

Summer Associate Program, Pandemic Style

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When the world went into shutdown mode, Caleb Setlock couldn't help but be worried.

Earlier during his second year of law school at Duquesne, he had accepted an offer to work as a summer associate at Barley Snyder. Then the COVID-19 pandemic shut down businesses across the world, and no one knew for sure how long it would last.

As the weeks passed, Setlock grew even more worried. Some of his classmates already had their summer associate programs shortened, changed to all-virtual or canceled completely.

"As the world got swept up in COVID-19-related cancellations, my expectations dropped," Setlock said about what the [Barley summer program](#) would look like. "I was hopeful the program would remain, but knew it would be challenging."

Even with other companies adjusting their summer work programs, Setlock and Barley's two other 2020 summer associates, Elizabeth Castillo and Gabriel Wertz, enjoyed the full eight-week experience, with much of it in-person and in the firm's offices.

Adjusted, yes. But more importantly, complete. Barley's summer associates in 2020 benefitted from a learning-on-the-job program that remained very similar to the education past summer associates experienced. While the three weren't in Barley offices every day, they did spend a majority of their time there. And when they weren't in the office - or when their supervising attorneys weren't - they were connected to the firm's attorneys virtually.

"(Even with the pandemic-related working conditions) I was still able to efficiently work and interact with many attorneys via (Microsoft) Teams, email or the phone," said Wertz, a Lebanon native and a rising third-year law student at the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law. "The staff and attorneys at all the offices were accommodating and helpful. I am grateful for how everyone went out of their way to create a beneficial learning experience for me."

The three associates all gushed about their summer experience, from learning about the day-to-day operations of a law firm to the in-person experience of sitting in on depositions and trial preparation. All three as well have accepted positions at Barley Snyder in 2021.

But even though the summer program eventually happened and was successful, it wasn't a given that it would in the early days of the pandemic shutdown. Even when the firm decided to go forward with it, there were still questions on how it would look.

"We decided early on we wanted to make sure our summer associate program continued as it has for years," said Barley Snyder chief administrative officer Dorothy Rund. "It was just a question of How do we make this happen safely

for the students and for our entire staff?' These law school students worked too hard for this to have their summer learning experience canceled."

Attorney [Alex Puskar](#), the co-chair of Barley's summer associate program, benefitted from Barley's summer program when he was at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. That helped him understand what an important part of the education process the summer program is, and how important it was to make sure the latest crop of law school students had the same opportunity.

"I know first-hand what a benefit it was being a Barley Snyder summer associate, not just for my education, but to also help me become familiar with the culture and daily life at the firm," he said. "I didn't want these three outstanding students to miss out on that kind of opportunity, even though it was slightly different than what a usual summer would be."

Castillo, who recently began her second year at Temple University Beasley School of Law, said she also worried the program wouldn't happen - but her fears were allayed early in the spring.

"Barley contacted me before I could even think to contact them," she said. "The firm was great about communicating with me early on. I really appreciated that. Before the start of quarantine in March, my supervising attorney contacted me to confirm I could still work in the summer. Human Resources then reached out with a month's notice regarding my delayed start date. They moved my start date to better prepare for the summer associates' work in the new COVID-19 work environment."

With the summer associates now coming in for sure, the firm educated them on how the program would look different than what they may have expected. Guidelines changed rapidly for businesses to reopen, and the firm stayed nimble and remained in contact with the three students to make sure they were comfortable coming into the office.

What could have been a lost summer became an enriching educational experience.

"It was different, yes, but I think we laid out a great plan for the program that followed all of the state's health guidelines, our attorneys executed it flawlessly and the students adjusted to it perfectly," Rund said. "We're very happy we decided to go forward with the program to continue our tradition of augmenting the education of aspiring young attorneys."

Wertz said he appreciates what the firm did for him this summer, especially with the knowledge that some of his classmates and friends missed out on summer educational programs because of the pandemic shutdown.

"Not only did Barley decide to continue with the program, but the firm also ensured that I received an authentic experience by allowing me to work from the office every day and providing me with a steady workload of assignments," he said. "I am grateful for how everyone went out of their way to create a beneficial learning experience for me."

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