Shaun Voigt  
Externship I  
United States District Court, Central District of California  
Judge: Honorable George P. Schiavelli  
Law Clerks: Kevin McReynolds and Andrea Ventura

GUIDED REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Question 5

A.

Throughout the externship I had the opportunity to work on a variety of interesting assignments. At the beginning of the semester I started working on "jurisdiction checks." The jurisdiction checks entailed summarizing the complaint and conducting preliminary research of the applicable statutes to see whether the cases were properly in federal court. After getting comfortable with the jurisdiction checks, I began getting more complicated and substantive assignments. Over the course of the semester, I had the opportunity to write memos on the following motions: (1) Motion to Reconsider Order of Dismissal; (2) Motion for Leave to File a Cross-Complaint; (3) Motion for Summary Judgment; (4) Motion to Transfer; (5) Motion to Remand; and (6) Motion to Dismiss. In between memos I worked on additional jurisdiction checks as well as scheduling conference memos.

B.

My supervising clerks gave me a lot of freedom to work through the different issues raised in each assignment on my own. I would get an assignment and a tentative date that the assignment should be completed, but it was up to me to manage my time and stick to that schedule. While I got a lot of freedom to work through the assignments on my own, the clerks’ office was always open if I had any questions or needed guidance on a particular issue.
Once the draft of whatever assignment I was working on was completed, the clerks would check my work, make corrections, and spend considerable time explaining the reasoning behind the corrections. I found the additional step of explaining the reasoning behind the corrections to be extremely helpful, and it made a noticeable difference in my writing and analysis over the course of the semester. Overall, the quality of supervision was excellent.

C.

I learned quite a bit throughout the semester. In terms of writing, I learned how to better organize my work product and to “trim the fat” out of my memos, which allowed me to get my point across with greater clarity and efficiency. I also became a more effective researcher, and improved my oral advocacy skills.

In addition to learning positive skills that will help me become a better lawyer, the externship helped reinforce what not to do as a litigator (i.e. cite bad case law, miss deadlines, misrepresent cases, present unorganized and illogical arguments, etc.). Law school does a good job of helping you think like a lawyer. Working in the chambers of a federal judge provides great insight into everything that goes on once a motion is submitted, and really helped me learn to think like a law clerk or judge. I am confident that the combination of the two will be invaluable when I become a practicing attorney.

D.

Judge Schiavelli has a full calendar every Monday consisting of both criminal and civil matters, which I was always welcome to attend. Because I was busy with my assignments, I would generally watch the proceedings when something interesting was on calendar or when there were oral arguments on a motion that I had worked on. Judge Schiavelli only had one
major trial this semester and I was able to watch a portion of that. I also had the opportunity to watch portions of three other trials that took place in neighboring court rooms.

In addition to watching trials and other court proceedings, every Friday there is a calendar meeting in Judge Schiavelli’s chambers which all of the clerks and externs attend. During that meeting we would go through everything that was on calendar for the following week. Also, after I completed each of the memos that I worked on, I would present them to the Judge at the calendar meeting. While presenting the memos, the Judge would make a point to ask questions and make comments throughout the presentation. This made the experience resemble oral arguments on a motion, which really improved my oral advocacy skills.

E.

I would highly recommend this placement to other students, especially if you are able to fit a full-time externship into your schedule. The clerks really go out of their way to give externs substantive assignments, and you will definitely get a lot more out of the experience if you are able to be there full time.

F.

In Judge Schiavelli’s chambers, the clerks, administrative assistant, and externs all have separate areas. The externs have a desk, phone, and a computer. There are printed resources available, but the majority of the research is done online (externs are provided with access to both Westlaw and Lexis). Externs also have access to a refrigerator, microwave, coffee maker, and snacks (which are provided by the Judge).

If you have any questions about externing for Judge Schiavelli, please feel free to contact me at shaunvoi@usc.edu.