

Introduction

Patricia E. Chu

The essays in “Progress in Process: Stories of Growth Towards Justice” collect the summer internship experiences of the 2017 Sorensen Fellows: Michelle Dennis '18, Zeynep Ece Esikara '19, Mrudula Gadgil '18, Max Gould '18, Paul Sindberg '18, and Leah Susman '18.

The summer internship in social justice is the centerpiece of the Sorensen Fellowship, but there is long period of application and commitment leading up to that point as well as a period of reflection when the Fellows return. These students independently found and applied for their own internships as well as for the Sorensen Fellowship itself in the year previous. Each then completed a spring course that would prepare them culturally and intellectually for the work of their internships. When they returned from their internships in the fall, the six Fellows together took PAX 89, a course in which they reflected on the experience of their internships and wrote the essays you find in this volume. This is also the time of the Fellowship during which Sorensen Fellows work together most closely.

I was fortunate to be their instructor for this latter time as they wrestled with issues of accountability, fairness, history, leadership, national and cultural identity, community life, and law – really, how we might understand the social arrangements of the past and present and alter those of the future. This may sound like an extraordinary

arrogation. But what always struck me over the months we were together was the deep humility with which the Fellows undertook their task of reflecting on and communicating what they had experienced and learned.

The title of this volume (which they chose) exemplifies their individual and collective sense of self as activists and social justice fellows. They all see themselves as having spent their Sorensen year learning and growing in ways they will be continuing.

They carefully considered the potential pitfalls of defining their positions as interns and holders of a fellowship in social justice. They were mindful that there can be a fine line between being part of the problem and being part of the solution, and of the limits their personal perspectives and cultural backgrounds placed on their ability to fully understand the experiences and needs of others and the politics in which their internship organizations operated. They questioned the ethics of taking on leadership in movements that might not directly affect them. They pointed to the enormity of what they did not know and of outcomes they could not predict.

But in the face of all this they remained determined to quest for lives in social justice work. Their title reflects this determination, as well as their acknowledgement of the complexity of taking up such a vocation.

Each week we met around our seminar table, in our cozy glassed-in classroom at the Ethics Center on the Brandeis University campus. As the view (though not the curiosity of the neighborhood squirrel) changed, from green and glowing summer to steely and cold New England winter, the Fellows wrote about their internships, offered up their drafts to each other, and found the words both to question and to encourage each other. An image from this time that captures for me the way they worked: six laptop power cords plugged into the table outlets, snaking out and entangling with each other, as if the six Fellows were all working on one document.

We almost always followed a writing or brainstorming session by passing the laptops around the circle so that each Fellow received input from all of the others. Discussion ranged as far afield as their internships had been from each other in focus and geography: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Ghana, New York City, South Africa. Unjust convictions; performing arts education for children; police violence; extending healthcare outside urban areas; immigrant, refugee and asylee assistance; violence against queer people and their communities; access to mental health care.... They may have had different entrance points into their missions but the experience of wrestling with the meaning and efficacy of service was something they all had.



Prof. Chu (center) with the 2017 Sorensen Fellows.

Now they shared their insights. Each listened carefully to the concrete details of the others' work, daily life, doubts, triumphs and reflections on the summer. How does one's social identity affect one's site of intervention? How does one know if one is having an effect? How do we understand our social responsibility? What are the best ways to speak about difference? How should we understand the contradictory feelings raised by our service? How do we handle organizational and institutional politics? Where is our service self-interested?

The reader will notice that these essays are very different in style and focus. Throughout the semester the Fellows challenged each other to move beyond their initial narratives and also to write in the mode that was truest for each. This was collaboration in its most constructive and respectful form, and I am grateful to have been present to experience it.

The 2017 Sorensen Fellows:

Michelle Dennis '18 is a biology major and Posse Foundation Leadership Scholar from Atlanta, Georgia. She is a Community Advisor to first-year residents, and a

teaching assistant in the biology laboratory. She also serves on the Student Leadership Board of the Student Support Services Program. Michelle has studied ballet since she was five and was Artistic Director of the Brandeis Ballet Company (2015-2016), choreographing "Hidden Language of the Soul," which was performed in the 2016 Leonard Bernstein Festive of the Creative Arts. This year, she performed at Brandeis University's 13th Annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. For her Sorensen Fellowship, Michelle interned with Light for Children in Kumasi, Ghana. Light for Children is an organization that focuses on the full development of orphans and vulnerable youth through its many programs in physical health and holistic wellness, education, literacy and against sexual violence. It also supports health clinics for all ages in the northern region, where many people live far from healthcare facilities. During the first part of her internship, Michelle taught introductory ballet technique at five schools that partner with Light for Children. During the second half of her internship, she worked at Hart Adventist, a hospital, assisting with patients' laboratory tests and examinations.

Zeynep Ece Esikara '19 is majoring in politics and economics. A Wien International Scholar, she is from Istanbul, Turkey. Ece is Director of External Relations for the *Brandeis International Journal* and in her work there organizes panel discussions among experts on global political issues. She works at the Brandeis libraries as an Access and Common Services Information and Borrowing Assistant and at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies as a student research assistant. Ece has served as treasurer of the New England Turkish Student Association. She has also worked at the Brandeis University Hunger and Homelessness Case Management Program at the Community Day Center in Waltham. Her internship for her Sorensen Fellowship was as a career coach and program assistant in the Refugee Services Department of Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) in Boston. Ece helped refugees, immigrants and asylees to prepare their resumes and job applications and coached them on interviewing for jobs. She spoke to other organizations about job placements from JVS and arranged for clients to receive other help such as English language classes, cultural orientation classes, and support in their new jobs. Ece also taught refugees how to navigate their new city and escorted clients and their families to medical and social services appointments, assisting with applications for aid such as childcare.

Mrudula Gadgil '18 is a double major in biology and Health, Science, Society, and Policy from Chelmsford, Massachusetts. She is co-president of the South Asian Students' Association, captain of the Brandeis Bhangra Dance Team, and a community advisor. As the Brandeis campus project coordinator for the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MASSPIRG) she advocates for the reduction of antibiotic use on factory farms. For her Sorensen Fellowship, Mrudula interned

with the Pro Bono Counseling Project in Baltimore, Maryland, an organization that connects Maryland residents with organizations that can provide free mental health care. She worked on updating Pro Bono Counseling's mission statements and other informational materials, but her primary placement was with Counselors Helping South Asians (CHAI), a formerly independent organization now under the auspices of the Pro Bono Counseling Project. A central part of CHAI's mission is to end the stigma in South Asian communities against mental health treatment. Mrudula worked to recruit South Asian clinicians for CHAI, and worked on outreach to South Asian organizations such as temples, mosques, and community groups through calls, meetings and attendance at cultural events. As part of this outreach, she organized and facilitated a workshop at a Muslim community center for young South Asian women on healthy friendships and family relationships.

Max Gould '18 is a philosophy and American studies major with a legal studies minor, from Maplewood, New Jersey. He has been a writer for *The Brandeis Hoot*, a member of the Brandeis University Mock Trial Association and is a varsity épée fencer on the men's fencing team. He has worked at the Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project at the Legal Aid Society, the Public Integrity Bureau at the New York State Attorney General's Office, and the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. For his Sorensen Fellowship, Max interned with the Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice, in the Bronx, New York, which works for the exoneration of wrongfully convicted people. As part of his internship, he did research for the Foundation such as evaluating the work of New York City's Conviction Integrity Units, established a new social media plan, assisted in fundraising and education initiatives such as a documentary series

about the experiences of exonerees, and contributed to case evaluation. During his time with the Foundation, Max also traveled to Albany, New York, the state capital, to lobby for legislation establishing a prosecutorial oversight board, and attended court hearings. He has recently begun work as a research assistant at another innocence initiative organization: the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism in the Justice Brandeis Law Project.

Paul Sindberg '18 is a politics major with a double minor in legal studies and music, from Oakwood Hills, Illinois. As the Coordinator of Community Engagement at the Brandeis Office of Prevention Services, he works to end sexual violence while building community understanding of the intersectional relationship between sexual violence prevention work and all anti-oppressive work. He has served in several positions with the Brandeis Student Union, including as services and outreach committee chair, executive senator, and vice president. Paul approached the Sorensen Fellowship program after developing his advocacy skills in internships with political campaigns and labor lobbying organizations. He completed his fellowship as an intern with the Love Not Hate campaign at OUT LGBT Well-Being in Pretoria, South Africa. This campaign provides myriad services to LGBTI survivors of hate crimes, including coordinating the first parliamentary lobbying program for LGBTI people in South Africa. Paul participated in direct client advocacy, case management, and legal research for survivors and their families in courts and police stations. Other aspects of his work with OUT LGBT included organizing formal and informal community programming, setting up safe spaces, and assisting OUT LGBT's Peer Outreach Team, which provides free HIV testing services and information. Currently, Paul is working as

a discrimination complaint intake intern at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination.

Leah Susman '18 is from the Chicago, Illinois area. She is an education studies major and a Latin American and Latino studies minor. In her work as J Street U's current National Campaign Chair, Leah takes it as her mission to shape the activism of the rising generation of the American Jewish community. At Brandeis, she has served as co-director of the Brandeis - Al-Quds Student Dialogue Initiative and co-chair of Hillel Race Talks, a program that promotes an anti-racist and inclusive Jewish community on campus. Leah's Sorensen Fellowship internship was with the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA) in Chicago. She became part of their Community Organizing Team, with a primary focus on a campaign for police accountability in Chicago, in which JCUA joined forces with a diverse array of community groups.

Patricia E. Chu was a Lecturer in Peace, Conflict and Coexistence Studies at Brandeis during Fall 2017.