To future SU Law interns at the Corte IDH:

I hope this note will be of use both as a summary of my summer at the Inter-American Court and as an addition to the repository of advice from past interns.

First, I was an intern at the Court from June through August 2018. During this time, I worked for two legal teams. As is likely to be expected in any form of judicial internship, there was a lot of reading and writing that went on, and this was true of both teams. Another subset of general tasks not unique to either team included research projects and memo-writing. Specifically, though, the “first” team comprised of a supervising attorney and three other interns. The attorney would assign us weekly readings, usually related to cases or critiques of decisions, and we would meet on Fridays to discuss them. Perhaps more importantly, one of the main duties of this team in the scheme of the larger workings of the Court was event-planning, in which capacity I translated correspondence and fact booklets between English, Spanish, and French; compiled spreadsheets; and helped the team arrange miscellaneous logistics for a particular event, among other tasks. More on this event below.

The “second” team of which I was a part was the Asesoría Presidencia, or Counsel for the President (of the Court). I was the only intern on this team, which was led by an attorney and her legal assistant. Essentially, we were in charge of media relations and speech writing. Every morning I would help compile a daily news digest of human rights-related news from the Americas (my countries generally included Argentina, Bolívia, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Surinam, United States, and Uruguay). In addition, I translated press releases on a variety of themes from Spanish to English, helped update the Court’s Twitter feed, and assisted with other press-related tasks. I also got to write a short toast in English for the President.

Importantly, both teams were deeply involved in the planning of a huge event, a weeklong commemorative celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the entry into force of the American Convention on Human Rights and the creation of the Inter-American Court. Some of the activities included an exchange between the three regional human rights courts — African, European, and Inter-American — in which the UN Secretary-General, President of Costa Rica, and President of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights participated as well; panels and seminars by the former presidents of the Court, human rights experts, academics, and judges from the national high courts of the Americas; and dinners and other events. It was
quite an experience. While the Court was never in session while I was there, this event made up for that.

Regarding advice, I would recommend that only those students with a firm command of Spanish apply for the internship. It is technically permissible to work in the Court with any of the four official languages (Spanish, English, French, Portuguese), but everyone speaks Spanish – and not everyone speaks English. The more languages you speak, the better. Further, without knowing your team placement, I would encourage you to go talk with the attorneys and learn about why they are at the Court and why they are interested in human rights. There are some very bright, fascinating people there – many have also worked at the European Court of Human Rights and/or are accomplished academics and/or have held high positions in their countries – and it is truly a privilege to work with them.

Logistically, I would recommend living somewhere close to the Court. The Court will send out many recommendations of lodging, but I just rented an apartment through Airbnb, which was approximately one kilometer away, and it was very easy to walk back and forth each day. The Court is located in a safe neighborhood, but people may recommend taking a cab or Uber back to the apartment when working later into the evening, when it is dark. Also, summer is rainy season in Costa Rica, so plan accordingly. Dress is semi-formal/business-casual at the Court, unless it is in session, in which case formal attire is required. I would also recommend bringing hiking shoes and beachwear, as interns often go away for the weekend – and take them up on this! The other interns are similarly bright and wonderful people, and traveling is often a great way to make friends. Plus, there are so many places to discover in Costa Rica, even during the wet season (which is sometimes not even noticeable due to the country’s many microclimates). A popular adage in Costa Rica, besides “pura vida,” is that when it is raining on the Atlantic/Caribbean coast, it is sunny on the Pacific side, and vice versa. San José was usually warm and sunny in the mornings, before raining or storming in the afternoons or evenings.

All in all, have fun, get outside your comfort zone, and continually ask what you can do to help at the Court. Seattle University Law students are very lucky to have this opportunity, and I have no doubt it will continue to be a very worthwhile experience.

Please feel free to contact me for any other questions or advice.

Sincerely,

Justin Loveland
J.D. Candidate, 2020