legal profession and an improved understanding what my own interests are within the law. Overall, the experiential learning course provided me with valuable skills, growth as a student, and gave me a strong introduction to future professional opportunities. I am already seeing the positive impact that this experience has had on my communication and critical thinking skills, as well as my independence and confidence, both academically and professionally.