

McGill Centre for Human
Rights and Legal Pluralism

Centre sur les droits de la personne
et le pluralisme juridique de McGill

International Human Rights Internships Program

2009 Report



McGill



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International Human Rights Internships Program

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Introduction

McGill University's Faculty of Law enjoys a rich tradition of human rights education and involvement. In 1992, the Faculty established a number of partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions in the global South and in Canada and the United States. In 2000, the internship program became a fully credited course with formal requirements, thus allowing students to earn six credits toward the completion of the McGill B.C.L./LL.B Program. The International Human Rights Internships Program is administered by the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism.

The International Human Rights Internship Program carefully selects law students for placements as interns with NGOs and tribunals for a period of 12 weeks, giving students an opportunity to experience and contribute to the work of human rights organizations in Canada and beyond. Partner organizations provide students with practical work experience in human rights investigation, monitoring, and reporting.

Upon their return to McGill, students are required to submit an internship report describing their work and experiences. Student also must write an academic research essay supervised by a professor, on a theme linked to their summer internship.

Around the world with the student interns

The experiences of the nine students who were selected to participate during the summer of 2009 clearly demonstrate the broad range of opportunities that this program offers. Each student reported a rich and educational experience. Here's what they had to say.

Intern: Kezia Speirs

Location: Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Placement: **Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)**

Faculty Supervisor: **Adelle Blackett**

Research Paper: *Labour rights for domestic workers in Cambodia: Challenges for implementation, monitoring, and enforcement*

**Recipient of the Lindsey Anne Cameron Award*

Kezia spent the summer at the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), a national NGO involved in monitoring, protection, and education regarding a number of diverse state- and non-state-perpetrated human rights abuses. She found LICADHO to be an extremely friendly and accommodating place to work.

During the course of her internship, Kezia worked on a variety of projects including: researching and writing articles and reports on illegal logging, the union movement in Cambodia, and illegal forced eviction; editing various reports, one of which focused on Human Rights Defenders and involved major revision; writing a funding proposal for NGO-CEDAW, which is responsible for monitoring and producing an independent report on the Cambodian government's implementation of CEDAW; and translating articles from French to English and vice versa.

In addition to her work at the NGO, Kezia was encouraged to participate in LICADHO's monitoring and public education activities. Thus, she had the chance to visit prisons on International Children's Day to help distribute food and toys, as well as to visit Andong and Damnak Treyung, two relocation sites for thousands of people from forcibly evicted communities. She also attended Sam Rainsy Party leader Mu Sochua's hearing for defamation against Prime Minister Hun Sen and spent several days on her own initiative at the UN-Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia trial listening to testimony from survivors of the notorious Tuol Sleng S-21 prison camp, which tortured, experimented on, and sent an estimated 17,000 people to their deaths under the Khmer Rouge.

Kezia
(second from
the left)
with fellow
coworkers in
front of
LICADHO





Jeannine with
genocide
survivor
Célestin in
Kigali

Intern: Jeannine Plamondon

Location: Arusha, Tanzania

Placement: **International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda**

Faculty Supervisor: **Frédéric Mégret**

Research Paper: *Witness Interference and the Protection of Victims and Witnesses in International Criminal Law – Preserving the Administration of Justice*

**Recipient of the Lord Reading Society 60th Anniversary Internship Award*

As an intern at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Jeannine was assigned to work in the Appeals and Legal Advisory Division (ALAD) in the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP). The ICTR was created by the United Nations General Assembly to investigate and prosecute crimes of genocide and other violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda and surrounding areas in 1994.

For the duration of Jeannine's internship, her legal team dealt with two cases at the appellate level: *The Prosecutor v. Protais Zigiranyirazo*, which was an individual genocide case, and *The Prosecutor v. Léonidas Nshogoza*, which was a contempt of court case involving accusations of witness interference and bribery. In addition to working on these two cases, Jeannine completed various tasks such as research and writing memoranda, proof-reading and cite checking, attending meetings of the appeals team, and assisting in the drafting of briefs. She was also assigned to draft parts of the response brief for the *Nshogoza* appeal. Although this experience was somewhat stressful, it also constituted the highlight of her internship, as her legal reasoning and drafting was submitted as an integral part of the Prosecutor's Response Brief before the Appeals Chamber in The Hague.

Jeannine notes that the internship itself and the experience as a whole were some of the most incredible moments she has lived and have strongly influenced her career and life goals. She describes her supervisor and team members as kind and inspiring and the close relationship she developed with them as invaluable. Aside from her work assignments, while at the ICTR, Jeannine also took advantage of the opportunity to sit in on trials and judgments and to visit the United Nations Detention Facility, where those appearing before the Tribunal are held. She also took the opportunity to travel to Rwanda and visited several genocide memorials around the country, which the Prosecutor as well as her supervisor considered to be an integral part of the internship.

Intern: Rachel Gotthilf

Location: Montréal, Canada

Placement: **EQUITAS – International Center for Human Rights Education**

Faculty Supervisor: **Hoi Kong**

Research Paper: *Freedom of Expression and the City of Winnipeg Anti-Solicitation Bylaw*

**Recipient of the Honourable Morris J. Fish Internship Award*

While working with Equitas in Montreal, Rachel was involved in a range of activities relating to the International Human Rights Training Program (IHRTTP). Equitas is a non-profit organization established in 1967 and specializes in human rights education. Its most well-known program, the International Human Rights Training Program, is an annual human rights education training program held in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, which welcomes over 120 human rights activists from approximately 60 countries for a three-week program.

Rachel's work drew on her bilingual skills. Her responsibilities included: creating a Virtual Resource Centre for IHRTTP participants and alumni by bringing together some of Equitas' human rights education resources into a user-

friendly online database; organizing and staffing the IHRTTP Resource and Documentation Centre; organizing logistics for a few IHRTTP activities; and collaborating with other interns in providing assistance to the participants during the program.

Rachel notes that her internship made her aware of the important role human rights education plays in society. By having the opportunity to observe the issues IHRTTP participants were discussing, she learned techniques for making human rights education participatory and engaging. She recalls how fascinating it was to observe human rights education firsthand and to get to know IHRTTP participants as well as the specific human rights challenges they were addressing in their home countries.

Group shot of the International Human Rights Training Program 2009 participants



Intern: Katrina Peddle

Location: Toronto, Canada

Placement: **Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal network**

Faculty Supervisor: **Alana Klein**

Research Paper: *Operationalizing Gladue: The Overrepresentation of Aboriginal People and Access to Needle Exchange in Canadian Prisons*

**Recipient of the Michael Novak & Kathleen Weil Human Rights Internship Award*

Katrina pursued work in Canada with the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. The Legal Network is an international leader in advocacy related to the rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV. According to her, the Legal Network provides both a supportive and challenging experience. She notes that staff were available to offer guidance, but it was a work environment that required independence and autonomy, which she enjoyed as a working dynamic. She also appreciated the chance to be able to begin learning the tools of legal advocacy in a hands-on environment.

Katrina had the opportunity to engage in legal research on a number of issues related to HIV, including women's property rights, prisoners rights, and the criminalization of HIV and notes that her work allowed her to learn a great deal about the role of international law in the enforcement of human rights both in Canada and abroad. During the course of her internship, she worked on a variety of projects including: researching implementation provisions that existed in legislation pursuant to violence against women; researching discrimination and disability law in relation to addiction; writing a memo regarding publication bans to be used among advocates working on HIV exposure cases; and working with a senior policy analyst

to write a report based on affidavits taken from drug users on their experiences and how these intersect with the need for prison needle and syringe programs. This last project dovetailed well with her love of community-based activism.

During her internship, Katrina also had the opportunity to meet advocates from across the country and around the world, including South African Justice Edwin Cameron, a HIV positive judge who has long spoken out about the need for access to anti-retrovirals in southern Africa. She met Justice Cameron during the Legal Network's first annual symposium that took place in June.

"I learned about how vital it is to keep human rights work community-based and community-driven. Lawyers occupy a privileged position as advocates in that they are able to use their knowledge of the law to further the rights of marginalized people. However, this work falls flat if it is not informed by the needs of people on the ground."

Katrina Peddle

Intern: Stavroula Papadopoulos

Location: New York City, U.S.A.


Placement: **Human Rights Watch**

Faculty Supervisor: **Rene Provost**

Research Paper: *Hybrid Tribunals and Justice in the DRC: Learning from Past Mistakes to Build a Stronger Justice Initiative*

**Recipient of the Michael Novak & Kathleen Weil Human Rights Internship Award*

At Human Rights Watch (HRW) in New York, Stavroula worked in the International Justice Programme, which focuses on supporting various justice initiatives against impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The International Justice division is very small and works closely together. Stavroula found her co-workers very helpful and pleasant to work with, and notes that her internship was especially useful in getting an inside view of how international human rights organizations work and what impact they have.



Her tasks consisted mostly of research and analysis on varied topics. She eventually focused on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the possibility of setting up a hybrid tribunal there to try war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. In the course of her work on the DRC, Stavroula revised a draft law proposed by a Congolese NGO for such a tribunal, analyzed and summarized reports on justice in the DRC, including cases from military tribunals and the ICC, and monitored the news on a daily basis. Her final research paper submitted to McGill as part of the internship was about the potential and problems of setting up a hybrid tribunal in the DRC and what it should look like. She was delighted to contribute it to HRW and that it be considered by them as base for their future work on this topic, in addition to the actual time spent working at HRW and researching different aspect of the conflict in the DRC.

Throughout the summer, there were also many opportunities to attend internal HRW events and meetings, such as “brownbag lunches” hosted by HRW every Friday, where experts from the organization’s different divisions speak about their work and their career paths. Stavroula notes that these lunches as well as many other internal speaker events were very helpful in gaining insight about how HRW and advocacy work in general. It allowed her to see how effective human rights work can be and how much is achieved discretely, behind the scenes.

Intern: Anna Shea

Location: Montréal, Canada

Placement: **Rights & Democracy**

Faculty Supervisor: **Roderick Macdonald**

Research Paper: *Perilous Territory: The Struggles of Non-status People in Canada*

**Recipient of the Honourable Morris J. Fish Internship Award*

Anna pursued work at Rights & Democracy, a Montreal-based organization charged with encouraging and supporting the universal values of human rights and the promotion of democratic institutions and practices internationally. Rights & Democracy considers itself to be in a unique position because of its relationships with grassroots rights and development groups as well as governments, and attempts to play a partnership-building role by bringing these groups together to promote the values of human rights and democracy.

Anna found the nature of her work fascinating. The projects with which she assisted dealt mainly with sexual violence against women in conflict situations, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as well as the prosecution of these crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (CIDH), the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). She undertook a wide variety of tasks, involving background reading, non-legal as well as legal writing and research, and a variety of other miscellaneous tasks and projects. Her tasks included drafting a memo about *The Prosecutor vs. Jean Pierre Bemba Gombo* at the ICC, in which she discussed the currently unexplored territory of the ICC’s Regulation 55, which provides for the legal recharacterization of the facts; editing a proposal for a seminar on gender justice and reparations, which was sent to the judges of the ICC and subsequently approved by them; and the research, organization and compilation of a list of documents to assist Rashida Manjoo, the new UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, in preparing for her appointment.

The principal highlight of her experience at Rights & Democracy was the opportunity to engage with a wide range of fascinating legal questions. From these projects, she learned a tremendous amount about doctrines of international criminal law, jurisprudence and procedure at international courts and tribunals. She also enjoyed meeting the NGO’s inspiring Congolese partners, and the fact that her internship provided her an opportunity to work and write in French.



Demonstration organized by civil society against the government's attempt to jeopardize the next year's presidential elections through constitutional amendment.

Intern: Mae J. Nam

Location: Manila, Philippines

Placement: **Ateneo Human Rights Center**

Faculty Supervisor: **Vrinda Narain**

Research Paper: *Migrating Maids: A Critical Examination of Labour Export Policy as a Strategy for Development in the Philippines*

Mae worked at the Ateneo Human Rights Center (AHRC) affiliated with the Ateneo de Manila Law School in Manila, Philippines. The AHRC was one of the first university-based institutions engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines. It provides human rights training, legal services for victims of human rights violations, and conducts research on human rights issues in the Philippines.

While Mae was at the AHRC she was able to do a wide array of interesting projects that focused primarily on international human rights. Her projects included updating judicial training materials on gender sensitivity for the Philippine judiciary, developing a report on migrant workers rights for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), contributing to an article on transgender rights, and working on a proposal for the Asian Development Bank. During the course of her internship, she had the opportunity to work with government representatives, academics and members of civil society. It was exciting for her to attend these meetings and to contribute her perspective on issues relating to women and female migrant workers given her personal background as the daughter of a Filipina migrant worker. Through her work at the AHRC, Mae learned the importance of having strong individuals speak out against government corruption in order to maintain good governance and the rule of law. She also witnessed the potential of massive popular movements.

As a woman of Philippine descent and someone very much involved with Philippine integration and immigration issues in Canada, it was especially rewarding for Mae to learn more about the current political, social and economic conditions in the Philippines. One of the most moving experiences she had was meeting three migrant workers at a migrant workers community center. She was able to interview each of them and record their heart-breaking stories. Even though their stories were sad, the women were hopeful and committed to enduring great hardship for the sake of their families. Listening to these women really put Mae's work with the ASEAN human rights mechanism for migrant workers in perspective. She is currently in the midst of producing a radio documentary with these women's stories.

Intern: Cedric Soule

Location: San José, Costa Rica

Placement: **Inter-American Court of Human Rights**

Faculty Supervisor: **Evan Fox-Decent**

Research Paper: *Comparing the treatment of indigenous rights claims between the Canadian and the Inter-American legal systems*

**Recipient of the Nancy Park Memorial Prize*

Cedric headed to Costa Rica to pursue work with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR). The IACHR, established in 1979 and based in San José, Costa Rica, is an autonomous judicial institution aimed at applying and interpreting the American Convention on Human Rights, a regional treaty that protects civil and political rights, such as the right to life, the right to humane treatment and the right to a fair trial. Working at the Court was a wonderful experience for Cedric. He says he not only enjoyed the work, but also learned the true meaning of teamwork, as well as how to focus, and be efficient in doing so, on different projects throughout the day.

During his placement, Cedric worked on different projects touching upon all aspects of the Court's mandate, including contentious cases, as well as resolutions on provisional measures and State compliance with Court judgments. Some of these projects involved summarizing the arguments brought forward by the Commission, the victim's representatives, and the State, as well as drafting an "argumentative map," encompassing the above and possible justifications for finding the violation of various Articles of the Convention. He also did legal research, translations and provided logistical support to

the lawyers and judges during Court session, which included taking care of the witnesses – reassuring them and explaining to them the process that was about to unfold – before they gave their testimony to the Court. His work at the IACHR allowed his to grasp the complexities of working in the human rights field, and to appreciate the importance of small victories when, for example, a State would recognize its responsibility in a case, or finally compensate a victim.

There were several highlights to Cedric's internship at the IACHR, one of which was to be a part of the legal team that redefined the Court's understanding of the crime of forced disappearance. Moreover, in addition to his court at the Court, Cedric had the chance to participate in the Court's extraordinary sessions, held in La Paz, Bolivia, which included attending the judges' deliberations on a contentious case and on a supervision of State compliance resolution after their respective public hearings had been held. For Cedric, it was a true privilege to be able to understand how the decision-making process at the Court worked and how the judges themselves reasoned, and definitely the highlight of his internship.



Cedric (second from the right) with other interns and the legal assistant whose team he was on.

Intern: Justin Dubois

Location: Kampala, Uganda

Placement: **Refugee Law Project**

Faculty Supervisor: **François Crépeau**

Research Paper: *Repatriation as Deportation*

**Recipient of The Robert S. Litvack Fellowship*

In May 2009, Justin set out for Uganda to work for the Refugee Law Project (RLP), an NGO associated with Makerere University in Kampala. RLP has the broad mandate to defend the rights of the estimated 1.8 million displaced persons in Uganda. Its comprehensive approach is relatively unique amongst NGOs in Uganda in that it provides both direct service to refugees (through its Legal Aid Clinic) as well as efforts to change the bigger picture through its Research & Advocacy and Education & Training departments. The organization's strength lies in its people and Justin recalls that his colleagues were paramount in making his experience so positive.

Justin worked primarily with the legal aid and counseling department, and more specifically, with the lawyers in the legal aid department. His work within the organization varied greatly and consisted of some research and writing, but mostly of following up on clients' cases. The cases ranged from 'normal' legal problems, such as not being paid for work performed, to needing assistance to obtain refugee status, to requiring more immediate legal support to obtain resettlement because of imminent threats. The follow-ups, consequently, all required different actions, from writing letters, taking testimonials or going to the various police stations in the city. In addition to the research, writing and the case follow-ups, Justin wrote grant applications as well as helped with the organization of different activities, such as a roundtable on traditional justice with the traditional leaders of Uganda, which allowed him to see an additional facet of work of the organization.

During the course of his internship, Justin also had the opportunity to travel to the refugee settlements in West Nile to offer on-the-ground legal aid, as well as to monitor the human rights and livelihood situation of the refugees with the aim of giving recommendations to the Government of Uganda, UNHCR and its implementing partners. For him, the field visit was an exceptional experience, not only to see first-hand the reality of living in these particular settlements, but also to better understand how policies are implemented on the ground.

"The internship has been a highlight of my time at the Faculty of Law."

Justin Dubois

UN Day for Torture victims:
Justin (left) with colleagues
Saphina Serugo and Gerald
Blacks, speaking to an invited
guest at activities
surrounding the United
Nations Day for Victims of
Torture, June 2009





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