

JusticeCorps: Experience that Matters

Rayna Jackson | Undergraduate Education Initiatives

What does an uninspiring internship look like? Getting coffee, making photocopies or filing papers all day? Doing lots of busy work but not getting any actual work experience? Unfortunately, these types of bad internship experiences are common. UCLA sophomore, Kimberly Kwan experienced one such internship first-hand. During her Freshman year, Kwan was excited when she was hired to work at a law firm. But after one month of making photocopies, filing paperwork and looking up only *one* legal code for her employer, her excitement turned to disappointment.

'I didn't learn a lot.' Said Kwan, reflecting on her experience.

Kwan wanted meaningful hands-on work in a legal environment. When she found out about the JusticeCorps program, Kwan applied and hoped for the best. *"I was hoping that JusticeCorps wasn't going to be like [my other internship] – and it wasn't!"*

JusticeCorps, according to the Program's Director, Dr. Jennifer Kalish, recruits and trains university students annually to serve in

overburdened legal self-help centers throughout California. UCLA JusticeCorps members provide assistance in 10 Los Angeles area Self-Help Legal Access Centers and with the LA County Department of Consumer Affairs Small Claims Advisor. Undergraduates receive intensive training throughout the year so they can provide in-depth and individualized legal services to self-represented litigants (individuals who represent themselves before the court), under the supervision of an attorney.

Students who complete 300 service hours earn an education award (from AmeriCorps). But that's not the only benefit. What makes JusticeCorps such a valuable experience for students is the interaction that they have with the public. Kalish points out that, *"The program is one of the few opportunities for undergraduates to interact with someone at a highly professional level. Everything students do is direct service. There is a lot of observation in other service programs, but JusticeCorps is 100% about direct service to the public."*

This immediate connection with the community is what Kwan enjoys most about JusticeCorps. On her first day, it took her four hours to assist one litigant, but by the end of her appointment, she was able to do everything with much more efficiency and ease. Today, Kwan leads a



Kwan works at the Los Angeles Superior Court in Downtown Los Angeles

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“Paternity I Workshop” to assist litigants who want to be established on a child’s birth certificate or those who want their status as a child’s parent changed. Kwan credits her success in the program with the support team of attorneys that supervise students. *‘At first, I was really afraid. But all the attorneys are super nice. I ask them multiple questions. They really help me a lot.’*”

Attorney Erin Dabbs, one of the JusticeCorps lawyers who directly supervises Corps members, doesn’t mind student questions. In fact, Dabbs finds that the students who are excited about learning and open to new experience excel most in the program. *“Those who constantly remain open, those students who question a lot will learn a lot. They will see the nuances.”*



Attorney Dabbs and JusticeCorps member Kwan review “Paternity I” paperwork on behalf of a litigant

Dr. Douglas Barrera, Assistant Director at the UCLA Center for Community Learning and UCLA liaison to Los Angeles Superior Courts, realizes just how much this program requires from its participants.

“JusticeCorps is not an easy experience for students, especially when they’re just learning how to help the litigants. But it’s one of the best examples we have of how much students can grow when they get out of their comfort zones. They routinely report to us that JusticeCorps is an experience that will stay with them long after they’ve graduated from UCLA.”

Undergraduate students who want an experience that matters such as one-on-one interaction with the public, transferable skills, valuable mentorship, and more defined career goals, should apply to JusticeCorps. Like Kwan, future Corps members will find that this internship is like no other. *“I love doing this, and that’s why I’m re-applying. I don’t know what specific law I want to get into, but I definitely am interested in going to law school and being a part of this program.”*

Those interested in participating in JusticeCorps are encouraged to submit their application by the end of Spring Quarter. Applications submitted after Spring Quarter will be reviewed as part of a rolling deadline through the end of summer or until positions are filled.

JusticeCorps is an AmeriCorps program and part of the [Center for Community Learning](#). For more information on how to apply, please visit the program’s [website](#).