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Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowship for Incoming Graduate Studies

Submitted: 9/8/2015

This summer I used my Mellon Fellowship to support a ten-week legal internship in Bangkok, Thailand. In Bangkok I was an intern at the Thai Arbitration Institute, which is the official commercial arbitration body attached to the Thai Office of the Judiciary. As an intern I was able to work with Thai lawyers, attend seminars on arbitration in Asia, observe hearings, and visit various law schools and judicial bodies throughout Bangkok. As a law student studying international law, the opportunity to study in Bangkok was invaluable, as it provided constant learning opportunities in areas ranging from international law to politics to economics.

In the area of international law, I was able to observe arbitration hearings, speak with arbitrators from all over the world, and edit Thai-English legal publications that outlined the importance of arbitration in growing Thailand's international presence and in attracting foreign investment to Thailand. For example, I learned that although foreigners are barred from working as lawyers and judges in Thailand, Thailand allows foreigners to act as arbitrators and arbitration consultants in order to boost investor confidence in their justice system.

In the area of politics and economics, I met legal experts who built Thailand's modern legal system, who work in the Supreme Court and government, and who are developing Thailand's international political and economic. I worked with the Thai Arbitration Institute in preparing for their 25th Anniversary Seminar, which focused on the importance of arbitration in the modern world. This seminar, which I also attended, attracted international speakers who work for UNCITRAL and the ICC, who helped develop the first Asian arbitration centers, and who were active in creating the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

More generally speaking, I learned about how arbitration operates at the intersection between domestic and international law and how it plays a crucial role in a modern, global economy. Without the safeguards provided by international arbitration institutes, international investment would be less efficient, riskier, and, ultimately, less popular. Interning in Thailand was a hands-on crash course that illustrated both how developing countries and investors use arbitration institutes to serve their business needs to their mutual advantage. Whether the Thai Arbitration Institute was protecting a Thai national from international investors who breached a contract or protecting investors from a bad business deal in Thailand, the opportunity to see real-life legal disputes take place in person could not be paralleled by any other internship that I could have had in my 1L summer. I am already applying what I learned in Thailand in my International Commercial Arbitration course at the UW Law School, and will certainly continue to benefit in the future.

I would like to thank the Institute for Regional and International Studies, because without this fellowship I would not have had the ability to participate in this truly unique educational opportunity.