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S
ome of the students have spent their summers in Ethiopia, Honduras, Israel, Macedonia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Tanzania—admittedly among the world’s “trouble spots.” Others in the same program have been sent to Buenos Aires, Geneva, Hong Kong, Melbourne, and New York—among the world’s most sophisticated cities. Whether in the developing or the developed world, what these U.S. and international law interns share in common is their keen commitment to promote and protect human rights policies and practices, domestically and globally. They have found their opportunities in the form of summer internships offered through the Program in International Human Rights Law (PIHRL) at the Indiana University School of Law—Indianapolis.

To date, these 10- to 12-week unpaid internships have taken first- and second-year law students across 6 continents to more than 25 countries, where they assist human rights governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organizations on specific international human rights law projects. The internships are but one component of PIHRL, a unique program directed by associate professor George E. Edwards (see sidebar), who founded the program when he joined the Indiana University faculty in January of 1997. In that first summer, two students were placed in internships abroad. By the summer of 2000, the internship numbers had more than quadrupled per year to 10 internships, bringing the total to date of 31 different internships in a program that is barely 4 years old.

Celine van Hoenacker spent the summer of 1999 working for the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, researching and writing legal memoranda on topics related to the defense of individuals accused of genocide and crimes against humanity; she also compiled minutes, in English and French, of judges’ meetings. Her fellow student Scott Goodroad was at the East Timor Human Rights Centre in Melbourne, Australia, documenting human rights abuses and violations in East Timor and submitting documents to appropriate NGOs, foreign governments, and the United Nations. Meanwhile in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Kirti Patel worked with a human rights group whose leader has been on trial for four years for publishing articles about government-run migrant worker detention centers.

Among the other students who went abroad in the summer of 1999, Michele Jackson worked with the Human Rights Internet, Children’s Rights Division, in Ottawa, Canada, on a project to create an international framework for legislation that would protect women and children from commercial sexual exploitation. Her fellow student, Joshua Robertson, went to Nepal and later advocated for Nepal’s lowest caste, the dalits (“untouchables”), before the UN Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which met in Geneva, Switzerland. During the summer of
2000, two students, Greg Loyd and Jenny Mirelez, each worked in back-to-back internships in Latin America; Loyd in Costa Rica and Honduras, and Mirelez in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, where their Spanish-language skills were essential to their projects with Casa Alianza, a human rights organization devoted to the defense and rehabilitation of street children in those countries. Another intern with two assignments was Edward Queen II, a former professor and respected philanthropist who is making a career shift to obtain a law degree specializing in human rights. He worked with the Helsinki Committee in Skopje, Macedonia, observing the nascent transition toward democracy, and in Jerusalem, Israel, working on human rights publications for the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group.

On the other side of the world, Ayoade Adewopo was at the Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission (HKEOC), contributing briefs submitted to the Court of Final Appeal (Supreme Court) and researching alternative court systems used in adjudicating human rights violations relating to familial status, disability, and sex discrimination. Katherine Hendrix worked for the Czech Helsinki Legal Counselling Centre for Refugees, conducting a comparative law project on Czech immigration and

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Human Rights Law Professor George E. Edwards

It has taken many years of traveling and living in different parts of the world for George E. Edwards to finally find his true vocation, teaching international human rights law at Indiana University’s School of Law—Indianapolis, where he is the founding director of the Program in International Human Rights Law. Edwards, a graduate of Harvard Law School, spent several years at a prestigious Wall Street law firm and five years in Hong Kong before joining the Indiana University faculty in 1997. He attributes his devotion to his field to several early and influential trips abroad.

As a high school student in North Carolina, he won a writing contest whose prize was a trip to represent black American youth at the Festac Arts and Culture Festival in Lagos, Nigeria, in the 1970s. There he witnessed poverty and the struggle for self-determination first-hand. Later, at law school, he interned with a law firm in Bangkok, Thailand, during which time he was invited to visit a nearby refugee camp. “That was my first real look at, and touch of, the world of international human rights, and the devastating affects of human rights violations,” he remembers. Before he finished his studies, he had signed up for a famine-related project in Ethiopia and worked another semester in Geneva for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

Much later, as associate director of the Centre for Comparative and Public Law at the University of Hong Kong, he became very involved in advocacy work on behalf of non-governmental organizations. In that city, he was struck by numerous violations relating to freedom of speech and freedom of association, the right to adequate food and housing, and discrimination based on race, age, and sexual orientation. Since those years, he has been invited to conferences worldwide to speak on human rights and is accredited to the United Nations to represent the National Bar Association. Although he never thought he would spend so many years in Hong Kong, nor end up teaching in Indianapolis, he is clearly enthusiastic about his work and impressed with the energy and interest of his “interesting, stimulated, and stimulating students” at IUPUI.
Hyo Joon Park worked for two organizations in Dublin, Ireland: the Irish Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and Amnesty International, researching asylum case law and factual evidence to prepare cases for individuals seeking asylum from African countries.

For these students, their work abroad in documenting cases, disseminating information, and doing advocacy work before real tribunals has been an incredible eye-opener. It has brought situations shockingly to life that otherwise existed on paper in legal briefs. “Students learn about the law, life, people, and repressive regimes. They also make a very valuable contribution to the organizations for which they work. . . . They do real legal work and tackle the same problems that other human rights lawyers do,” says Edwards. It is clear that he is proud of the field assignments that his students have carried out. For their part, they are enthusiastic and dedicated, all the while cognizant of the paradox of “wanting jobs they wished didn’t exist.”

Students decide where and what kind of work they want to be involved in and Edwards helps them locate the internship opportunities. Generally, no previous human rights experience is required. Once the students have been matched and accepted into the internship programs, they are eligible for scholarships. These are awarded by IU’s School of Law—Indianapolis, which pays the costs of the programs, the amounts varying depending on the placement. They receive 4 hours of academic credit for successfully completing an internship.

Courses that form the core of PIHRL are International Human Rights Law, International Criminal Law, Public International Law, European Community Law, International Environmental Law, and International Legal Transactions. In addition, the PIHRL students are regularly able to hear distinguished speakers on human rights who are invited to campus from such diverse countries as Botswana, Brazil, Burma, Canada, China, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Venezuela.

In praising the International Human Rights Law Bulletin published yearly by PIHRL, Norman Lefstein, dean of the School of Law—Indianapolis, says that “it is exciting for us to have successfully embarked on an international program that involves students, faculty, the local community, and overseas visitors, who engage in a wide range of collaborative activities in international human rights law.”

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