Greetings!

This issue focuses on placements in the field of criminal justice. Students reflect on their experiences with some of the following community partners in Poughkeepsie and beyond.

- Office of the Public Defender, Dutchess County
- Office of the District Attorney, Dutchess County,
- Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.
- End The New Jim Crow Action Network
- Dutchess County Courts
- The Prison Public Memory Project
- Greater Hudson Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

New opportunity this Fall:

Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections

E.N.J.A.N.

“Working with E.N.J.A.N. (End the New Jim Crow Action Network) has demonstrated to me the real process of community organizing, coalition building, and local activism. As an Urban Studies major, these are topics that I have approached in the classroom from many perspectives, from community mapping in post-Katrina New Orleans to the housing struggle in the Umoja Village in Miami. In true multidisciplinary fashion, I have combined these studies with my interest in the criminal justice system and prison abolition in the Political Science and Sociology departments. E.N.J.A.N. is a vibrant and democratic group of activists in Dutchess County, and has provided me the opportunity to participate in a real manifestation of my academic interests. I have been impressed by the different collaborations and public education campaigns that have been
discussed and enacted, as well as members’ dedication to calling attention to criminal justice issues in our area. Currently, in conjunction with the #FREENDY campaign, I am researching local police departments’ complaint processes, and look forward to sharing this information with local decision makers and the larger community. This experience continues to shape my understanding of community organizing and advocacy, and I look forward to bringing these lessons with me after graduation.”  - Sophia Burns ‘18

“When I first considered looking for a position through the CEL office, I was interested in something pertaining to the legal field. As a political science major who intends to apply to law school in the near future, I thought that I would likely find a placement somewhere like the Dutchess County Public Defender’s Office. However, my time at Exodus Transitional Community had stitched together my academic interests regarding law and social justice with my own personal experience in a way that has been more fulfilling than what I believe an opportunity at a law office would have provided. After studying the theoretical underpinnings of systems like the school to prison pipeline, my time at Exodus was refreshing as it complicated and grounded topics that we discuss at Vassar from a position of comfort and privilege everyday.”  - Jade Diaz ‘18

Watch a documentary made by Isabel Sakarin ’19 and Eli Schwamm ’19 on Exodus
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY, DUTCHESS COUNTY

“My internship at the Dutchess County District Attorney’s Office allows me to learn more about the law, the legal profession, and the US judicial system from the perspective of the District Attorney’s office. Throughout this experience, I have been able to apply the more theoretical lessons that I have learned in my political science classes to understand how bias, institutional constraints, and the goals of the office operate in real life. Moreover, this opportunity has expanded my perception of the criminal justice system in the US, my respect for the work of individuals at all levels of the court system, and my knowledge of law and the legal profession. As a result, I have found myself approaching my coursework from a more personal perspective as I consider my own experiences within this system. Additionally, as someone who had the intention of going to law school at the beginning of the semester, this internship has also opened my eyes to a variety of professions within the American judicial system.” - Cecilia Bobbit’19

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER, DUTCHESS COUNTY

“Working as an intern at the Public Defender’s Office has personally been the most involved internship experience I have had so far. The supervisor, Mr. Matteo, allows me and the other interns to do real work beyond administrative duties. This provides me with an actual job experience that will definitely help me as I prepare for the post-grad world and a better understanding of current issues of the justice system that are brought up in my classes. As the first person that potential clients interact with when they request a Public Defender, it is not lost on me the role that we play in not only comforting and being empathetic to clients, but winning their trust (as well as the supervisors’) that we would execute the job efficiently and accurately. And in that same capacity, it is equally important to me the diversity that the Vassar interns bring to the office - two women and two men all of color - as visual representation is just as important as anything else considering the racial makeup of Dutchess county.” - Anthony Brown ‘18
PRISON PUBLIC MEMORY PROJECT

“As an intern with the Prison Public Memory Project (PPMP) last semester, I had the opportunity to write a story on one of their two case files. The PPMP aims to bring conversations about criminal justice and prison history to the forefront through public education, community engagement, and research. Importantly, their work in Hudson, NY focuses on a women's correctional facility that first opened in 1887. Doing this work at the same time that I took Professor Leonard’s “Women, Crime, and Punishment” enabled me to write a story about an incarcerated girl with adequate historical and sociological context. I conducted research at the State Archives in Albany as well as with the girl's case file, which was donated by someone who worked at the facility at the time that it closed. The story will be published online soon, and will hopefully contribute to local conversations about women in prison.” - Sophia Burns '18

E.N.J.A.N.

“My involvement with E.N.J.A.N has allowed to see how my education manifests in the real world. It has made my work at Vassar tangible outside of it. Taking a Criminology class last semester properly educated me on issues I thought I was informed about, such as mass incarceration and differential law enforcement. I took another class titled “Incarcerating Philosophies” that looked at mass incarceration from a philosophical perspective – what is the rhetoric that drives criminal justice in the United States? How are mass incarceration and “tough-on-crime” policies conceptualized and justified? I have carried what I’ve learned from these classes to my work with ENJAN, contributing to their Court Watch program and Bail Fund initiative, among other things.”

- Tabraiz Lodhi ‘20

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