



Summer 8-22-2013

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Recommended Citation

Hill, Kim, "Students Complete Human Rights Internships at Prestigious NGOs" (2013).
News and Events. 2126.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2126>

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Students Complete Human Rights Internships at Prestigious NGOs

Aug. 22, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Two Illinois Wesleyan University students have completed summer internships at international human rights organizations through the University's newly established Center for Human Rights and Social Justice.

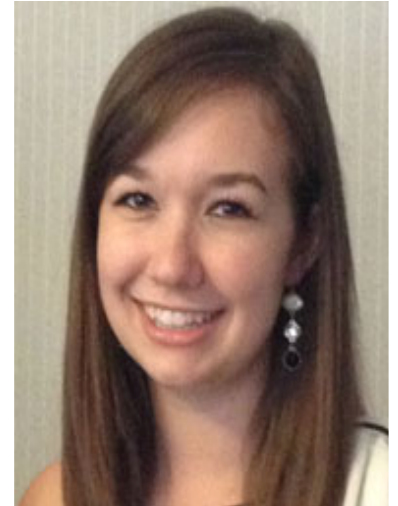
Amanda Watts '14, a secondary education and history double major from Oswego, Ill., interned at the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. Cathy Geehan '14, an international studies major from Kansas City, Mo., spent her summer at the Scholars at Risk Network housed at New York University.

The Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC) provides elementary and secondary students with hands-on learning about the Constitution to prepare them for informed civic engagement. A nonprofit, CRFC designs and conducts local, national and international programs that emphasize current and historical controversies involving rights, law and policy.

Watts spent most of her internship compiling, writing and revising materials for a two-day summer institute for high school teachers on how to present constitutional law issues to their students. She created case materials on two recent decisions, including *Shelby County v. Holder*, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case regarding the constitutionality of two provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The materials included background, facts of each case, the question presented, the constitutional foundations, precedents, arguments for each side and the decision. Watts adjusted the information for two readability levels – high school juniors and seniors and remedial readers. CRFC staff, teachers and law professors reviewed the materials extensively before publication and distribution.

"The insights gained from interacting with such a diverse group of people broadened my perceptions of both law and education, and drew my attention to the significant overlap between the two," said Watts, who plans to attend law school after graduation from Wesleyan. "Working on this project gave me invaluable experience on many levels, and the institute itself was extremely beneficial."

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of higher education institutions dedicated to protecting scholars around the world who are at risk because of their ideas. SAR protects scholars suffering threats to their lives and well being primarily by arranging positions of sanctuary at network institutions for those who are forced to flee. It also promotes advocacy for academic freedom throughout the world. Illinois Wesleyan is one of more than 120 U.S. institutions in the Network.



Amanda Watts '14



Cathy Geehan '14

SAR has also established a Scholars in Prison Project to help protect scholars unable to leave their home countries due to threats, restrictions or imprisonment. During her internship Geehan took an integral role in researching and updating all Scholars in Prison cases, implementing a new system for tracking updates, making substantive recommendations in the redesign of a Scholars in Prison web link and drafting mockups for the web redesign.

“The most rewarding aspect of the internship was when scholars would come in to visit,” said Geehan. “It was really amazing to be able to hear their experiences and learn about their opinions on the situations in their home countries.”

The students were selected for the internships through Illinois Wesleyan’s newly established Center for Human Rights and Social Justice. The center offers academic focus and support for ongoing and new initiatives focusing on human rights and social justice discussions, events and activities.

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