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## **Internship Is Secured, but a Seat? That's Tricky**

By **SIMON AKAM**

Susan Cho's internship at the Kings County district attorney's office this summer has presented some different challenges than her previous stint working alongside prosecutors in Rochester. "There's sometimes trouble finding a seat," Ms. Cho, 26, who is soon to be a second-year student at [Villanova University](#) School of Law, said of her spell at 350 Jay Street in Downtown Brooklyn.

Last summer, 135 law students toiled as unpaid interns with the Brooklyn district attorney. This year there are 195 — a number that Carol L. Moran, the director of legal hiring, believes is a record.

The bumper crop of interns, whose placements end July 31, is the result of an increase in both applications and the percentage of students who accepted offers, most likely a fallout of the recession, as many corporate law firms have cut back on their summer programs. In addition to the intensified competition to score a full-time — and paid — job after graduation, the intern glut has put a premium on office chairs, desk space and meaty assignments.

"It's much harder for them to find stuff for us to do," said one intern who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of alienating his bosses. "Definitely some people feel they haven't done anything."

Ms. Moran, the hiring director, said the Brooklyn office received about 500 applications for this summer's positions, up from 400 in 2008. "We made close to 200 offers last year, and ended up with 135," she said. "This year we made slightly more offers — close to 250. I was looking for 150 interns, and ended up with 195."

Jerry Schmetterer, a spokesman for the district attorney's office, said the glut "appears to be economy related," saying that fewer students this year asked to defer the decision to accept an unpaid internship — which many did in the past while waiting to see if they had snared lucrative employment.

The Queens district attorney has also seen an uptick in interns, with 83 (from 60 last year); but Manhattan (about 50) and the Bronx (20) have their usual number this summer. A spokesman for the Staten Island district attorney said the office had seen more interest, but kept hiring stable, at 27, to ensure proper supervision and space.

The popular internships come amid a brutal legal job market: according to the [National Association for Legal Career Professionals](#), the employment rate for 2008 graduates — 90 percent as of February 2009 — represented the first decrease since 2003.

“We know law firms hired smaller groups of summer associates,” said James G. Leipold, the group’s executive director. “There’s a lot of competition for a smaller number of opportunities.”

Meg Reuter, assistant dean for career planning at [New York Law School](#), said that while students are considering the public sector as an alternative to scarce corporate work, such jobs are not immune to economic conditions.

“The federal government can deficit spend, so they can hire even when they don’t have the tax revenue, but state and local government cannot,” she said.

In Brooklyn, Ms. Moran said that although about 75 percent of the lawyers on Jay Street had once been interns, only a few of this summer’s cohort would get job offers. She said the office was now hiring about 7 to 8 percent of applicants, down from 10 to 12 percent in previous years.

Those who supervise interns, and some of the interns themselves, said there has been enough work to go around. “I do research, draft motions, call witnesses,” said Venice Choi, 22, who is working in the homicide bureau.

But other interns pass the hours doing crossword puzzles or playing games on the computer; some have taken to observing random court proceedings to fill their days.

Surviving an unpaid summer in New York is another challenge. Some interns received grants from their schools — typically about \$5,000 — intended to support students with an interest in public interest law. Others are living with relatives or working at paid jobs in May and August to make ends meet.

“I’m receiving credit,” said Stephanie Mishler, an intern in the homicide bureau who will start her second year at [Seton Hall University](#) School of Law this fall. “It’ll pay off in the long run.”

The swell of interns has helped in at least one area: On Wednesday evening, the rackets division took on the green zone trial bureau in a softball game at Prospect Park, and each team fielded a brace of students.

Before the game, John Rudikoff, an assistant district attorney, said that one of the rackets interns, Evan Gidez, 24, soon to be a third-year student at Brooklyn Law School, had already proved his worth on the field.

“In the first game Evan made an amazing catch; he’s an excellent ballplayer,” Mr. Rudikoff said. “We didn’t know that, but it would have given us even more reason to hire him.”

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