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In firm, in-house internship lets W&L law student see both sides

By Dolan Media Newswires
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From left, Whitney D. Pulliam had a joint summer internship with McGuireWoods and Exelon Corp., a McGuireWoods client. Assistant General Counsel Divesh Gupta supervised her work for the energy company. (Maximilian Franz/The Daily Record)

BALTIMORE, MD — Some law students spend their summers working at law firms. Others work in-house for a company's legal department.

One intern in Baltimore got to do both.

The eight-week internship was a combined effort by McGuireWoods LLP's Baltimore office and Exelon Corp., one of the law firm's clients.

In the first year of the program, Whitney Pulliam, a first-year law student at Washington and Lee University School of Law, spent four weeks at McGuireWoods and four weeks with Exelon's in-house legal team. The program focused on energy law on both ends.

"Most folks in law school have no idea

where they want to go," said Brian J. Kelly, a McGuireWoods attorney who helped organize the program. "Most think they want to do litigation because that's all they learn in law school. It was always important to show them as much of a playing field as we can."

While at the law firm, Pulliam worked with the corporate, public finance, securities and litigation groups at the firm, all concentrating on either an energy law issue or an energy client, Kelly said.

The firm tried to treat Pulliam as much like an associate as possible, he said. She would juggle three or four assignments at once, working on tasks like looking into retail regulatory issues for electric suppliers, reviewing a power purchasing agreement for a client, researching regulations in various counties and dealing with case memos for ongoing trials, Kelly said.

During her time at Exelon, Pulliam had daily meetings with top company executives. She visited some of the company's sites, like the Conowingo Dam and the solar installation at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg.

Whitney also was one of the speakers at McGuireWoods' quarterly presentation to Exelon

"As an intern, you don't usually get time in front of the client, let alone high-level folks with the client," said Divesh Gupta, managing counsel at Exelon.

Pulliam also researched court dockets to keep track of various federal proceedings the company was involved in and summarized them in a written document. Since the company is considering business opportunities in another state, Pulliam also researched the securities and exchange regulations in that state and submitted a memorandum to Gupta.

Gupta said his goal was to give the intern an idea of what it is like to work for a company, so that "if she decides on in-house life ... actually decides there is something there, then she is not reaching for a dream job that is not anywhere near what she thought it was," Gupta said.

The idea for the program evolved from both McGuireWoods' and Exelon's involvement in the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, which works to increase diversity in the legal profession through, among other things, its 1L Scholar Program for first-year law students.

Attorneys at McGuireWoods set out to organize a program connecting a law firm to a company



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through energy law. The law firm then approached Exelon with the idea. It got a warm reception from Gupta, who said he had wanted to bring a program like that to the company for a while.

The law firm and company then spoke about the program at both the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law and the University of Baltimore School of Law, and it was also publicized at other schools. They received more than 100 applications.

While McGuireWoods — like Washington and Lee — is based in Virginia, Pulliam found out about the program by browsing the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity website.

She said she applied because she was interested in learning about what it was like to work in-house. She had worked previously as a paralegal, but never experienced the working environment of a company's legal department.

Kelly said they decided to concentrate on recruiting first-year law students because it would give the interns a chance, early on, to figure out whether they were more interested in private practice or working at a company. That way, they could make a more informed decision when applying to summer programs after their second year.

Pulliam "had that ability to compare and contrast" the two worlds, he said.

Based on her experience this summer, Pulliam said, she now plans to spend five years at a law firm before looking into going in-house.

"Law firms are great for training, especially in the beginning of your career," Pulliam said. "Now I know if I decide to move in-house, that is something that is attainable."

She also said she sees herself going into energy law.

"The energy field is something that is very relevant and it's changing," Pulliam said.

Both McGuireWoods and Exelon said they plan to host the program again next year. They are discussing whether they can add more students or lengthen the internship to 12 weeks, but have made no official decisions yet. Kelly said he had talked to other firm clients about the project, as well.

"Next year is far away," Kelly said. "But, from the response we've received from other clients who have heard about it, I'd be surprised if we just limit it to energy next year."

- By Kristi Tousignant. This article first appeared in [The Daily Record](#), another Dolan Company publication.

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