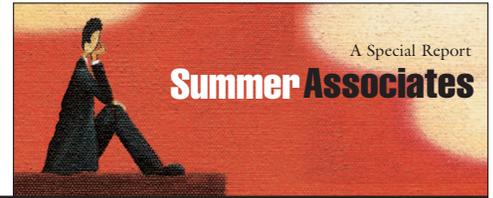


A Summer for Good Works

Some firms let associates spend part of their time on public interest law.



BY GABE NELSON

Some law firms in the District are discovering that offering their summer associates pro bono and public interest opportunities is a smart way to draw them in.

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman and Crowell & Moring, for instance, encourage summer associates to split their time between the firm and a public interest group. To sweeten the deal, summer associates continue making their salary from the firm—usually about \$2,000 a week—while working elsewhere.

Pillsbury and Crowell let their summer associates do public interest work for about a month, which means roughly \$8,000 paid to an associate who isn't even working at the firm anymore. But it's money worth spending, says Thomas Hill, a partner at Pillsbury and head of recruiting for its D.C. office. He says the split summer schedule draws in idealistic students who might otherwise be lost to public interest groups.

"It's enormously popular with the law students in the program because they appreciate being associated with a firm that's committed to public service," he says.

Pillsbury's public interest split program was born at Shaw Pittman in the fall of 2001—before Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman formed in a 2005 merger—to accommodate an impressive second-year law student who couldn't decide whether to spend her summer with a public interest group or a law firm. Hoping to bring her to Shaw Pittman, the firm came up with a creative answer. "We put our heads together and thought, 'Why don't we give her the opportunity to try both?'" says Hill.

Realizing how powerful the split program could be in recruiting undecided law students, Shaw Pittman decided to extend the offer to their summer associates each year. "Our program's about as extensive and generous as you're going to find," Hill says.

If Shaw Pittman hadn't offered a split program, they would have lost Ashley McDonald and Rebecca Carr, both of whom narrowed their search for summer-associate positions to firms with a public interest split. As a 2L at Georgetown University Law Center, Carr doubted whether a firm was right for her at all.

"Some people always know they're going to work at a firm," Carr says. "But a split program helps those of us who are wrestling with the idea."

To McDonald, then a second-year student at Yale Law School, law firms seemed fairly stuffy. She had grown cynical about the work she would do if she joined a firm after earning her law degree. "I just started to get a feeling during law school that there might be something other than representing one big company suing another big company," she says.

After eight weeks trying out practice groups at Shaw Pittman, McDonald spent the rest of her summer at the National Women's Law Center, where she researched and wrote memoranda on Title IX, stem-cell research, and poor women's access to health care. Carr split her summer between Shaw Pittman's litigation group and the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. In her eight weeks at Shaw Pittman, she worked on a variety of assignments, including a long-term research project on labor law which she eventually presented to a human resources group at Georgetown. While at the Washington Lawyers' Committee, she worked on employment discrimination cases.

"Both jobs were primarily working on employment issues—just from different angles," Carr says. The realization cleared up her indecision. "I knew I wanted to be at a firm, and I wanted to do pro bono work there," she adds.

Hoping to take on pro bono work, both Carr and McDonald became litigation associates at Pillsbury.

PRO BONO PROJECTS

Crowell & Moring aims to give summer associates exposure to the type of pro bono work they would do if they joined the firm as associates, says Susan Hoffman, public service partner at Crowell. For Addie Taylor, that experience gave her a positive impression of the firm's culture, which inspired her to continue working there even after the summer ended. Until she graduated from the George Washington University Law School last month, Taylor worked as a clerk for the firm. She plans to start as an associate at Crowell this fall.

During her summer at Crowell, Taylor worked on four pro bono cases, including an asylum case in which she wrote the client's affidavit. The client was later recommended for asylum. "She said that we weren't just her lawyers, we were also her friends, and that was the most gratifying part of the summer for me," Taylor says.

Each year, Crowell prepares a docket of pro bono cases for summer associates to help with, says Hoffman. This year, for example, Crowell summer associates can help put together a manual about the McKinney Act, which requires the government to create housing for the homeless on the site of closed military bases. Crowell has also offered to take on ten custody cases created by the District's new Grandparent Caregivers Pilot Program, under which grandparents with legal custody of children can apply for an \$800 subsidy per child.

The centerpiece of Crowell's summer pro bono program is what the firm calls the Took Tour. Named after founding partner Eldon "Took" Crowell, the tour includes visits to several of Crowell & Moring's pro bono clients in Washington. Although Took Crowell used to host a cocktail party for the summer associates, he decided that he wanted to do something more to show associates what Crowell stands for, Hoffman says.

On the Took Tour, summers visit the City Lights School, a public charter school for emotionally disturbed adolescents, and the Mazique Parent Child Center, an organization that provides

services to families for child development. They also make stops at Bread for the City and So Others Might Eat, two support centers for the homeless.

"We wine and dine our associates, but there's an underbelly to the city, and if they're going to live here, they need to see that," Hoffman says.

Crowell's pro bono emphasis charmed Taylor. Although Crowell's interest seemed real to her, other firms may be trumping up their pro bono programs to draw in prospective summer associates, she says.

"At a lot of firms, they know students are interested in pro bono, and try to act like they have an extensive pro bono program," Taylor says. "Then, when you become an associate, there's no time for pro bono work."

It's not surprising, considering the long hours that junior associates work and the limited choices they have about what kinds of work they do. For instance, Carr, who chose to work at Pillsbury in part for the firm's dedication to pro bono work, admits she has been too busy to take on as much pro bono work as she would have liked since joining the firm in September.

But with all things considered, the positives of the program far outweigh the negatives, Hill says. "We're able to give something of real value to public service groups in the city."

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