

PILSA Ought to Offer Need-Based Stipends

Evan Mintz, 2L

This year the Public Interest Law Student Association and Office of Career Services raised more than \$400,000 in its annual fundraiser to support Cardozo student public sector summer internships. As one of the 274 of students benefiting from this endeavor, I could not be happier. However, I'll probably be cashing my stipend checks with just a little more joy than many other students because I will be spending this summer in Austin, Texas, a city with a cost of living around half that of New York City. This summer, my rent will be about a third of what it is now, groceries will cost half as much, and the New York beer specials will be the Austin beer regulars. And yet, I will be receiving the same amount of money as every other stipend student. Whether it knows it or not, OCS has created an incentive to find an internship in a city with a cheap standard of living—or better yet, in a city with family members who can provide free housing and food (but that was last year's ill-fated adventure). OCS needs to take a look at its spending powers and recognize the incentives it is creating, and the incentives it isn't creating but should be.

By doling out a flat fee to all students, OCS instantly encourages students to find internships in the cheapest places possible.

This system denies extra funding to students who may need it the most while granting extra funding to those who do not need any more help. OCS could create a need-based system in which students must demonstrate a base-level of funding required for their summer. This base would be an amalgamation of housing costs, food, utilities and transportation. Once these bottom-line requirements are met, extra funds could be distributed either in a flat payment to all stipend receivers, or to those who have the lowest base cost to attempt to mitigate the conflict between the fairness of need-based payments with the equality of a flat fee. However, the difference may not be that extreme. Given the cost of storing goods in New York, flying to and from an internship, and the economic loss of the effort of finding a new place in a new city, the amount saved by working in a cheaper environ may not be all that much. However, under the current system there is no way of knowing. Even if OCS does not change its current payment system, it would be a good idea to survey students on their spending habits during their summer internships to see just how much of a difference there is.

While OCS's lack of current discretion may result in unintended effects, it also prevents them from nudging students in directions that could benefit Cardozo. Simply because of location and

available job fairs and interviews, one can fairly assume that most Cardozo students are getting internships somewhere near New York City. However, it may benefit Cardozo for students to spread out over the summer, stretching the Cardozo brand beyond the tri-state area. OCS could offer students extra funding if they secure internships in targeted, desired markets. Hypothetically, if Cardozo PR were planning outreach programs in California or Florida, students who work there over the summer could receive more money if they take part in whatever programs are planned in those states.

This incentive does not have to be constrained to geographic issues. Perhaps there are specific jobs, non-profit organizations, or even general practice areas where Cardozo wants to expand its visibility. OCS could list the targeted areas at the beginning of the year and offer extra funding to students who end up in one of the targeted jobs for the summer. This system would both reward students for helping Cardozo and create a greater student awareness of Cardozo's goals for the future.

Right now, OCS has an effective spending power and students are already jumping through hoops to get their stipends. It is time to put this power, and students' need for money to buy groceries, to good use for Cardozo.