

Open Access Podcast
FERC Interns and a Covid Summer
August 14, 2020

Angelique Besnard: Welcome to Open Access, I'm Angelique Besnard, a summer intern in FERC's Office of External Affairs. I'm a junior at Georgetown University, majoring in International Politics. I am happy to have the opportunity to make my first podcast, here at FERC.

Each summer FERC welcomes more than 40 interns and volunteers to the Washington, D.C., headquarters and regional offices throughout the U.S. This summer we operated in an entirely virtual environment. Each intern works in one of FERC's 12 program offices, gets challenging assignments and works toward becoming the next generation of energy industry leaders. Students in the intern program engage with FERC's leadership through networking sessions, attend training and information sessions and participate in numerous professional development workshops during their time on board.

Today, I'm speaking with fellow summer interns who will give us a glimpse of their experiences and what they learned from their time at FERC.

First, let's go to Mark Tao, interning for the Office of Enforcement. Mark, after completing your first year at Dartmouth College, why did you choose to intern at FERC?

Mark Tao: Yeah, so my first year I took a slew of courses and I got a better idea of sort of what I want to study in major in, though I haven't decided yet. I have decided that I really like data science, computer science and public policy so I really wanted the chance to get some sort of exposure early to that kind of work as early as possible. Now I had hear about FERC's intern program through a previous college intern who said that he loved the agency, loved the people, and learned a ton from the internship in those fields, so I figured that now would be an amazing time to get some preliminary experiences the industry. And yeah, I'm really grateful that I took that opportunity.

Angelique Besnard: Great, so what professional development opportunities did FERC's internship program provide you?

Mark Tao: So, I think, there were three main opportunities that I really keyed in on. First of which was a LinkedIn workshop where we were taught by some HR people about how to network and navigate the website and sort of what a good LinkedIn profile looks like. I also, there was also a resume review workshop which ended up also being really helpful. The speaker then sort of offered the opportunity for any presentation attendee at the chance to look at their resume, which is really helpful. Then, there was a navigating the federal hiring maze one, which I found to be super helpful and just calming my nerves about not getting my applications lost or filtered through some algorithm. I'm really grateful that FERC put this all together.

Angelique Besnard: Now, what would you say was the most rewarding part of your internship?

Mark Tao: I would say that there were two main things that I found the most rewarding. The first of which, was definitely my incredible intern project. It was sort of on a different kind of market transaction that I think will be hopefully helpful to Branch 7.8. And the second thing that I found to be the most rewarding was getting to work with my Branch 7.8 team. They were all incredibly helpful and totally understanding throughout this entire process and I really couldn't have asked for a better group of mentors to learn from. And I'm absolutely positive that I'll be able to go back to any one of them in the future if I have any questions about anything job related. So, yeah.

Angelique Besnard: Thank you for sharing, Mark.

Mark Tao: Absolutely. Thank you for having me.

Angelique Besnard: Next, we go to Kitty Sargent, a law student at George Washington University. Kitty, can you tell us what brought you to FERC?

Kitty Sargent: Yeah, so, I was really interested in FERC because I'm a rising 3L at GW so I'm going into my last year. And I have a lot of experience in environmental law and admin law, which is sort of like my base interest coming into law school. But as I learned more about energy law at GW, I was drawn to it and wanted to explore more, so an internship at FERC seemed like a really good fit for this summer.

Angelique Besnard: Now, what role did you play in the General Counsel's office, and what was your favorite project?

Kitty Sargent: Yeah, so this summer I have been in the energy market section in the General Counsel's office. It has been a really great experience so far, next week is my last week, actually. And my favorite project happened I think last week, and it was a pretty standard research project, it was bankruptcy-related, for a case that's before the Commission right now. And I was given a research question that was discrete for one specific topic. But what was really cool for me was that we had a team meeting for everyone who was working on this case, and I got to speak in the meeting and presented some of my findings to the attorneys. And there were some pretty senior attorneys there, so it was really cool for me to be able to participate in that way and sort of be treated like an actual attorney, not just an intern, so I really value that experience.

Angelique Besnard: Wow, that sounds like such a great experience! How has your internship at FERC helped further your career goals?

Kitty Sargent: Yeah, I think in two main concrete ways I really felt that FERC has been a great summer for me. First, it's just really solidified for me the energy law is something that I'm interested in pursuing with my career. Hopefully, maybe at FERC in the future. But I have really just enjoyed learning more about energy law and more about the sector in general, beyond like the legal standpoints. And then also, from a mentorship perspective my supervisor, Helen Dyson, has been super great and she's been an awesome mentor and has really made all the interns that she oversees, she's made us all feel really welcome even though we're remote which is not the easiest task. Big shout out to her for doing that. It's been really great to be connections like that.

Angelique Besnard: Well thank you for sharing your experience with us, Kitty.

Kitty Sargent: Thank you so much for having me.

Angelique Besnard: Next, we go to Andrea Salazar, a second-year law student at Vermont Law School who worked in the Office of Administrative Law Judges this summer. Andrea, could you please explain to us your interest in FERC?

Andrea Salazar: Sure. My interest in FERC stems from my general interest in the field of energy, due to my background in chemical engineering, and that's where I started learning about traditional and renewable energy systems. At Vermont Law School, I'm also pursuing my master's of energy regulation and law, so FERC really fit well with that.

Angelique Besnard: Could you please walk us through what a typical day looks like for you?

Andrea Salazar: Sure, I have one to two meetings a day with an energy analyst, a law clerk, a paralegal, an ALJ, or all of them at once. Typically, after that, I'll take the day to run some Boolean searches on a legal research site or receive feedback for iterations of my legal writing.

Angelique Besnard: Now, what would you say was your most rewarding experience or project this summer?

Andrea Salazar: The most rewarding experience was getting to meet and engage with Commissioners, the chief judge, attorneys from various offices, and law clerks from OALJ. They were all super interested and willing to share their lived experiences, their career paths and just listening to them talk about those trajectories was an amazing opportunity because it reminded me that they were in law school once too, and it kind of helps me understand that I can also make it.

Angelique Besnard: That sound like a great opportunity. Now, as you enter your second year at law school, how has the internship supplemented your law curriculum?

Andrea Salazar: So, this internship has allowed me to engage with science and finance-based regulatory issues that aren't spelled out in textbooks or even in the statute or regulations. Going into my alternative dispute resolution course this fall, I come with the experience of having sat in on settlement conferences, for example. And then going into my climate justice practicum course, I come with a general understanding of regulatory structure and function. But most importantly this internship has allowed me to become a part of a ALJ's team and see the process necessary to evaluate different arguments, whereas a casebook pretty much lays out all of that for you and the reasoning is after the fact. It's really nice to be in the middle of that action.

Angelique Besnard: Well thank you, Andrea, for sharing.

Andrea Salazar: Sure.

Angelique Besnard: Finally, we go to Franco Ghadiri, who is pursuing a Master of Environmental Management at Duke University. Franco, why are you interested in the energy sector?

Franco Ghadiri: Hi, so I'm interested in the energy sector because energy is connected to everything within our daily lives, as well as the greater economy. And I think it's a very fast changing, very innovative sector to work in and that's why I'm interested in it.

Angelique Besnard: How has your master's degree prepared you for this internship with FERC?

Franco Ghadiri: My master's degree definitely prepared me for this internship with FERC. You know, I learned a lot of skills in my classes such as econ, stats, and law in addition to Microsoft Excel and Word, which I all used in my internship.

Angelique Besnard: What was your biggest takeaway from your experience at FERC, and how will it help you in your future?

Franco Ghadiri: So, my biggest takeaway was learning about financial markets and you know, FTRs, and how to prevent market manipulation because I was working with the Office of Enforcement. So I definitely can apply that knowledge to energy projects that I do in the future.

Angelique Besnard: Would you want to come back and work for FERC in the future?

Franco Ghadiri: Absolutely. Everyone is so nice here and very respectful. And I just felt very included in the work environment, so I definitely would come back.

Angelique Besnard: Great, thank you, Franco.

Franco Ghadiri: Thank you.

Angelique Besnard: Thanks, everyone, for joining us today to share your experiences as a FERC summer 2020 intern. It was a great summer even if we were all working remotely. Stay safe, mask up and wash those hands!