SPECIAL FEATURE:
PRO BONO SPRING BREAK

Each year, Boston College Law School students organize several public service pro bono spring break trip programs. Students participating in these trips have the opportunity to travel and work with a non-profit organization for the week of Spring Break while accumulating pro bono hours. In this issue of the Public Interest Newsletter, we are excited to share with you vignettes written by these students reflecting on their spring break experiences.

NAVADO NATION
SPRING BREAK TRIP

Where: Window Rock, AZ, Navajo Nation reservation

Working on the Navajo Reservation in Window Rock, Arizona, students provide much-needed legal aid and governmental support by conducting legal research for attorneys. Participants are placed at the Navajo Nation’s Department of Justice, DNA People’s Legal Services, and the Navajo Nation Supreme Court.

By: Natalia Belland, 2L

This year the BCLS Navajo Nation Service Trip sent 6 excited students to Window Rock, Arizona to work on the Navajo Nation reservation. Our dedicated team leaders placed us in three different aspects of the Navajo legal system: two students worked at the Window Rock District Court, three students at the Navajo Department of Justice, and one student at DNA Legal Services. These placements gave us practical legal experience, and more importantly, provided great insight into Navajo culture and traditions. The people we met on the reservation were overwhelmingly generous in sharing their knowledge of Navajo culture as well as their family stories and experiences. For example, the Deputy Supreme Court Clerk took us, along with law students from the University of Michigan, on a rich cultural tour of the Tribal Council Chambers, the Offices of the President of Navajo Nation, and the memorial dedicated to the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II. Later in the week we had the distinct honor of being introduced at a Tribal Council meeting where Council delegates publicly commended us for our service. We were also introduced to the First Lady of Navajo Nation and the legendary State Senator John Pinto. Senator Pinto served as a Navajo Code Talker in World War II and has served as a State Senator in New Mexico since 1977. He is generously sending a signed copy of his book on the Navajo Nation Code Talkers to BCLS. These experiences helped shape our understanding of the Navajo people, the Navajo legal system, and the relationship between the Navajo and the U.S. federal government. I am confident that we will be more thoughtful and compassionate lawyers as a result.

Participants of the 2013 Navajo Nation Service Trip pictured with Michael Smith, Deputy Clerk of the Navajo Supreme Court, before hiking the sacred Window Rock, pictured above. (L to R): Natalia Belland (2L), Elizabeth Fegreus (1L), Katharine Foote (1L), Andrew Haile (1L), Omar Arnouk (1L), and Colleen Irving (2L), Michael Smith.
NEW ORLEANS SPRING BREAK TRIP

Where: New Orleans, LA, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services

For the past six years, BC Law students have donated their time and skills to the Gulf Coast’s recovery by volunteering in New Orleans. Students assist local attorneys to provide legal aid to individuals personally affected by the hurricanes, as well as organizations that continue to rebuild the city’s infrastructure.

By: Anthony Rizzo, 1L

During Spring Break 2013, I had the privilege of working with the Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) in New Orleans. SLLS provides free legal services to clients that are living within 150% of the poverty rate. The department I worked in was dedicated specifically to working with the homeless residents of New Orleans. Throughout the week, I worked with new clients to complete intakes, as well as on cases that my supervising attorney had been working on for several weeks. Some of the work that I accomplished included researching Social Security claims, preparing memos for Administrative Law Judges regarding Social Security claims, and aiding clients that were awaiting Veterans Administration Disability claims. Overall, it was a very rewarding experience.

By: Dan Koh, 1L

I worked in the Employment and Public Benefits department of Southeast Louisiana Legal Services and worked with clients who had been denied unemployment and social security disability benefits. SLLS is involved in the appeals process for their clients (with incomes falling within 150% of the poverty rate). I participated in all aspects of the legal process, including completing potential client in-person and telephone intakes, reviewing clients’ medical and other administrative records, filing documents in court, listening to hearings via phone, and participating in the weekly summary meeting with the entire department.

Although the trip was only one week long, I appreciated every single minute and I especially cherished getting to speak with the clients about their legal problems and the hope that SLLS provides for them. For most of the clients, receiving the unemployment and social security benefits were the only thing keeping them from living on the streets, and they were so grateful that we were there to help them through the process. I am glad that I was able to contribute, however little, in this work. I would certainly recommend this trip to any future students and would go again next year.

Participants of the 2013 New Orleans Spring Break Trip (L to R): Sylvia Joo (1L), Jenna Burstyn (1L), Mark Potash (1L), Jennifer Henricks (1L), Christian Chorba (1L), Jennifer Bernazzani (1L), Dan Koh (1L), Anthony Rizzo (1L), and Alphonse Harris (1L)
**Immigration Spring Break Trip**

Where: VIDA Legal Assistance, Miami, FL; The Florence Project, Central Arizona

Since 1988, BC Law students have been traveling to various locations across the US to volunteer with local immigration legal services. This program provides a unique opportunity to gain substantive legal experience during the first year of law school, see the workings of a non-profit legal service organization, and learn about the field of immigration law.

By: Jennifer Flynn, 1L (VIDA Legal Assistance)

My Spring Break trip to work with immigrants at VIDA Legal Assistance in Miami was amazing. Our supervisor assigned us all cases on our first day and had us looking at files right away. Throughout the week we got to meet with clients and sort through their evidence to compile their applications for lawful permanent residence. Our clients had been through some of the worst things imaginable and they were all recipients of U-visas, which are for victims of domestic violence or other violent crimes. In spite of this, they were some of the kindest, most gracious people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. We prepared applications for a family of five, and they were so grateful that they brought us in a feast of Mexican food made by members of the local immigrant community. Seeing how my legal education could help real people was revitalizing and renewed my commitment to public interest law.

By: Shannon Johnson, 1L (Florence Project)

Situated among twelve correctional facilities in Central Arizona, the Florence Project offers free legal services to detained immigrants who normally would appear in Immigration Court pro se. During our Immigration Spring Break spent volunteering at the Project, we witnessed the desperate need that detained noncitizens have for legal advice and direct representation. Many of the Florence Project’s clients—some lawful permanent residents, others with U.S. citizen spouses and children—will undergo their removal proceedings with little knowledge of their rights or of potential forms of legal relief available to them. The Florence Project addresses the overwhelming need for legal services by educating detainees about their legal rights, preparing them to appear pro se in Immigration Court, and providing limited representation to detainees in most need. During our time at the Florence Project, we assisted in “Know Your Rights” presentations at the detention center, drafted a memo on evidentiary issues in Immigration Court, wrote country condition reports for asylum cases, and completed intakes with new detainees. We also visited the Detained Immigrant and Refugee Children’s Initiative in Phoenix, where we observed juvenile Immigration Court and learned about the challenges of being an undocumented, unaccompanied minor in deportation proceedings.

By: John Simon, 1L

In coordination with the Institute for Justice and Democracy and Haiti, we traveled to Port-au-Prince in order to produce a report concerning the right of the Haitian people to freely assemble. To do so, we conducted a series of interviews with civil society leaders, Haitian police, parliamentary members, and UN MINUSTAH peace keepers. After conducting our research, we will be releasing the report through UDHI and through the Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Society. We knew little about Haiti before embarking on our trip this past spring. With notebooks as luggage and background reading in hand, we set off to investigate reports of the systematic infringement of the fundamental right of every Haitian to peacefully assemble.