



# AAPD



# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

AAPD Summer Internship Program

## About the AAPD Summer Internship Program

The AAPD Summer Internship Program provides an opportunity for students with disabilities to gain hands-on professional experience and advance their career goals. Through the Summer Internship Program, AAPD seeks to give a class of students with disabilities the skills, resources, and networks they need to not only become employed, but to be employed in high-level positions. Our Summer Internship Program engages students and recent graduates with disabilities from all across the United States. Because we cover the costs of travel and housing in addition to providing a living stipend, we are able to recruit a diverse class of interns that may not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in a program like ours. For many of our interns, AAPD's Summer Internship Program provides their first exposure to the broader disability community, which empowers them to become self-advocates and sets them on a path to employment.



**18 years** of providing successful internship experiences to students with disabilities



**Over 300 interns** have furthered their careers through the AAPD Summer Internship Program



**600+ colleges and universities** in AAPD's network



The **premier leadership development opportunity** for students with disabilities

In addition to placing interns on Capitol Hill, in government agencies, with national nonprofit organizations, or in the private sector, AAPD also matches each intern with a professional mentor. The AAPD Summer Internship Program is unique and effective because we offer a comprehensive experience that goes beyond the normal 9-to-5 intern work week. Outside of internship hours, AAPD educates our interns on the history of the disability rights movement and the challenges our community still faces today. The interns also have numerous opportunities to participate in social and professional networking events.

## 2019 Summer Internship Program Demographics



**148 applications received**

19 interns 12.83% acceptance rate



**Ages 19-28**

13 states represented in the 2019 class



**53% identify as people of color**

68.42% identify as women

21% identify as genderqueer/non-binary



**All self-identify as people with disabilities**

20 different disabilities represented



**58% identify as LGBTQ+**

## 2019 Interns



### Faith Akinbohun

**Year:** Graduate Student

**Major:** Master of Social Work

**College/University:** University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work

**Placement:** Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY)

Faith Akinbohun received her BS in Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University. Faith is a budding disability advocate. She was able to get a career resource guide created for disabled students while she attended law school. Faith also spearheaded a book drive for a local detention center with the goal of improving the mental health of residents. She plans to pursue an MSW in the future with the goal of opening her own private counseling practice.



### Kristen Cox

**Year:** Recent Graduate

**Major:** Theatre Design and Technology

**College/University:** Northern Illinois University

**Placement:** Smithsonian Institution (Federal Information Technology Intern)

Kristen comes from a technical theatre background and attended Northern Illinois University in the greater Chicago area, earning a BA in Theatre Studies with honors. Kristen also graduated from the International Baccalaureate Programme. Kristen has previously been involved at internships with the Charlottesville Opera and the Pittsburgh Festival Opera, and worked for the School of Theatre and Dance's costume shop and for Northern Illinois University's housing department as a Community Advisor.



## Sabrina Epstein

**Year:** Rising Junior

**Major:** Public Health Studies, Minors in Spanish and Art

**College/University:** Johns Hopkins University

**Placement:** National Endowment for the Arts

Sabrina Epstein is a student at Johns Hopkins University, where she studies Public Health, Visual Arts, and Spanish. Passionate about disability rights, she hopes to pursue a career making the world more accessible. She is especially interested in healthcare policy and the role of disability in the arts. Sabrina serves as the communications director for the College Democrats of America Disability Caucus and the vice president of Advocates for Disability Awareness at Johns Hopkins.



## Nina Erbes

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Anthropology

**College/University:** Mount Holyoke College

**Placement:** Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Nina Erbes is a senior at Mount Holyoke College working towards a bachelor's degree in Anthropology, with a specific interest in medical anthropology. Through her coursework at Mount Holyoke, she became interested in the intersection of anthropology and health, particularly the critical analysis of medicine and exploring medical traditions around the world. While at Mount Holyoke, Nina has served as an AccessAbility Services Fellow, working as a mentor for underclassmen with disabilities. Nina's extracurricular interests revolve around music: she plays in the Mount Holyoke English Handbell Ensemble and hosts a radio show devoted to synthpop and New Wave music on the college's radio station, WMHC. After she graduates, Nina plans to earn a Master

of Public Health degree with the goal of designing public health initiatives to bring healthcare access to marginalized groups. She is especially interested in exploring initiatives aimed at disabled and LGBTQ+ populations.



## Kenia Flores

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Politics and International Affairs

**College/University:** Furman University

**Placement:** National Council on Independent Living/Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC)

Kenia Flores is pursuing her bachelor of arts in Politics and International Affairs at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. She is a member of the Richard W. Riley Institute Advance Team, Pre-Law Society, and the Lambda Nu chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha. She has interned at the National Federation of the Blind, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the district office of Senator Thom Tillis. Her passion for disability rights advocacy has been fostered by her involvement in the local and national levels of the National Federation of the Blind.



## Katie Herbert

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Political Science, Concentration in Peace and Conflict Studies

**College/University:** Grinnell College

**Placement:** Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

Katie Herbert is a rising fourth-year at Grinnell College. Originally raised in Washington, DC, Katie was enthusiastic about the American political system from a young age. This led to her seeking a degree in Political Science with a concentration in Peace and Conflict Studies. She has spent her time at Grinnell working on the rights of students with disabilities by becoming an Access Leader whose job it is to audit spaces around campus and give suggestions as to how to make these spaces more accessible to all students, faculty, and staff. Katie has also been a Fellow for NextGen America for two of her semesters at Grinnell. Her job as a Fellow was to increase the youth vote on her campus. She did this by creating a community around political activism and founding

NextGen Grinnell. Katie also spent her fall 2018 semester as an elected senator in Grinnell's student government. During her time as senator, she brought concerns of fellow students before the Grinnell Student Senate and worked on a variety of committees as a representative of the student government. During the spring semester of 2019, Katie spent her time abroad, studying the political history of Eastern and Central Europe in the Czech Republic. Katie Herbert hopes to spend the following months after her graduation in May of 2020 putting her electoral work in Iowa to the test by devoting all of her time to the 2020 presidential race.



## Ashley Heuser

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** History and Government

**College/University:** University of Virginia

**Placement:** DC Office of Disability Rights

Ashley Heuser is a rising fourth-year at the University of Virginia studying History and Government. As part of her university's Distinguished Majors Program, Ashley's senior thesis will be *Changes in Student Perceptions of Disability: A Micro-History of UVA*. As a history scholar, Ashley is passionate about contributing to the literature of disability historiography. Ashley was one of the founding members of the club Chronically Ill and Disabled Cavaliers and is currently serving as its vice president. Involvement in the disability community is important to Ashley and she is a student member in the Disability Advocacy and Action Committee (DAAC). As a student member, Ashley serves as a liaison between the student body and the DAAC. She has

raised the visibility of disabled students on her campus by casting disabled actors to play disabled characters in a show that all freshmen have to see. Ashley has worked with other organizations to make her school more accepting of the disability community by creating a guide for accessibility within student organizations and helping to plan a university-wide Disability Awareness Week. After graduation, Ashley hopes to be employed as an ADA coordinator since she wants to act as a mediator between the disability community and the able-bodied world. Afterward, Ashley wants to return to academia and become a professor of disability history. When not advocating for the disability community, Ashley is usually knitting a sweater or playing with her dog.



## Serena Jaros

**Year:** Recent Graduate

**Major:** English

**College/University:** University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

**Placement:** United Spinal Association

Serena Jaros recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with an English degree and a concentration in Rhetoric. She has worked as a freelance editor for a publishing company near Chicago. Her interest in politics and issues goes back to before high school, when she would bore anyone who would listen with all the news of the day. Serena has volunteered for local political candidates and enjoyed digging into specific issues as part of AAPD's program. Voting rights, international affairs, and community development are her main areas of interest, and she looks forward to making even more of a difference in the world. In her free time, Serena loves to read and go to concerts.



## Hamza Kaakarli

**Year:** Rising Junior

**Major:** Neuroscience

**College/University:** Michigan State University

**Placement:** Representative Rashida Tlaib (D-MI)

Hamza's passions for science and policy are two of his most defining characteristics. As a student at Michigan State University, he is studying Neuroscience with a minor in Global Public Health and Epidemiology. Along with his research in epidemiology and biostatistics, he is continually looking to expand his horizons and prepare for a career in the healthcare field.



## Alexandra Kilgore

**Year:** Rising Junior

**Major:** Politics and Philosophy Pre-Law

**College/University:** The Catholic University of America

**Placement:** Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)

Originally from Kent Island, Maryland, Alexandra is a rising junior at The Catholic University of America, where she is pursuing a major in Philosophy Pre-Law and a minor in Politics as a member of the University Honors Program. Her areas of interest include Thomism and theories of jurisprudence, and she hopes to pursue a joint JD/PhD upon graduation. She holds several leadership positions on campus, including serving as member of the executive board of the Pre-Law Society and secretary for the Philosophy Club, of which she was a founder. She also recently participated in the University's re-accreditation process through the North Atlantic Middle States Commission by serving as a student member of the Ethics and Integrity

Working Group. A two-term senator for the Class of 2021, she has authored multiple pieces of legislation which serve to further accessibility on campus, for which she was named the 2017 Zach S. Bilotte Memorial Award Recipient. Alexandra is a proud alumna of the Project ASCEND Scholarship program ('17) and of American Legion Auxiliary Maryland Girls State and Girls Nation ('16). An involved participant in campus ministry, Alexandra is passionate about service and the intersection of faith and politics. She is a corps member of Jumpstart, an AmeriCorps program which places volunteers in underserved preschool classrooms to facilitate early childhood literacy skills and social-emotional development, and recently spent her spring break in Bend, Oregon serving with Habitat for Humanity. In her free time, Alexandra loves to hike, attend concerts, and read anything she can get her hands on. She will be studying abroad in Rome, Italy in the fall of 2019.





## Evita Nwosu-Sylvester

**Year:** Law Student

**Major:** Law

**College/University:** Cornell University

**Placement:** Centene Corporation

Evita Nwosu-Sylvester is a rising third-year law student at Cornell Law School, where she is working to accomplish her dream of becoming a lawyer and advocate for people with disabilities. No matter where her career takes her, she hopes that she can provide a voice, and continue to be an example of what individuals with disabilities can achieve. Last summer, she had the honor of interning for the Honorable Justice Barry T. Albin of the New Jersey Supreme Court. The previous year, she interned at Pfizer Consumer Healthcare, where she had the honor of being featured in the 2017 Pfizer Disability Journal. In addition to her studies, she is the former president of the Christian Legal Society and the former career services liaison for the Black Law Students

Association. Also, she is currently working on efforts to increase accessibility and raise disability awareness at her institution. In her spare time, she enjoys singing. Evita's career goals are to pursue either corporate or government work related to disability.



## Luwei Quan

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Cognitive Neuroscience and English

**College/University:** Brown University

**Placement:** Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Luwei Quan is a third-year premedical student at Brown University double majoring in Cognitive Neuroscience and English. She currently volunteers and interns at several different disability-centered organizations and projects both on Brown's campus and throughout Rhode Island. Luwei organized an inaugural panel on health inequity within intellectual/disability communities through PAL (Partnership for Adult Learning), serves as Logistics Coordinator and Peer Mental Health Advocate with LETS (Let's Erase the Stigma), and conducts research concerning virtual reality in adolescent situational management.



## Emely Recinos

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** International Relations

**College/University:** New York University

**Placement:** The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Emely Recinos is a rising senior at New York University where she is majoring in International Relations with a concentration in Latin America, as well as pursuing a minor in Peace and Conflict Studies. Since her parents are from El Salvador, and because of her own visual impairment, she is aware of the challenges individuals with disabilities face when trying to access education and assistive technology in this part of the world. During her study abroad experience in Argentina in the fall of 2018, she was able to further develop her understanding of what services and accommodations are still missing for this community within the country, and how to discuss the issue professionally in Spanish.

Based on the information she gathered there, along with other research she is doing in regards to the lack of assistance provided throughout the region, she hopes to one day fund a nonprofit organization of her own to further assist the disability community. Additionally, when volunteering at the Afghanistan Foundation for the Blind in New York City she was inspired by the organization's mission of helping provide healthcare and education to individuals living with visual impairments or blindness in Afghanistan. There she saw what difference she could make in another part of the world by purchasing adaptive equipment, sending it over to those who need it, and then providing the adequate training to use it in their everyday lives. In her spare time, Emely enjoys listening to and playing music and exploring new restaurants in New York City.



## Gabriela Rossner

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Environmental Studies, Minors in Biology and Public Health

**College/University:** The George Washington University

**Placement:** Center for American Progress Disability Justice Initiative

Gabriela Rossner is a rising senior at The George Washington University in Washington, DC. Hailing from the Bay Area, her passion for nature led her to pursue a degree in Environmental Studies with minors in Biology and Public Health. Since discovering her enthusiasm for the outdoors as a teacher for a scientific camp, Gabriela has dedicated her academic and professional pursuits to the environment. She hopes to merge her passions of environmental justice and disability justice in order to prioritize those who are most highly impacted by climate change. Previously, Gabriela worked at the Western Energy Project, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and the American Water Works Association. At school, she is involved with the Disabled

Students Collective and serves as a teaching assistant for Biology. In her spare time, she loves going to art museums, reading, and being outside.



## Cassaddee Sicherer

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Visual Arts, Minor in Political Science

**College/University:** Rutgers University

**Placement:** Democracy Initiative/Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)

Cassaddee Sicherer is a senior at Rutgers University en route to completing her BFA with a concentration in Digital Media Production and a minor in Political Science. Cass is a New Jersey resident with a love for disability and LGBTQ+ advocacy. Cass has spent time organizing through Jews For Racial and Economic Justice as Grace Paley Organizing Fellow, has worked on both congressional and city council campaigns in New York City, and spends her time on campus running LGBTQ+ programming with an eye on accessibility through her university's Queer Caucus. In addition to advocacy, Cass loves working with teens and has spent time working as a Keshet Fellow for their teen LGBTQ+ overnights as well as a fiber crafts teacher at a children's day

camp. As an art student, Cass has been awarded a visual arts award at the Mason Gross Undergraduate Annual Exhibition and spends her time making video and print-based art installations.



## Zahara Spilka

**Year:** Rising Junior

**Major:** Computer Science, Minors in Art (Studio Emphasis) and Psychology

**College/University:** Macalester College

**Placement:** U.S. Department of Energy (Federal Information Technology Intern)

Zahara Spilka is an undergraduate student at Macalester College, where she develops her skills in computer science, art, and psychology by building of programs such as touch recognition software, collaborating on personal art pieces and class assignments, and assisting the former chair of Macalester's Psychology Department with her research on the friendships between deaf and hearing children.

Zahara attended the 2018 Grace Hopper Celebration in Huston, Texas, and also earned an Honorable Mention from Scholastic Art & Writing Award for one of her digital art pieces in addition to having it published

in Celebrating Art's Spring 2017 book. Zahara is an animal rights activist and digital artist and originally hails from Maine.



## Stephen Strouse

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Philosophy, Politics, Economics and Law/Music

**College/University:** Bowling Green State University

**Placement:** Senator Bob Casey (D-PA)

Stephen Strouse is student at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He is pursuing a double major in Music and Philosophy, Politics, Economics and Law (PPEL). Stephen enjoys volunteering as an advocate with the U.S. Pain Foundation. Because of his experience living with chronic pain and a disability, Stephen is especially passionate about advancing policies to support people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. He has met with state and federal legislators to advocate for a variety of issues, including healthcare, disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights, education, and sexual assault prevention. Stephen strives to promote policies that ensure equal treatment and opportunities under the law, regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, age,

national origin, health status, or disability. Stephen has won the Donna Nelson-Beene Excellence in Research Writing Award at Bowling Green State University, and his research paper “New Music: The Value of Creativity” was published in WRIT: GSW Journal of First-Year Writing. He is lead trumpet in Jazz Lab II and plays in Concert Band as well. Stephen is also involved in a variety of organizations on campus. He is a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, PPEL Club, and serves as secretary for Disability, Rights, Education, Awareness, and Mentoring (DREAM).



## Danny Thomas Vang

**Year:** Recent Graduate

**Major:** Social Work, Labor Studies

**College/University:** San Francisco State University

**Placement:** Information Technology Industry Council

Danny Thomas Vang is a blind student from San Francisco State who wishes to combine the disciplines of social work and labor studies to conduct policy analysis and program evaluation in municipal government. He plans to translate his knowledge of social justice-oriented theoretical frameworks to explore issues relevant to participatory budgeting, pedestrian safety, and gainful employment. Danny has analyzed legislative ordinances and evaluated employee-to-customer interactions as an intern for the Office of Supervisor Norman Yee, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, and the Wells Fargo Customer Care and Recovery Group. At the Longmore Institute, he has also conducted qualitative interviews about disability employment

culture in the tech sector and has strategized with the San Francisco Department of Adult and Aging Services about the development of the first disability cultural center in the nation with municipal sponsorship. In his spare time, he socializes with friends, exercises at the gym, watches Japanese anime, and cooks for fun.



## Jordyn Zimmerman

**Year:** Rising Senior

**Major:** Education Policy

**College/University:** Ohio University

**Placement:** National Disability Rights Network

Jordyn Zimmerman is a rising senior at Ohio University. She is currently studying Education Policy with a minor in Communication Studies, as well as pursuing a certificate in Law, Justice, and Culture. As a non-speaking autistic student, Jordyn is passionate about making critical questions around disability, justice, and education essential aspects of daily life. Jordyn currently co-chairs the Hillel International Student Cabinet and is a member of Ohio University Student Senate. She has presented to thousands of professionals and multiple organizations on a number of topics related to autism, inclusion, and technology. On campus, Jordyn founded the Ohio University Sparkle Effect team, the seventh inclusive cheer team at the collegiate level and an organization

that promotes school spirit and inclusion across the community.



*Photo: AAPD Interns visit the AAPD offices*

## Orientation: Preparing the Next Generation

Below is a sample of the workshops and guest speakers organized during the interns' week-long Orientation at the start of our program..

- **History of the Disability Rights Movement**, Patrick Cokley, Disability Policy Engagement Manager, Anthem
- **Screening of *Lives Worth Living* (PBS)**
- **Group discussion of *Enabling Acts: The Hidden Story of how the Americans with Disabilities Act Gave the Largest US Minority Its Rights* by Lennard Davis**
- **Careers in Public Policy Panel**, Anupa Iyer, Policy Advisor, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Class of 2013); Asha Kuziwa, Community Organizer and Healer; Gaby Perla, Government Affairs and Public Policy, Google; Sophia Rubio, Scheduler, Office of U.S. Representative Don Beyer (D-VA)
- **Leading From Our Identities: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Immersion**, Kimberly Díaz and Andrew Daub, oneTILT
- **AAPD Summer Internship Program Alumni Panel**, Maya Ariel, Management and Program Analyst, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (Class of 2011); Keri Gray, Senior Director of Stakeholder Engagement and Strategic Communications, AAPD (Class of 2011); Isabella Kres-Nash, Executive Assistant, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Class of 2016); Shiven Patel, Legal Intern, National Disability Rights Network (Class of 2018)
- **Networking Discussion**, Derek Shields, Director, National Disability Mentoring Coalition
- **Workplace Accommodations and Disclosure Presentation**, Lou Orslene, Co-Director, Job Accommodation Network



*Photo: AAPD Intern Katie Herbert with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi*

## Disability Advocacy Certificate Program

The Disability Advocacy Certificate Program is a 10-week program that prepares our interns to be effective advocates and representatives for the disability community. The program focuses on equipping participants with the skills to advocate in their home universities, home states, and on the national/federal level. Our goal is for students to become familiar with the history of political progress in the community as well as current challenges in the healthcare, education, media, and employment fields, among others. Through conversations with issue experts, from staff on Capitol Hill to noted disability advocates, interns learn how advocates can effectively push for change in these areas. Interns attended weekly classes on Fridays and completed two assignments by the end of the program, including a blog post for AAPD's website and a leave behind on disability advocacy issues for Congressional staff.

Topics for the 2019 Disability Advocacy Certificate Program included:

- The ADA and Other Disability-Focused Legislation
- How the Legislative Process Works
- Policy and Advocacy in Counties
- Disability and Education
- Political Representation in the Disability Community
- The Free Press in America & Disability in the Media
- Disability and Healthcare
- The Principles of Lobbying
- Disability and Employment
- Political Parties in America

This year's Certificate Program included presentations from:

- **Rob Engel**, Professor, AAPD Disability Advocacy Certificate Program
- **Bobby Silverstein**, Powers Pyles Sutter & Verville, PC
- **Valerie Novack**, Portlight Fellow, Center for American Progress Disability Justice Initiative
- **Julie Christensen**, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Association of People Supporting Employment First
- **Gabe Cazares**, Manager of Government Affairs, National Federation of the Blind
- **Neal Carter**, Principal, Nu View Consulting
- **Sarah Blahovec**, Disability Vote Organizer, National Council on Independent Living
- **Day Al-Mohamed**, Disability Policy Advisor, Author, and Filmmaker
- **Alex Davidson**, Health and Education Legislative Correspondent, Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
- **Faina Dookh**, Legislative Fellow, Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
- **Ola Ojewumi**, Founder & Director, Project ASCEND
- **Rick Fredrickson**, Senior Vice President of Long-Term Care Programs, Centene Corporation
- **Representatives from the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative**
- **Lauren Karas**, Office of Disability Employment Policy
- **Frances Vhay**, Office of Disability Employment Policy
- **Democratic National Committee Staff**
- **Republican National Committee Staff**
- **National Association of Counties Staff**
- **Newseum Staff**



*Photo: AAPD Interns participate in Disability Advocacy Certificate Program classes*

## Professional Development and Networking

One of the hallmarks of the AAPD Summer Internship Program is the number of opportunities that interns have to engage in professional development and networking. These range from intimate conversations with icons of the disability rights movement to panels with Washington, DC's top public policy professionals. In addition to the professional development aspect of the curriculum, events are also focused on strengthening disability identity while encouraging disability pride. This year's programming included:

- **Welcome/Mentor & Mentee Reception at the AT&T Forum**
- **Skill Building Workshop #1: Managing Up at Your Internship**, Kimberly Díaz, oneTILT
- **Skill Building Workshop #2: Personal Narratives**, Kimberly Díaz, oneTILT

## Disability Power and Pride

For many AAPD interns, the AAPD Summer Internship Program marked their first time in a group of youth with all types of disabilities, their first time in a room with youth that identified positively with their disability identity, and their first time experiencing real-time educational and professional success from disclosing their own disability. This year's activities focused on disability power and pride included:

- **Tour of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Memorial** with longtime disability rights advocate (and former AAPD staff member) Jim Dickson
- **Senator Bob Casey and Senator Patty Murray's celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Supreme Court *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision**
- **Community Living for All: Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Olmstead Decision**, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living and Office for Civil Rights
- **Meeting with Administration for Community Living Commissioner Julie Hocker**
- **Roll on Capitol Hill Congressional Reception**, United Spinal Association
- **National Council on Independent Living Annual Conference**
- **National Council on Independent Living March & Rally at the Capitol**
- **AAPD 2019 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Celebration**
- **Meeting with Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)**



*Photo: AAPD Interns meet with Senator Tammy Duckworth*



## 2019 Placements



Senator Bob Casey (D-PA)



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)



Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)



Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib (D-MI)



Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY)



ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY CENTERS ON DISABILITIES

THE LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY & RESEARCH NETWORK

Association of University Centers on Disabilities



Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC)



Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law



Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)



Centene Corporation

# Center for American Progress



Center for American Progress Disability Justice Initiative



Democracy Initiative



Information Technology Industry Council



Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights



National Council on Independent Living



National Disability Rights Network



arts.gov

National Endowment for the Arts



Smithsonian  
Smithsonian Institution



U.S. Department of Energy



United Spinal Association

## Supervisor Testimonials

*"It was a pleasure working with Serena this summer. Serena is passionate about disability rights and she was a fast learner and was able to juggle multiple assignments in record time. I was also impressed with her research and writing skills as demonstrated in her letters of support to Capitol Hill on various bills and in research memoranda. She was able to sort through multiple files and documents on disability rights issues as we prepared for our annual conference, 'Roll on Capitol Hill', here in Washington, DC in June. I had every confidence in Serena taking the lead in engaging with Congressional offices on behalf of United Spinal Association. Finally, a great way to end an internship, on the last day of her internship, she was offered a job as an Independent Living Specialist at the DC Center for Independent Living and she accepted the job!"*

**- Alexandra Bennewith, Vice President, Government Relations, United Spinal Association**

*"Kenia's responsibilities spanned from constituent services to legislative policy research. She had a great attitude and looked forward to interacting with constituents calling into our office, something most interns dread. Our whole staff, myself included, valued our time working with Kenia and we organized an informational session for her to share her own experiences and she took questions from staff."*

**- Andrew Nam, Office of Senator Thomas Tillis (R-NC)**

*"Our office thoroughly enjoyed working with AAPD this summer and having Cass join our team. Cass's eagerness to take initiative in policy areas of interest was both of benefit to our office's operation and rewarding to witness. Cass's professionalism and dedication make them an excellent representative of AAPD and we hope to continue working with the organization in the future."*

**- Meaghan Body, Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)**

*"We appreciated the opportunity to work with an AAPD intern, and Sabrina Epstein met all of our expectations and more. Her knowledge of both the arts and disability communities greatly enhanced her work at the National Endowment for the Arts, providing added value to our efforts to promote cultural accessibility and assist people with disabilities seeking careers in the arts. She took on projects with gusto and added her knowledge and experience to our work. We look forward to seeing what she accomplishes in the future!"*

**- Beth Bienvenu, Director of Accessibility, National Endowment for the Arts**



Photo: AAPD Interns at the AAPD ADA Celebration

## 2019 Mentors

**Zack Bastian**, Manager of Strategic Alliances, Verizon

**Julia Bascom**, Executive Director, Autistic Self Advocacy Network

**Jennifer Mandelblatt**, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Platform

**Raquel Braternitz**, Senior Designer, Pivotal Labs

**Gaby Perla**, Government Affairs and Public Policy, Google

**Vivian Fridas**, Programs Manager, United States International Council on Disabilities

**Elsie Guerrero**, Program and Executive Assistant, Democracy Initiative

**Patrick Cokley**, Disability Policy Engagement Manager, Anthem

**Erika Hudson**, Policy Analyst, National Disability Rights Network

**Day Al-Mohamed**, Supervisory Program Analyst, U.S. Department of Labor

**Andrew Morris**, Policy Analyst, Administration for Community Living

**Jessica Queener**, Senior Program Associate, Institute for Educational Leadership

**Lydia Brown**, Justice Catalyst Fellow, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

**Ola Ojewumi**, Founder and Director, Project ASCEND

**Dana Fink**, Program Analyst, Administration for Community Living

**Judy Heumann**, Disability Rights Advocate

**Mia Ives-Rublee**, Disability Rights Advocate

**Claudia Gordon**, Director of Government and Compliance, Sprint Accessibility

**Kings Floyd**, Disability Rights Advocate

## Mentor Testimonials

*“Sabrina and I had mutual friends in common before meeting, and I was excited to find out she was applying for the AAPD internship, although I didn’t consider at the time that I might be her mentor. We had coffee with each other during the summer, but also connected at relevant community events; Sabrina was always able to introduce me to someone new, and I could do the same for her. In this way I came to know more of the interns this summer, and have come away with new ideas and renewed motivation, but also new friends, mentors, and colleagues.”*

**- Kings Floyd, Disability Rights Advocate**

*“I support the AAPD intern program through mentorship because it’s an opportunity to know and learn from rising leaders in the disability movement. AAPD interns leave with a deeper understanding of policy, and how their work can make a material impact for others. I appreciate the opportunity to help them refine their ideas, and keep in touch long after the program closes.”*

**- Zachary Bastian, Manager of Strategic Alliances, Verizon**

*“I have had the privilege of being a mentor for AAPD interns for a number of years and have valued all of the people I have worked with. I have learned from all of them, not only about who they are and where they want to go in life, but also about their successes and obstacles they are trying to overcome. I know that all of my mentees will continue to grow personally and professionally and be excellent examples of what disabled people can achieve. They themselves will go on to become mentors.”*

**- Judy Heumann, Disability Rights Advocate**

*“Faith is a remarkable young woman with a bright future ahead of her. I am impressed by her perseverance and dedication to transforming society through policy and social work. It was such a privilege to get to know her this summer and I can’t wait to see all that she accomplishes in the future!”*

**- Ola Ojewumi, Founder and Director, Project ASCEND**

*“I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with Ally this summer! Our summer involved a lot of food and a vivid discussion on whether fish and chips should include French fries or potato chips. Ally’s positive attitude, passion and kindness will take her far in our world, and I can’t wait to follow her journey.”*

**- Erika Hudson, Policy Analyst, National Disability Rights Network**

*“I strongly believe mentorships are a critical component in advancing one’s career, especially for people with disabilities. I know I have benefited from the mentor/mentee relationship in the past. Consequently, I was eager to engage with my mentee and hopefully provide some useful knowledge and advice I have gathered. My mentee, Emely, and I met a few times throughout her internship. I believe I have added another important person to my network of contacts. I hope that I have been able to open some doors for her by introducing her to relevant contacts in the field. I know I plan to keep in touch with Emely and any updates she may have with school and her career. It was a privilege to be her mentor this summer and I am glad AAPD continues this internship program as it is crucial in assisting people with disabilities get the relevant experience in order to continue on the pathway to employment.”*

**- Vivian Fridas, Programs Manager, United States International Council on Disabilities**

*“Participating in the AAPD’s summer mentorship program was an immensely rewarding experience because it allowed me to see firsthand how the AAPD is cultivating a deep bench of thoughtful and bright young leaders interested in policy. It was uniquely fulfilling to work with Zahara because of her consistent engagement and desire to make the most out of her experience working for the Department of Energy. Throughout the summer, we spoke at length about how to authentically “tell your story” in professional settings – going through this exercise with Zahara challenged me to do the same in my professional life!”*

**- Gaby Perla, Government Affairs & Public Policy, Google**

## Intern Testimonials

*“Through my internship placement, I had the opportunity to strengthen my future goals, broaden my knowledge, and engage in discussion impacting the disability community. From sitting in the Supreme Court for a decision, to learning about the importance of disability participation in the 2020 Census, to meeting with the Assistant Secretary of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, there was something new to look forward to every week! Through various meetings with hill offices, other disability groups, and professionals around the DC area, I was also able to enhance my networking skills. I am confident that the connections I made this summer will help me as I prepare for life after undergraduate school and look ahead into my future.”*

**- Jordyn Zimmerman, interned at the National Disability Rights Network**

*“While at the Smithsonian, I've had the opportunity to expand my network and explore possible career options for my future. I worked directly with photographers and other creators within the Smithsonian to find ways to improve the digital asset management system in place at the Smithsonian. I also was a part of the Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative's Significant Properties for Digital Video subgroup in order to better standardize media throughout the government”.*

**- Kristen Cox, interned at the Smithsonian Institution**

*“My academic courses provided me a framework to analyze political issues through a social justice-oriented lens, but my internship with the Information Technology Industry Council has translated this knowledge into the workplace and the community at large. I delved into real-world issues such as the ethical inquiries posed by artificial intelligence and the security implications of supply chain management, as well as observed how a trade association is able to balance the interests of its constituents. This summer has not only solidified my passion for tech policy analysis, but has also provided me a glimpse into what my career could look like in the future and has given me an invaluable network in Washington, DC. I would recommend ITI as a future placement for participants and thank AAPD for their successful facilitation of the program!”*

**- Danny Vang, interned at the Information Technology Industry Council**

*“Being an AAPD summer intern has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life. I have been afforded the opportunity to develop personally and professionally through this program. I thank the program and its sponsors for all they have provided me.”*

**- Hamza Kaakarli, interned at the Office of Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib (D-MI)**

*“I could not have accessed for a better placement than the DOE. There I worked on three big projects: two coding projects and one administrative. When I was not working on projects, I talked to the wonderful people on in my office.”*

**- Zahara Spilka, interned at the U.S. Department of Energy**

*“I absolutely loved my summer placement! The experience reinforced my desire to work in disability advocacy by exposing me to a wide range of subjects – from disaster response issues to mental health in communities of color. Through conducting policy and historical research, managing social media, and participating in cross-team discussions, I learned a great deal about the disability and political scenes.”*

**- Gabriela Rossner, interned at the Center for American Progress Disability Justice Initiative**

*“My experience being a member of the AAPD Summer Internship Program was life-changing. Prior to this summer, I had always been engaged with disability rights and politics, but this program gave me the opportunity to watch our government work first-hand as an intern with Speaker Pelosi. I learned the ins and outs of how grassroots organizing can influence some of the highest powers in our nation, and that was truly powerful for me. I will take my newfound experience and go on to continue participating in*

*grassroots politics and continue to help provide a voice to the voiceless, including members of my own disability community.”*

**- Katie Herbert, interned at the Office of Speaker Nancy Pelosi**

## Intern Employment Outcomes

- Serena Jaros was offered a full-time position as Youth Outreach Coordinator at the DC Center for Independent Living.
- Kristen Cox is in the process of interviewing for a position at the Smithsonian Institution.



*Photo: AAPD Interns at the AAPD ADA Celebration*

## Alumni Testimonials

*“As an AAPD intern, I learned valuable career development skills in my placement and through the Disability Advocacy Certificate Program, strengthened my understanding of the type of work I enjoy, and gained tremendous connections through networking opportunities facilitated by the AAPD staff. I am confident that the skills, connections, and insight into what I want to do will help me in my eventual job search after graduating from college, as well as in my professional and personal lives long-term.”*

**- Adam Fishbein (2018)**

*“Participating in the Summer Internship Program increased my confidence in my own abilities and gave me a deep connection to the disability community. I bought my first suit, went to my first networking happy hour, and exchanged business cards for the first time during the course of the intern program.”*

**- Maddy Ruvolo (2013)**

*“You don't know how much this internship program will change you for the better until you actually experience it. I've had the best summer of my life thanks to AAPD. I have developed into a student who has had the experiences needed to graduate knowing that I now have skills that can be extremely beneficial for my professional development.”*

**- Nermina Aly (2017)**

*“My experience in the AAPD internship program helped me to see that I am not alone in my experience of disability. I had not been introduced to the disability rights community and would not have gone on to be in the career position I am in now had I not had that experience.”*

**- Rochelle Honey-Arcement (2012)**



*Photo: AAPD Interns attend the AAPD ADA Celebration*



## Alumni Spotlight



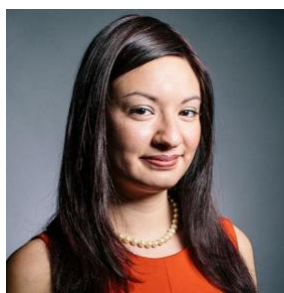
**Elijah Armstrong (2018)** recently graduated from Penn State University with a major in education and public policy and is starting a master's program in education policy and management at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. After facing discrimination in high school, Elijah created a nonprofit called Equal Opportunities for Students, an organization committed to making sure students understand the laws protecting their civil rights. Participation in Equal Opportunities for Students stretches from Rhode Island to California. Elijah has worked directly with policy advisers to President Obama, the U.S. Department of Education, and New York City Public Schools advocating student rights. He has also presented at the International Disability Studies conference, Columbia University, and the New York City Department of Education's Inclusion Division. Elijah interned at the Office of Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) during the AAPD Summer Internship Program of 2018.



**Isabella Kres-Nash (2016)** is the Executive Assistant at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. She graduated from Brown University in 2018 with majors in political science and history. During her participation in the AAPD Summer Internship Program of 2016, Isabella interned at the Office of Senator Patty Murray (D-WA). After the AAPD internship program, Isabella went on to pursue multiple opportunities including an internship at Rooted in Rights, an Office Assistant Position at the Brown Center for Students of Color, and a Teaching Assistant Position at Brown University's School of Public Health.



**Keri Gray (2011)** is the Senior Director of Stakeholder Engagement and Strategic Communications at AAPD. At AAPD she works on the REV UP Campaign, which has received much attention in the leadup to the 2020 presidential election. Prior to her time at AAPD, Keri worked at Disability:IN as the Director of the Rising Leaders Initiative and served on the AAPD Board of Directors from 2017 to 2018. As part of the 2011 AAPD Summer Internship Program, Keri interned with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). She received her MA in communications and a BA in political science and communications from Abilene University in Texas.



**Leah Katz-Hernandez (2009)** is Manager of CEO Communications at Microsoft and a member of the AAPD Board of Directors. Prior to her time at Microsoft, Leah was known as the celebrated ROTUS, Receptionist of the United States, for President Obama. The first ever deaf person to hold the position, she was appointed to the West Wing after serving in First Lady Michelle Obama's communications office and for the Obama campaign during the 2012 election cycle. After the 2016 election, Leah went to work at Gallaudet University as the Manager of Special Projects in the President's Office. Leah has also traveled the world as a public speaker via the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International

Information Programs. Leah earned her Professional MA in strategic communication from American University and a BA in Government from Gallaudet University.

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