

**Class of 1995 Summer Service Fund Report**  
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I had an incredibly valuable experience interning in the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education this summer. OCR has 600 employees and is the second largest office in the Department of Education. The office focuses 20 percent of its time on policy issues and the other 80 percent on enforcement of Title VI (protection from discrimination based on race), Title IX (protection from discrimination based on sex), and Title II and Section 504 (protection from discrimination based on disability status). I worked primarily for the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategic Operations and Outreach, Bob Kim. My work for OCR focused on communications; I researched press activity, developed an office social networking strategy, managed the constituency contact database and wrote press releases. I also learned about the office's role in issues relating to school climate and school discipline, equitable teacher distribution, transgender students, and racial isolation in charter schools. Over the course of my summer, it was refreshing to see how much the Department valued the input of stakeholders (civil rights advocates, students and communities).

As I worked in OCR's main office, I got a taste of all the office's duties. One of the greatest responsibilities of OCR is the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). The CRDC collects data on equity and access from public schools across the country, and the data is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, limited English proficiency and disability. It is used by OCR in its enforcement and monitoring efforts, but the results are public, so other agencies, policymakers and researchers utilize it as well. It was rewarding to work in OCR as the Department was proposing changes and additions to the data collected and asking for public comment. I attended meetings with stakeholders and heard their praise and suggestions for change.

I was also able to see the process the Department goes through when developing and distributing policy guidance. This summer, OCR's policy team released two "Dear Colleague Letters": one issued jointly with the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the rights of students with hepatitis B, and one clarifying the requirements of Title IX that support pregnant and parenting students. Additionally, I was fortunate to intern in OCR during the Supreme Court decision in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*. I learned more about the use of affirmative action by colleges and universities across the country and researched race-neutral alternatives employed by these institutions.

I especially enjoyed helping my supervisor prepare for the first plenary meeting of the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan on Racial and Ethnic Equality at the Department of State. It was eye-opening to hear leaders from both countries discuss their struggles and concerns, and share suggestions for solutions. Another one of my most fun experiences was volunteering to play "Family Fortune" – a mix of "Family Feud" and "Wheel of Fortune" – as a part of the Department's employee education program. The event focused on "Ladders of Opportunity", a priority of the administration. Two other interns and I challenged a team of three full-time employees. I answered all of my questions correctly and won the game for my team!

Having participated in the Princeternship program at the Department of Education earlier in the year, I was able to reconnect with some of the leaders I met during my time in January. When I wanted to help revamp the office's social media presence, I reached out to the Director of Digital Engagement, Cameron Brenchley, whom I met during my Princeternship, for his advice. It was also great to keep in touch with the Princeton alum that I shadowed, Massie Ritsch '98, Acting Assistant Secretary in the Office of Communications and Outreach. We were in contact throughout my internship and he updated me on his work.

I did not ultimately provide any support to the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, but I did have the opportunity to speak with Executive Director David Johns about the initiative on many occasions. Still, I was able to explore other offices in the Department. I completed research projects on equitable access to highly effective teachers and the early education workforce for one of my January contacts who was supporting the Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching (The RESPECT Project) program. The RESPECT Project aims to transform the culture of thought around the teaching profession.

Living in DC was itself rewarding. Through the Princeton-in-Washington program, I attended events across the city and met with alumni who worked in fields of interest to me. I spoke with Dr. Howard Hogan '74/'76, Chief Demographer at the U.S. Census Bureau, about the measurement of race in the U.S. Census, and heard Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan '81 speak about her experiences at Princeton and her path to the Court. Through other connections, I was also able to meet Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and my senator, Claire McCaskill. I went to a "March on Washington Film Festival" event in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at the NPR headquarters. There I met two of my role models: Michele Norris of "The Race Card Project" (and NPR), and social justice activist and leader in the Civil Rights Movement, Julian Bond. As I am especially interested in the black male experience in the U.S., I attended a symposium on the black male achievement gap sponsored by the Educational Testing Service and the Children's Defense Fund. The proximity of the Department to the Capitol enabled me to hear Secretary Arne Duncan testify in front of the Senate Budget Committee on the President's FY14 Education Budget Request – and to attend the inaugural hearing of the Congressional Caucus on Black Men and Boys.

Overall, I was thrilled with Department of Education's internship program. The internship coordinators established a great "brown bag" speaker series and notified us of additional valuable informational sessions throughout the Department. I received tremendous support as an intern and I could tell that my work for the Department was deeply appreciated. It was empowering to work with such diligent, dedicated leaders in the Office for Civil Rights. I now have an even greater commitment to civil rights and public service.

My experience this summer has helped me to develop further career goals and have a better sense of the work I enjoy doing. After speaking with law school students and graduates in OCR, I am now more seriously considering law school. I plan to intern in DC again next summer and hope to return to the Department of Education after graduation.