



THE LEGISLATIVE CLINIC

Tips on Selecting a Legislative Placement

Each student in the Legislative Clinic is required to fulfill a legislative placement that involves an unpaid internship with an elected member of Congress, a legislative committee (Senate or House), or a non-profit advocacy organization pursuing legislative change. Students are required to spend a minimum of two days per week in Washington, D.C. (and some placements may require three days per week). In addition to the offices of individual Senators or Representatives, students have pursued placements at many committees or subcommittees on Capitol Hill, such as the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senate Finance Committee, Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation, House Judiciary Committee, House Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property, House Committee on Homeland Security, and House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. You are not limited to prior placements. These are only identified as examples that you may want to consider in your search.

In thinking about a legislative placement, here are several suggestions:

- **What are your goals?** You should consider carefully the goals that you are hoping to achieve by enrolling in the Legislative Clinic. Do you want to build on prior legislative experience or is this your first legislative experience? Do you have a special substantive interest that you would like to pursue through the work of a legislative committee? Are you interested in a more general or varied legislative experience that might arise in the office of an elected member of Congress? Would you prefer to work with an advocacy organization that is trying to effectuate legislative change from the outside?
- **Do internet research** to identify legislative placements that best meet your goals and speak to former students of the Legislative Clinic and to faculty, students, and work colleagues for their suggestions. The names and placements of some past students in the Legislative Clinic are available from Rachel Mayover, Clinic Administrative Director.
- **Apply to several placements and apply early.** As you identify potential placements, make sure you familiarize yourself with deadlines. They vary significantly on Capitol Hill, with some as early as September, many in October or November, and some with no deadlines at all. Early applications increase your chances of success.
- **Prepare a packet for each application.** Unless specifically advised otherwise by a placement's website, prepare an updated resume, short writing sample (5-10 pages), and

a cover letter. The cover letter is very important. Make sure there are no mistakes in spelling or grammar. Highlight any legislative experiences or other work or law school experiences that might be appealing to the placement site. State why you are interested in the specific legislative placement to which you are applying. Be certain to say that you are taking the Legislative Clinic at Penn Law School and that you will be given academic credit for work at your legislative placement.

- **Identify individuals who might be helpful** in your search for a legislative placement. Think about friends, family, fellow students, and faculty who may have worked on Capitol Hill or who might have contacts in D.C. Think about your summer work experiences. For example, if you have worked at a law firm during the summer, chances are the law firm has D.C. contacts that might assist you. Think also about connections to hometown Senators or Representatives (and the committees or subcommittees upon which they serve).
- **Apply by email** to the Interns Coordinator for the legislative placement desired or to the person specifically identified on that placement's website. Do not mail application materials unless specifically instructed to do so. U.S. mail to Congress takes extra time because of security protocols in place and therefore most placement sites prefer email communications.
- **Be prepared for telephone or in-person interviews.** Many placements set up telephone interviews after receiving applications and some may ask you to come into their office for a second round interview. In such interviews, be prepared to discuss your specific interest in that site and highlight prior experiences that might make you especially valuable to them. Do your homework about the site, its key members, and current legislative work that is often summarized on the site's agenda.

To assist you further, past students in the Legislative Clinic were asked to share their advice on selecting legislative placements. Here are several of their comments. Please note that some students recommend committees, while others recommend working in the personal office of an individual members of Congress. Your goals in taking the Legislative Clinic should help guide you as you embark on this process. Please contact Prof. Rulli (lrulli@law.upenn.edu) or Rachel Mayover (rmayover@law.upenn.edu) if you have any questions.

Student One

In selecting a legislative placement, a student must be self-reflective in considering her preferred experience. While the Oversight Committee dealt with more high profile and "exciting" issues on a day-to-day basis, the work falls largely in the realm of political trench warfare, and does not offer an opportunity to see the process of legislative sausage-making. Therefore, it is important to consider what experience is more valuable to the individual. I would

recommend working for a committee as opposed to a personal office, as I believe the committee work allows you to get a deeper experience, whereas the work of a personal office can often be more administrative in nature. More political polarization exists on the House side, so I would probably recommend working for the party one identifies with in that context, or else be prepared for an awkward office social environment.

Student Two

Having worked in several types of offices in DC—agency, lobbying, and legislative—I would encourage future students to try to work on a committee, if possible. In my experience, committee staff and counsel know the value of law students, and in particular, know how to get them involved in the policy and strategy discussions that member offices focus on but without the constituent tasks and other work. Also, committees are engaged more with actual lawmaking and in interfacing with offices like Legislative Counsel and the Joint Committee on Taxation. Finally, committee professional staff are incredibly knowledgeable and policy celebrities in their respective fields, an overall great networking and professional development opportunity. On that note, I would encourage students to find a mentor early on that can speak to your skills and personal attributes. Despite what may be said, I think DC is a meritocracy – who you know might get you in the door, but being smart and personable, working hard, and executing well will carry you forward in your career.

Student Three

My final advice is about looking for a legislative placement. Having worked on the Hill, both as an intern and as staff, I understood that my role would be dramatically different depending on the office. I think the first step in a search is to contact previous Penn students to hear about their experience. I knew that the Finance Committee would give me substantive work because I spoke with each of the two previous Penn students who worked there. I would also advise that students try to get placed in committee offices, unless they have a particular interest in working for a member. Committees have bigger staffs, which allows you to work with more people. Committees work exclusively on policy, which I thought would be more valuable as a semester clerkship than working on constituent issues. Committees are also more likely to be staffed by lawyers, who know how to effectively use a law student. In one personal office that offered me a position, a staff assistant rather than a senior counsel would have supervised me. I think it would have been more difficult to get substantive work. Finally, Committee staffs are older. I know from my time on the Hill that the young staff may feel threatened by law clerks.

Student Four

In identifying a placement I would tell the student to think of specific domestic and international policy issues that interest them and identify which subcommittee or committee jurisdiction this falls under. First, I would apply to these committees and subcommittees and reach out to people in the office to learn more about the work they do. I would then look at the Chairman and members and apply to their individual offices. Next, I would look for geographic regions where the student has a tie either in terms of going to school in that place or growing up in a specific community. Beyond, this I think having an open mind and possibly networking with

Penn alum or individuals who have worked on the hill before. In terms of navigating the hill experience, I found it helpful to connect with friends I have in DC to learn more about how their jobs interact with DC and the capitol. From what everyone says it is a small town and friends I had not connected with in years had many useful connections on the hill which helped with networking. Something that I did not do that I wish I put more effort into doing was trying to set up lunch meetings with Penn alum in Philadelphia. The weather may not be on your side but the semester flew by before I could.

Student Five

I have lots of advice for those seeking legislative placements next year (some of which I've already been telling my friends who are interested). First, it's a great experience: do it if you can. I was so scared to be away from a traditional school setting, from the library, and from what was familiar. It felt a little crazy to essentially live in two major cities at once-- but I am so glad I did it. I grew so much as a result. I would encourage anyone who wants to do policy (even in the future) to do this clinic. Hill experience is almost a mandatory prerequisite for so many policy opportunities. Plus, getting a permanent Hill job is all about who you know—this is a great way to get your foot in the door.

Second, apply for placements early. I would have loved to get a Senate Judiciary placement—I tried so hard! I also applied for a placement at the Foreign Relations committee, a placement with Senator Reid, and Senator Durbin to name a few. But it was too late for so many of them—so my advice is, if you want to do the legislative clinic, apply for placements early. Little did I know, we have alums at the Senate Judiciary Committee and someone who used to work with Senator Reid!

Third, if you want to do Hill work, policy work, or government work—use the time you're in DC to network. Many lunch hours were filled with meeting alumni or other people connected to the office. I often came in early or stayed late just to take an hour out of my day to meet someone. I met so many incredible people doing incredible things. I met an attorney at the Senate Judiciary Committee for just a brief second, but she worked on the Sentencing Reform Legislation—a dream for me—and that was so inspiring.

Student Six

I strongly recommend a student interested in the legislative clinic to participate. The opportunity to build relationships on the hill is really important and immeasurably important. In finding the right placement I would simply recommend that students consider their long-term interests and what committee and or organization best fits those goals. Most students will likely be going to a firm upon graduation so I suggest picking a placement that is willing to take lawyers straight out of private practice. D.C. is a place full of lawyers and ambitious individuals. While this fact has its downsides, the reality is that great relationships both personally and professionally can be built. Make it a point to engage everyone and never miss a chance to create a relationship.

Student Seven

When looking for a legislative placement, I would recommend beginning by identifying interests. One of the things that made this placement so exciting for me was that I was working in an area that I found exhilarating. It is very important to enjoy the experience.

I also suggest really thinking and being sure about whether you are Democrat or Republican. I am apparently too apolitical for politics, but I believe that I lean more left. Being surrounded by people continuously bashing the other side, with which I generally affiliate, made parts of the experience unpleasant. I also felt like I was living a bit of a lie. As a result, I would really recommend that prospective Clinic students pick a side and stick with it.

Student Eight

Another piece of advice that I would give involves the DC experience. DC is a great city for lawyers and government workers alike. I would recommend that students take the opportunity to grab coffee with people in their office and people who do not work in your office. Networking plays an important role in the profession, and this clinic gives students a chance to get a professional development head start in an industry of their interest.

Student Nine

In terms of parting words and advice to students looking to take the course next year, I would advise students to pursue topics they are both interested in and curious to learn more about. The experiential clinic is more rewarding when there is a strong nexus of intellectual curiosity and passion about a given issue. When thinking of a legislative placement, I would advise them to get ahead of the placement procurement process, starting as early as the beginning of the fall for spring semester placements, especially for those looking to be on the Hill. I would also encourage them not to get discouraged and to stick with the process of applying and following up with open internship postings. You never know which e-mail and resume forwarding would lead to an opportunity.

Student Ten

My advice for future students selecting placements would be to apply early and broadly. I was lucky to have been part of the office and able to return but if that weren't the case then I likely would not have found a placement that I would have enjoyed nearly as much because I didn't apply broadly enough. The other note that I would leave is that it can be tolling going back and forth between two separate lives on a weekly basis and that one should mentally prepare themselves for that.

Student Eleven

My advice is to be open to different opportunities and different possibilities. When I was looking for placements, I thought I wanted to work with [one particular House Committee]. I ended up at [a different House Office], an office I knew very little about. However, I came to really enjoy my time there and after hearing from other students who were working for committees, I believe I ended up in about as good a spot as I could have reasonably asked for.

I would also recommend doing your due diligence prior to applying to any particular office. Find out who works there, see what their backgrounds are, see if they are in the news—for good or for bad reasons. I think it is good to get a sense of who you will be working for and who you will be working with. This will also help in the interview process, since many potential placement sites really just want to hire people who are actually interested in the work and willing to put in some actual effort.

Finally, recognize that a lot of what makes a working experience good or bad turns on whether or not you can earn the trust of the people you're working with. The more I did good work or asked good questions, the more the staff was willing to hand off responsibility to me. Showing interest in your work and putting in effort to learn the relevant procedures and substantive areas applicable to your work will go a long way toward accomplishing this goal.

Student Twelve

I would highly recommend the clinic to any student interested in politics, policy advocacy, regulatory law, and government. Students interested in the Legislative Clinic should plan ahead and reach out to potential placements during the beginning of the Fall semester. In terms of potential placements, I would stress to students that they should really think about what skillsets they hope to gain out of the placement. I was really interested in learning about proactive legislation, passing legislation in different state legislatures, and writing legislation, which my supervisor, during the interview process, made clear to me was part of an internship there. I also would advise any student taking the clinic to really factor into their schedule the time it takes to commute each week. I took a slightly too ambitious course load in addition to the clinic and my pro bono commitments, so I would advise students to prepare to take a slightly lighter case load and factor in additional work that might take place outside of the two or three days in the office.

Student Thirteen

If students have a particular field of interest, they should find a congressperson on the related (sub)committee and express a desire to work in-depth on that material. They should shoot for securing a legal role for themselves with an important and friendly supervisor. (Somewhat relatedly, my impression was that it is more fun to be in the majority of your particular chamber of congress—it's less inspiring to work on projects that have no chance to see the light of day.)

I'd also advise future students to attend as many events as possible, even though that can be difficult to do after a long day of work. My office was great at notifying me of these events and attending them with me, introducing me to their friends and colleagues and exposing me to the variety of ways that staffers find themselves on the Hill.

Student Fourteen

It took me a while to get my placement sorted out so I think I would encourage students not to give up on looking and to remain persistent to secure a placement. I'm not sure what the experience was like in member offices, but I would highly recommend students to pursue committee placements because you get to work in a larger office, with a larger amount of staff devoted to your issue area, rather than just one LA or staffer. That being said, if they don't have a specific area of interest, maybe a member office would be a more authentic experience.

I would encourage students to stay in DC as much as possible and spend time with their coworkers. Once you do that, it opens up a lot of doors and opportunities for you that will help your career moving forward. DC is a town built upon relationships so taking advantage of your time to cultivate those is important.

Student Fifteen

I recommend scouring the Congressional Committee websites and the House and Senate employment bulletins. If you are fortunate enough to get an interview, recognize that screeners conducted via phone are going to feel a bit uncomfortable, and prepare accordingly to keep the conversation flowing. When possible, correspond with real email address! My response rate (even if those responses simply told me that the position had already been filled) was much better when I used valid email addresses as opposed to online forms (I think those submissions are just lost to the digital abyss). Importantly, keep Professor Rulli in the loop! I found that he was genuinely interested in knowing the opportunities for which I had applied, interviewed, and received offers. He also regularly receives word of opportunities, so circling back with him throughout the application process may result in additional helpful contacts.