Reflexion Essay: Summer Internship with Clifford Chance LLP, Singapore

During my seven-week internship with the Singapore Office of Clifford Chance LLP, I worked mainly in the small 4-person Human Resources team that supports the lawyers and business development staff in the office. Besides the day-to-day HR operations that included the management of candidate databases and tracking of personnel changes, my chief responsibility was to assist two batches of summer legal interns with their structured 4-week vacation scheme programs. The legal interns were all penultimate students in either U.K. or Singapore law schools and the vacation schemes served as the feeder program for the two-year training contract with the global firm. In addition to tracking their progress and performance, I was tasked with the scheduling and preparation of talks and seminars that aimed to enhance their knowledge of Clifford Chance and the practice areas in which the firm operates. Furthermore, because the HR manager employees a laissez-faire approach towards my internship, I had the opportunity to work with a litigation lawyer on a pro-bono case and to undertake a number of independent projects, including the development of an Employee Wellbeing Program and the compilation of a report on the perceived gender imbalance in the office.

As a prospective pre-law student who was trying to explore different career options, my goals and expectations for this internship were very clear from the beginning. Specifically, from the law side of things, I wished to gain as much knowledge as possible about the day-to-day life of lawyers, the working conditions in an international law firm, and the law profession in general. Moreover, since I had only had limited experience working in a commercial corporate environment before this internship, I wanted to see
whether that kind of working life was really for me, as opposed to the freelance career paths that my parents have pursued.

In general, I am pleased to say that my goals were largely fulfilled. From my very first day on the job, I was very keen to know as many lawyers as possible in the firm and scheduled a number of informational interviews during lunchtime throughout my internship. Besides, I really tried to take full advantage of the summer vacation schemes that I was responsible for managing. In addition to attending all the scheduled talks and seminars, I assisted the legal interns with a number of tasks assigned by their supervisors and discussed extensively with them about the current job market and the future trends of the legal profession. As for experiencing the corporate environment, I achieved the goal by default by treating myself seriously as a full-time, permanent employee, doing all of my assigned work in good faith and accepting responsibilities.

In regards to specific skills that I developed on the job, my interpersonal and research skills improved the most. As an HR intern, I had to interact with different people everyday, from senior lawyers to stationary suppliers and this experience has enabled me to develop and employ different modes of communication based on the specific circumstances. As for my research skills, I had to do extensive research of congressional records for the litigation lawyer and ad-hoc research for my independent projects and day-to-day HR operations.

Taken as a whole, this internship has been really helpful to me in terms of industry knowledge. First of all, working in the HR capacity has allowed me to look beyond the work of individual lawyers and given me a fresh outlook on the running and structure of a typical law firm. I am now informed about the different career paths that a corporate lawyer could
undertake, as well as the future development of law firms. After immersing myself in a corporate law environment, I have come to decide that the legal profession is really an ideal career option for me. As someone who can only do good-quality work that is both rewarding and meaningful, I believe a lawyer's job satisfies this qualification perfectly based on my observation in the internship. Not only were all the lawyers I talked to passionate about their jobs despite the often demanding schedule, they invariably commented on the steep learning curve that is required of a good lawyer given the amount of new information and knowledge that they have to confront on a daily basis. I personally have always believed that a job would stop being interesting the minute it becomes stagnantly repetitive.

On a final note, this internship has exposed me to a unique culture of Singapore. As an international student from China, I initially didn’t expect the Singapore culture to be much different from my own but surprisingly, I was quite mistaken. Taking on two drastically different paths of development, Singapore and China have quite different expectations in both the workplace and the social occasions. By mingling with the legal interns who are largely local Singaporeans, I was able to from a rudimental understanding of the Singapore culture.