Office of Capital and Forensic Writs

*The Office of Capital and Forensic Writs is a Statewide Public Defender Representing Clients on Death Row in Texas*

**Death Penalty Defense Investigator/Mitigation Specialist Internship (unpaid) – Fall 2021**

**What Does the OCFW Do?**
The Office of Capital and Forensic Writs is a statewide public defender representing clients sentenced to death in Texas in post-conviction. Our job is to investigate, identify, and litigate constitutional errors in our clients’ conviction and death sentence, and advocate on their behalf.

**What is a Mitigation Specialist?**
“Mitigation Specialist” is the professional term for a defense investigator in death penalty cases who specializes in conducting “mitigation” investigations. In death penalty trials, jurors are supposed to hear “mitigation evidence” to weigh in deciding whether to sentence someone to death or life without parole. Mitigating information can include evidence of mental health disorders, racial oppression, poverty, lack of education, incompetency, intellectual disability, abuse, trauma, or anything else a juror could decide gives the defendant’s life value. To uncover this evidence, mitigation specialists conduct broad investigations which include extensive interviews with our client’s family, friends, teachers, and doctors, as well as collecting and analyzing medical, school, mental health, criminal, and employment records. Mitigation specialists assemble the information they learn into a compelling story, called a social history narrative. In a post-conviction context, like at OCFW, this narrative is used to show the court that insufficient mitigation evidence was presented at trial, such that it prejudiced our client, and accordingly, our client should get another chance to present it to a new jury.

Mitigation specialists at OCFW also participate in fact-investigation which involves challenging the factual narrative of the crime presented at trial. Common areas of fact-investigation include police and prosecutor misconduct, withholding of exculpatory evidence, juror misconduct, and innocence.

**Who we are Looking For:**
We are seeking bright and driven students with a passion for criminal justice reform, public defense, social sciences, and/or civil and human rights to assist in the investigation and development of mitigation evidence. Under the supervision of OCFW staff attorneys and mitigation specialists, interns are provided an exciting opportunity to gain experience in the legal and investigative field, while helping people who need it the most. Students with a focus in a relevant field (e.g., cultural anthropology, history, psychology, sociology, African American and/or Latin American studies, public health, ethnography, law, social work, English, communications, or another field involving qualitative research,) are especially encouraged to apply.
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Diversity Statement:
OCFW recognizes the racial bias and inequity inherent in the criminal legal system. OCFW appreciates the importance of cultivating and maintaining a staff whose backgrounds, cultures, and experiences reflect those of who we represent. Every OCFW staff member shares a profound commitment to public service and to defending people from underserved communities.

As an office, OCFW is committed to cultivating an anti-oppressive workplace that embraces staff with diverse backgrounds. We acknowledge the ways in which systemic oppression and injustice can undermine access to professional opportunities and are committed to conducting hiring that is equitable and accessible. We welcome all applications, including those from candidates from diverse backgrounds who are sensitive to the experiences of those from communities disproportionately impacted by systemic injustice and racial bias.

Duties:
Mitigation specialist interns at OCFW will participate in the following:

- Helping collect and analyze records about the crime and the client’s life.
- Investigating family, cultural, community, socioeconomic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, racial, historical, and political factors that shaped our clients’ lives; drafting memos.
- Conducting social media and internet investigations.
- Assisting mitigation specialists with interviewing witnesses (when travel is safe), including jurors, complaining witnesses, and the client’s friends, family, and acquaintances, etc.
- Communicating with clients by phone and in person (when travel is safe).
- Meeting with the client’s team to develop themes and theories.

Preferred Qualifications:
- An interest in public defense and criminal justice reform;
- A strong commitment to the advocacy of death sentenced persons and persons from marginalized communities;
- Ability to work collaboratively and independently;
- Attention to detail, organization, and accuracy;
- Proficiency in Excel, Word, and internet research;
- Enthusiasm for complex research and analyzing voluminous records and data;

Course Credit:
This internship is unpaid. However, OCFW will work with the candidate selected to obtain course credit through their school, if the applicant desires.
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Internship Terms:
This internship is based in a remote setting. When safety protocols allow, interns will be permitted (but not required) to go into the office, or into the field for investigative work. Applicants must be able to commit to being present in the virtual office for an agreed upon number of hours per week, not less than 10. Interns must remain in regular contact with their supervisor and team leaders about projects and tasks assigned. Supervisor check-ins are required.

How to Apply:
To apply, send: (1) a cover letter which describes why you are interested in advocating for people sentenced to death (2) your resume to internship@ocfw.texas.gov. **Note: applications that do not follow the above instructions will not be considered.**

**THE DEADLINE TO APPLY IS SEPTEMBER 8th, 2021.** This internship will last through the fall semester.

OCFW is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any request for reasonable accommodations needed during the application process should be communicated by the applicant to Sandra Justice, the Office of Capital & Forensic Writs Senior Accountant, at (512) 463-8520.

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