

# REPORT ON LIMAN SUMMER FELLOWSHIP

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## Placement Organization

The Berkeley Center on Health, Economic & Family Security (CHEFS) is a think tank focused on the growing problem of economic insecurity, which is affecting more and more American families. With faculty experts in law, social welfare, public health, political science, public policy, medicine, and economics, CHEFS analyzes interrelated issues and makes policy recommendations to assist the engineering of legislative, institutional, and regulatory policy solutions to the problems that threaten the health and welfare of working families.

Berkeley CHEFS' programmatic goals include:

- Defining economic risks faced by working families;
- Increasing health security through promoting universal health coverage at the national, state, and local levels;
- Developing better protections for workers who are on voluntarily or involuntarily leave from their jobs;
- Supporting working families in a flexible workplace; and
- Ensuring that seniors can be secure in their retirement years.

Berkeley CHEFS is the only center of its kind at any of the top 50 law schools, and the only university-based think tank that focuses specifically on developing and promoting integrated policy solutions to address problems stemming from the rising insecurity of American workers and

families. Because these policies may face court challenges, the center's legal expertise allows it to craft its proposals to withstand such challenges.

### My Work

At CHEFs, I was able to work on women and quality of workplace issues by contributing to policy research on how the government can best bolster workingwomen by subsidizing childcare and regulating how private employers structure their family leave policies. I believe this experience greatly contributed to my growing understanding of the various factors affecting women as they try to work their way out of poverty, or maintain financial stability.

My time at CHEFS was filled with substantive research on domestic and international policy and legislation related to family leave policies. I had a range of research assignments – some were small and specific, for example to research whether family leave benefits are taxable in OECD countries, and some were more significant, for example creating a long and detailed appendix outlining the components of various public benefit programs. This appendix will be included in the forthcoming suggested model federal legislation on paid family leave, which CHEFS is set to unveil in early 2011. I was invited to participate fully in the organization, attending staff meetings and briefings, and worked directly with a research associate and the center's executive director.

### Memorable Moment(s)

The most significant lesson I learned at CHEFS came by way of something surprising: the weekly staff meeting. Usually, staff meetings are thought of as obligations to grumble about and trudge through. At CHEFS, however, these meetings exposed me to the best management I have ever seen. The meetings took place first thing Monday morning, setting the tone and pace for the week. Each

staff member was asked to report both what they accomplished the previous week and what they intended to accomplish in the week to come. Having people report their achievements and intentions to a group, each and every week, functioned as a terrific motivational tool. Ann O’Leary, CHEFS executive director, deftly and judiciously gave suggestions and directives, telling people the best and most efficient way to achieve what they had on their plate. At the meetings, she also discussed the health of the organization as a whole – whatever its larger goals or current burdens might have been. In this way, she made employees feel involved not only in their small slice of the organization’s work, but also in the overall success of the organization. This ownership, from the most junior intern all the way up to the executive director, truly helped people to feel invested in and excited about their work.

I remember thinking to myself during several of these Monday morning meetings that if I am ever lucky enough to be in a management position, I want to model myself almost exactly on Ann O’Leary. She was never cross or discouraging, but impressively confident in her ability to guide the organization. I guess what surprised me was that I have been so focused on developing an academic and technical understanding of women and quality of workplace issues that I have often forgotten to notice the mechanics of the workplaces in which I participate. An organization focused on supporting women workers should be run by an impressive female leader, and should be a good place to work. I have worked at other non-profits with workplaces I would qualify as dysfunctional and unprofessional, in terms of workplace conduct (yelling and guilt trips were common), shared ownership of work product (such as competition to take sole credit for achievements), pay and benefit negotiations (lop-sided, unfair) and a lack of mentoring and furthering employees’ education. Perhaps it seems like a simple, obvious lesson to have learned, but I think organizations

should practice what they preach, and I feel fortunate to have been exposed to an organization effectively doing so.

### Post-Graduation Plans

When it comes to professional goals, my career plan rests on a commitment to bolstering the wellbeing and financial livelihoods of women and girls. Increasingly, our societal governing structures are being privatized. I am currently very interested in public regulation of private businesses, as I would love to focus on women and quality of workplace issues. I think that a comprehensive and powerful understanding of how to make government play a positive role in people's lives necessitates comprehension of how corporations and employers function and the ability to force corporations to function as they should. I believe in broadening the applicability of feminism, and for this reason I have striven and continue to strive to learn about the comprehensive enforcement of corporate responsibility, as opposed to a single-issue like employment discrimination or family leave policies, or other narrowly tailored feminist issues. At CHEFs, I found coworkers who shared my belief that employment practices that are good for women do not happen in a vacuum, but instead are fostered by a larger context of responsible business practice.

Eventually, I hope to serve as the issues director for a national women's organization. At the beginning of my junior year in College, I proposed my own major – Women and Public Policy – because I wanted an academic elaboration of my belief that public policy functions best when it bolsters the livelihood and prospects of women. This frame of policy analysis can and should be effectively extended to issues far beyond those traditionally deemed “women's issues.” There is an effective analysis of the estate tax, for example, that hinges of what would be best for women and girls. Only 1% of estates currently pay the estate tax, yet a repeal would mean a \$753 billion

reduction in education and social program spending over the next decade. With women making much more if they attain a high school degree, and with the majority of welfare recipients being single mothers, the repeal of the estate tax would harm women significantly more than it would help the narrow population currently levied. This type of analysis needs to be well heard in every major policy discussion, and as an issues director of a major women's organization, I hope to write these types of analysis and lobby to make sure that the needs of women are addressed as government enacts policy. CHEFs shares this view of public policy, and is working effectively to insert feminist analysis into many different policy debates. I would love to head an organization like CHEFs in the future, and believe that working with them this summer has further credentialed me for this dream.

#### Support from the Liman Fellowship

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity given to me by the Liman fellowship. I was able to work on issues close to my heart, as well as participate in a community of like-minded lawyers. The conference held at Yale Law School on March 4, 2010 jumpstarted my enthusiasm, as well as exposed me to many impressive, impassioned practitioners, helping me to believe that a future in public interest law is a real possibility. I was impressed, throughout, by the devotion and helpful guidance of those administering the Liman Fellowship. Thank you!

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